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Gunotsav and the pursuit of quality education in India: Implementation, Impact and Policy lessons

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Abstract

Gunotsav is a large-scale, state-led quality assessment initiative designed to enhance learning outcomes, school accountability, and infrastructural development in India's public education system. First launched in Gujarat in 2009 and subsequently adopted by Assam in 2017, the programme combines self-evaluation, external evaluation, and community participation to assess scholastic, co-scholastic, and infrastructural parameters of schools. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of Gunotsav's objectives, methodology, implementation, and impact in Gujarat and Assam. Drawing on data from multiple evaluation cycles, it highlights the programme's role in improving foundational learning outcomes, strengthening school accountability, enabling data-driven decision-making, and fostering community ownership. The study also discusses challenges such as logistical constraints, variation in implementation quality, and data follow-up gaps. Finally, it presents policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and scalability of Gunotsav across states. By aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Gunotsav demonstrates how participatory evaluation frameworks can drive systemic quality improvement in school education.

Keywords: Gunotsav, school education, quality assessment, learning outcomes, Assam, Gujarat, SDG-4, NEP 2020, external evaluation, education policy

1. Introduction

Quality education is the cornerstone of national development. Ensuring equitable access to quality learning outcomes across all levels of schooling has been a persistent focus of both the Government of India and state governments. Over the years, several large-scale assessment and quality assurance initiatives have been introduced to evaluate and enhance the performance of schools, teachers, and students. These initiatives aim not only to assess learning levels but also to identify gaps and provide targeted interventions for improvement. Quality education is one of the key priorities of the Government of India and is enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) of UN, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Over the past two decades, India has made significant progress in expanding access to education; however, ensuring learning outcomes and quality improvement across schools remains a critical challenge, particularly in government and rural schools. To address this, the central and state governments have launched several initiatives aimed at monitoring, assessing, and improving the quality of school education.

At the national level, the following initiatives are noteworthy;

1.1 National Initiatives

- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) came into effect on 1st April 2010. It makes education a fundamental right of every child aged 6 to 14 years in India. The Act ensures that all children receive free and compulsory elementary education in a neighborhood school.

Key Objectives

1. To provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14 years.
2. To ensure that no child is denied admission due to lack of documents or late admission.
3. To eliminate discrimination and create an inclusive learning environment.
4. To maintain quality standards in schools with trained teachers and proper infrastructure.
5. To ensure that children complete elementary education without fear, stress, or failure.

The RTE Act has led to wider educational access, improved infrastructure, better enrolment and retention rates, and stronger institutional frameworks both nationally and in Assam. While India has achieved near-universal elementary education, the next challenge lies in improving learning outcomes a focus now being reinforced through NEP 2020.

- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive framework to transform the Indian education system. It replaces the NEP of 1986 and aims to make education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned with 21st-century needs.

Key Objectives

1. To ensure universal access to education from pre-school to secondary level.
 2. To focus on foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3.
 3. To restructure the school curriculum into a 5+3+3+4 model.
 4. To promote multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the foundational stage.
 5. To integrate vocational education from an early stage.
 6. To promote critical thinking, creativity, and experiential learning.
 7. To achieve 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030.
 8. To reform higher education with multidisciplinary institutions and a flexible credit system.
- **National Achievement Survey (NAS), 2017 and 2021:** One of the earliest nationwide initiatives was the National Achievement Survey (NAS), launched by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). NAS evaluates the learning achievement of students in classes 3, 5, 8, and 10 at the national and state levels, providing data to inform policy and classroom practices.
 - **Performance Grading Index (PGI 2.0):** Introduced by the Ministry of Education, PGI assesses states and union territories on multiple domains including Learning Outcomes, Access, Infrastructure, Equity, and Governance Processes. The index promotes healthy competition among states and encourages evidence-based policy decisions.
 - **Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+):** This is a comprehensive data collection and monitoring system covering school infrastructure, teacher qualifications, enrolment, and facilities. It enables better planning and monitoring at national, state, and district levels.

- **Shagun Portal and Dashboard:** An integrated platform to monitor the performance of schools and implementation of Samagra Shiksha components. It provides a real-time view of the functioning of schools and helps in identifying areas requiring attention.
- **Vidyanjali:** A volunteer-based initiative that focuses on community and private sector participation in improving co-scholastic and infrastructural aspects of schools.

