Society & Social Justice · GS - II

Should education be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the state or as a strategic investment for building a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation ? Critically evaluate.

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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Education as right, Article 21A, welfare state, human capital, knowledge economy, social mobility, demographic dividend, NEP 2020, public investment, employability

Model Answer

Education should be understood simultaneously as a welfare obligation and a strategic investment. Treating these as competing objectives would overlook the dual constitutional and developmental role of education.

As a welfare obligation, education promotes equality of opportunity and social justice. Article 21A guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 years, while the Directive Principles emphasise broader social welfare. Public education is particularly important for disadvantaged groups because market-based provision alone may reproduce inequalities of income, gender, geography and social status.

As a strategic investment, education builds human capital, productivity, innovation and technological capability. A knowledge-driven economy requires critical thinking, research, digital skills and lifelong learning. Education also determines whether India can convert its demographic potential into productive employment.

NEP 2020 explicitly links quality and equitable education with economic, social, cultural, intellectual and technological progress. It also calls for substantially increasing public investment in education and identifies 6% of GDP as an important target.

However, excessive emphasis on competitiveness can marginalise foundational learning, inclusion and education’s civic purpose. Conversely, viewing education only as welfare may understate the importance of research, innovation and industry-relevant skills.

Therefore, the appropriate approach is a rights-based human-capital strategy: universal access and equity should remain the foundation, while investment in teachers, research, vocational education, digital infrastructure and higher education should drive national competitiveness.

Education is thus both a constitutional social obligation and a long-term investment in India’s productive, innovative and democratic capabilities.

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