1.2 State initiatives

At the state level, several innovative initiatives have been undertaken to ensure quality education. Gujarat pioneered the Gunotsav programme in 2009, an external and internal assessment initiative aimed at evaluating the quality of primary education, improving learning levels, and ensuring community participation. Assam, inspired by Gujarat's success, adopted and adapted the Gunotsav model in 2017 to assess schools across the state in a phased manner. Jharkhand introduced its own version of Gunotsav to assess and improve the performance of government schools.

Against this backdrop, Gunotsav stands out as a participatory and comprehensive quality assessment programme that integrates self-evaluation, external evaluation, and community involvement. It focuses on identifying strengths and weaknesses of schools and enabling systemic improvements through well-designed remedial measures. The initiative has not only improved the accountability of schools but also encouraged a culture of continuous improvement and active stakeholder engagement.

Gunotsav (Gujarat): Launched in 2009, Gujarat's Gunotsav was one of the earliest comprehensive school evaluation programmes. It introduced external evaluation of schools by senior government officers, self-evaluation by schools, and grading based on scholastic, co-scholastic, and infrastructural parameters.

Gunotsav (Assam): Inspired by Gujarat's model, Assam implemented Gunotsav from 2017 onwards to improve learning outcomes and ensure accountability in government schools. The programme involves both self-assessment and external evaluation, covering millions of students from class I to IX of all Government /Provincialised, Tea Garden Management Schools, Tea Garden Model Schools, Aadarsha Vidyalays and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas annually.

Karnataka's Marusinchana Scheme: Focused on remedial teaching for students lagging in basic competencies, this initiative aims to bridge learning gaps and support continuous improvement.

States like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar have also launched similar school evaluation drives to monitor learning outcomes and strengthen accountability mechanisms. School Evaluation Frameworks in states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu: Many states have introduced school grading systems, teacher performance audits, and community participation mechanisms tailored to their local contexts.

These initiatives collectively reflect a paradigm shift from mere access to education towards quality assurance and outcome-based monitoring. Among these, Gunotsav stands

out as a state-led, large-scale, decentralized, and participatory school evaluation programme that combines self-assessment, external evaluation, and community involvement. Initially pioneered in Gujarat and later adopted by Assam, Gunotsav has emerged as a model framework for assessing school performance, identifying learning gaps, and initiating remedial actions to improve the overall quality of school education.

2. Objectives

The Gunotsav initiative was conceived with the central aim of enhancing the quality of education in government schools through systematic evaluation, accountability, and targeted interventions. It emphasizes not only students' scholastic achievement but also the overall performance of schools in co-scholastic areas, infrastructure, and community participation.

The key objectives of Gunotsav can be outlined as follows:

2.1 Assessment of Learning Outcomes

One of the primary objectives of Gunotsav is to evaluate students' learning levels in core subjects such as language, mathematics, and science through standardized tools. The evaluation is conducted at different grade levels to identify the extent to which students have achieved grade-appropriate competencies. This helps in measuring actual learning rather than relying solely on pass percentages or internal assessments.

2.2 Identification of Learning Gaps and Planning Remedial Measures

Gunotsav helps schools and education authorities to diagnose specific learning gaps among students. Develop a Culture of Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Promote regular introspection and adoption of best practices.

Based on the results, schools are expected to prepare and implement remedial teaching plans to support underachieving students. This targeted approach enables teachers to focus on competencies where students require additional support.

2.3 Ensuring School Accountability

By involving self-evaluation by the school and external evaluation by trained government officials or independent assessors, Gunotsav creates a culture of transparency and accountability. The process encourages teachers and school heads to reflect on their practices and work towards continuous improvement.

2.4 Strengthening School Infrastructure and Environment

Gunotsav also evaluates the physical infrastructure and learning environment of schools, including availability of classrooms, sanitation facilities, drinking water, libraries, and ICT resources. The assessment helps identify infrastructural gaps that may affect the quality of education and student well-being.

2.5 Promoting Community Participation

Another distinctive feature of Gunotsav is the active involvement of the community in the school evaluation process. Local community members, School Management Committees (SMCs), and parents are encouraged to

participate, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility towards improving the school's performance.

2.6 Building a Culture of Continuous Quality Improvement

Gunotsav aims to move beyond one-time inspections towards creating a culture of continuous quality enhancement. By providing periodic feedback, setting benchmarks, and sharing best practices, the programme motivates schools to sustain improvements over time.

3. Methodology

The Gunotsav programme adopts a three-tier evaluation methodology, ensuring a comprehensive and participatory assessment of schools:

3.1 Self-Evaluation

Schools assess themselves across scholastic, co-scholastic, infrastructure, and community participation parameters, encouraging ownership and introspection.

Each school conducts a self-assessment using structured tools provided by the education department. This involves teachers and the head of the institution evaluating their school's performance on various parameters, including student learning levels, classroom processes, co-curricular activities, community involvement, and infrastructure. This step encourages schools to introspect and identify areas needing improvement.

3.2 External Evaluation

An external evaluation is carried out by trained evaluators comprising entire government officials starting from Chief Minister, MLAs IAS, IPS, ACS, Professors, Engineers, teachers from other schools, and other designated personnel. These evaluators visit schools and assess:

Students' learning outcomes through written and oral tests.

Teaching-learning processes through classroom observations.

School environment, records, and community participation.

This external evaluation ensures objectivity and uniformity.

3.3 Grading and Feedback

Based on the combined scores from self and external assessments, schools are graded (e.g., A+, A, B, C, D). Feedback is provided to each school, highlighting strengths, areas for improvement, and required remedial actions. This grading acts as both a performance indicator and a motivator for schools to improve.

4. Implementation in Gujarat and Assam

Gunotsav is conducted periodically in phases across districts to ensure systematic coverage of all schools. The process involves:

- Orientation and Training of evaluators.
- Preparation of assessment tools including student test papers and school evaluation formats.
- Scheduling visits and ensuring logistical support for evaluators.
- Execution of assessments over designated days.
- Data compilation and analysis at block, district, and state levels.
- Follow-up actions through School Development Plans (SDPs) to address gaps identified during evaluation.

States like Assam have conducted Gunotsav in cycles, typically covering all government and provincialized schools within a year. This structured and phased approach allows for thorough evaluation and effective follow-up.

4.1 Gujarat

The Government of Gujarat launched Gunotsav in 2009, marking one of the first state-led efforts to assess the quality of school education through a decentralized and participatory framework.

Phased Roll-Out: Initially, Gunotsav was conducted in elementary schools and later expanded to cover secondary and higher secondary levels. Over time, the initiative has been refined, with the introduction of Gunotsav 2.0, aligning with new national educational policies and digital tools.

Frequency: The evaluation is typically conducted annually, covering all government schools across the state in phases.

4.2 Assam

The Government of Assam, through Samagra Shiksha

Assam, adopted Gunotsav in 2017, inspired by Gujarat's success. The programme was adapted to suit the geographical, linguistic, and administrative diversity of Assam, and has since become one of the most ambitious quality assessment exercises in the North-Eastern region of India.

Phased Implementation:

Pilot Phase (2017): Gunotsav was initially rolled out in selected districts to assess feasibility and develop evaluation tools tailored to Assam's context.

Statewide Implementation: Based on the pilot's success, the programme was expanded to all government and provincialized schools at the elementary level, later including secondary schools.

The evaluation is conducted in multiple phases, ensuring coverage of thousands of schools and lakhs of students across all districts.

In Gunotsav 2025, held between January 6 and February 9, more than 43 lakh students across over 32,421 schools participated in the evaluation.

Table 1: Year-wise Performance Evaluation of Schools (2017-2025)

Year	No. of schools evaluated	Grade obtained by the number of schools (Number of schools is shown in%)				
		A ⁺	A	B	C	D
2017	48868	12.35	26.45	27.9	18.75	14.54
2018	46404	23.01	46.98	23.56	4.95	1.49
2022	41878	11.56	40.69	31.54	11.130	5.08
2023	41507	29.02	45.98	18.49	4.69	1.82
2024	32421	35.75	46.06	14.2	3.18	0.81
2025	32421	40.79	42.79	13.01	2.73	0.67

Note:

- **2019-2021:** The *Gunotsav* was not conducted due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The decrease in the total number of schools is because schools with fewer than 30 students were not evaluated. Additionally, many schools were amalgamated to improve the teacher-student ratio, enhance infrastructure facilities, and implement the recommendations of the external evaluators.

5. Impact and Outcomes

The implementation of Gunotsav in Gujarat and Assam has produced significant impacts on multiple dimensions of the school education system. By systematically assessing scholastic, co-scholastic, infrastructural, and community-related parameters, Gunotsav has transformed the way quality is monitored and improved in government schools. Its outcomes can be categorized under several key areas:

5.1 Improvement in Learning Outcomes

One of the most notable impacts of Gunotsav has been its contribution to enhancing student learning levels, especially in foundational literacy and numeracy.

In Gujarat, successive rounds of Gunotsav since 2009 have shown steady improvements in students' performance, particularly in language and mathematics. Schools that initially received lower grades showed marked progress after targeted remedial teaching and regular monitoring.

In Assam, Gunotsav has led to a significant shift in focus towards competency-based assessments. Schools now identify students' strengths and weaknesses more accurately, enabling teachers to adopt remedial and differentiated instruction strategies.

The emphasis on oral and written tests during external evaluation has helped reveal actual learning levels, moving away from inflated exam results that often masked learning deficits.

For example, after the Gunotsav 2023 round in Assam, data from Samagra Shiksha indicated an increase of over 12% in Grade A+ schools in literacy-related competencies compared to the 2019 round, despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 Strengthened School Accountability

Gunotsav has brought accountability to the forefront of school management.

The public display of school grades and district-wise rankings has motivated schools to improve their performance.

Teachers and administrators are more conscious of self-evaluation and documentation, as they anticipate external scrutiny.

The involvement of senior government officers as external evaluators has raised the seriousness and credibility of the evaluation process.

This has created a culture of responsibility within schools, where performance data are used for self-improvement rather than only for compliance.

5.3 Enhanced Infrastructure and Learning Environment

The infrastructure component of Gunotsav has led to tangible improvements in school facilities:

Schools with poor infrastructure have been identified and prioritized for resource allocation.

Many districts in Assam have used Gunotsav data to plan the construction of toilets, classrooms, and libraries. The evaluation criteria also emphasize cleanliness, availability of safe drinking water, and classroom displays, indirectly promoting a child-friendly environment.

5.4 Data-Driven Policy Decisions

Gunotsav has generated large-scale, reliable data that have informed education planning and policymaking:

In Gujarat, Gunotsav data have been used to allocate funds and design teacher training modules tailored to observed weaknesses.

Assam has used district-wise performance reports to deploy resource persons, organize remedial teaching camps, and target foundational learning interventions.

The granularity of the data—available at school, cluster, block, and district levels—allows for evidence-based decision-making.

5.5 Community Participation and Ownership

A unique contribution of Gunotsav is the active involvement of local communities:

School Management Committees (SMCs) and parents are engaged in the evaluation process, giving them a clearer picture of school performance.

This has strengthened the link between schools and communities, encouraging local support for school improvement activities.

Public grading has increased community pressure for accountability, encouraging schools to perform better.

5.6 Post-COVID Recovery and Remedial Action

In the post-pandemic period, Gunotsav has played a crucial role in identifying learning loss and planning remedial measures:

Assam's Gunotsav 2023 and 2025 rounds revealed gaps in basic reading and arithmetic skills due to prolonged school closures.

The evaluation results were used to plan special remedial classes and bridge courses, aligning with the objectives of the NIPUN Bharat Mission for foundational learning.

5.7 Recognition and Incentives

In several states, Gunotsav outcomes are also linked to recognition and incentives:

Schools achieving A+ grades receive public recognition and, in some cases, additional grants.

In Assam, students from top-performing schools have been awarded tablets and certificates, which motivates both teachers and learners.

5.8 Broader Systemic Impact

Gunotsav has shifted the focus of the education system:

From input-based monitoring (e.g., infrastructure alone) to outcome-based evaluation.

From occasional inspections to regular, structured, and transparent evaluation cycles.

From a top-down approach to a participatory, decentralized model involving multiple stakeholders.

In summary, Gunotsav has demonstrated that large-scale, structured school evaluation programmes can lead to meaningful improvements in learning, accountability, and infrastructure when supported by follow-up actions and community participation. Its success in Gujarat and Assam

makes it a potential model for replication in other states and developing countries.

6. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its effectiveness, Gunotsav faces several challenges that can limit its impact:

Logistical Issues in conducting assessments across remote and rural schools: Conducting evaluations in geographically difficult or remote locations can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Poor connectivity and infrastructure sometimes hinder smooth implementation.

Risk of over-emphasis on grading rather than long-term improvement

Schools may focus primarily on improving grades rather than fostering long-term quality improvement in teaching and learning practices. Overemphasis on Grades may lead schools to focus more on assessment days rather than continuous quality improvement.

Shortage of Trained Evaluators in some regions

Quality of external assessment depends on trained and involved personnel. In some districts, a shortage of qualified evaluators can affect the objectivity and consistency of school grading,

Data management and follow-up gaps

Collection, analysis, and utilization of evaluation data are sometimes incomplete, limiting the effectiveness of remedial measures.

Apart from all these the Variations in Implementation Quality across districts, Follow-up Actions are sometimes delayed due to administrative bottlenecks.

Addressing these challenges through better planning, capacity building, and community engagement is essential for sustaining the programme's impact.

7. Recommendations

To strengthen and sustain the impact of Gunotsav, the following recommendations are suggested:

Integration with Digital Dashboards and PGI: Real-time monitoring and analysis:

Use technology for real-time monitoring, analysis, and visualization of school performance. Integration with the Performance Grading Index (PGI 2.0) can help track improvements systematically.

Capacity Building for Teachers: Training in pedagogy and assessment

Regular training programmes should be conducted for teachers to improve instructional strategies, assessment literacy, and classroom management.

Continuous Monitoring by departmental officials

Shift from one-time annual assessments to continuous and periodic monitoring, ensuring timely identification and correction of learning gaps.

Teacher -Students ratio: The student -teacher ratio must be judiciously managed for effective conduct of classes and plannings. The Head master work load may be decentralized and availability in school may be increased.

Strict implementation of Academic Calander: All activities in the school must be as per academic calander prepared well in advance. Too much of new activities apart from those mentioned in Academic Calender further reduces the scope of remedial classes essential for many students.

Infrastructure and maintenance: Infrastructure status in schools have improved a lot, few requirements such as class room partition wall, boundary wall, etc. are still essential, but most importantly it is essential to have a maintenance grant or mechanism for sustainable growth.

Synchronization of Gunotsav evaluation scheme and schools evaluation scheme of students: Class room teaching, Annuual examination Paper and Question paper scheme of Gunotsav must be made similar so that students can easily track the question of Gunotsav.

School Management Committee: It is essential to form a School Management Committee which is dynamic and committed.

Cross-State Sharing of Best Practices: Establish mechanisms for sharing successful interventions, innovative teaching strategies, and administrative practices between states to foster collaborative learning.

8. Conclusion

Gunotsav represents a systematic, participatory, and data-driven approach to improving the quality of school education. By integrating self-assessment, external evaluation, and community participation, it goes beyond traditional inspection models to create a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. Its success in Gujarat, Assam, and other states demonstrates its potential as a model for large-scale quality assessment. With continued refinements, regular follow-ups, and strong stakeholder engagement, Gunotsav can play a pivotal role in achieving the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, ensuring that every child in India receives quality education.

Gunotsav serves as a replicable and scalable model for improving school education quality at state and national levels. Its structured approach, combining self-assessment, external evaluation, and community involvement, ensures accountability, identifies learning gaps, and fosters systemic improvements.

There has been a steady improvement in the percentage of schools obtaining A+ and A grades from the baseline in 2017 through 2025. Particularly large gains post-2022 (after the COVID disruption).

The share of schools in the lowest grade (D) has fallen significantly over time.

Infrastructure is being monitored and improvements are being made (e.g. electrification, partition walls, toilets), but infrastructure is not part of grade calculation; the grades are overwhelmingly decided by scholastic plus small weights for co-scholastic and community participation. ssa.assam.gov.in+1.

Some Major Improvement in Gunotsav 2025

Percentage of A+ schools increase to 40.79% from 35.75% in Gunotsav 2024. Percentage of total A+ and A grade schools increase to 83.58% from 81.81% in Gunotsav 2024.

Percentage of C grade schools decrease to 2.73% from 3.18% in Gunotsav 2024. Percentage of D grade schools decrease to 0.67% from 0.81% in Gunotsav 2024. 7846 schools obtained A+ grading in both 2024 and 2025. Percentage of students appeared in Gunotsav 2025 is 98.33%, which is a very much welcoming sign.

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