

SIKKIM EXPRESS

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SIKKIM: EMERGING AS INDIA'S PREMIER EDUCATION HUB

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Sikkim, a small yet strategically located northeastern state of India, is rapidly transforming into a premier education hub in the country. With its serene environment, political stability, and increasing investment in quality infrastructure, Sikkim has become a preferred destination for students seeking higher education.

The state government's progressive policies, along with the establishment of reputed universities and institutions offering diverse academic programs, have contributed significantly to this transformation. Emphasis on holistic development, focus on research and innovation, and strong industry-academia linkages are further driving educational excellence in the region. This paper explores the various

factors contributing to Sikkim's emergence as a center for academic excellence and analyzes its potential to attract national and international students.

Nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, Sikkim is rapidly transforming into a beacon of educational excellence in India. With its pristine environment, serene ambiance, and forward-thinking policies, the state is

drawing students from across the nation, positioning itself as a favourable destination for higher learning. Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang has repeatedly emphasized Sikkim's emergence as an educational hub, highlighting its potential to rival established centers of education. This shift is not just about academics; it's fostering economic growth, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. As someone who has witnessed this evolution firsthand during my tenure as Registrar at Sikkim Manipal University from 1999 to 2003 and thereafter as Vice Chancellor of ICFAI University Sikkim from 2018 to the present, I can attest to the drastic changes that have propelled Sikkim onto the national stage.

CLIMATE CONDUCTIVE TO HIGHEST-QUALITY EDUCATION

Sikkim's temperate climate, characterized by cool temperatures, fresh mountain air, and minimal pollution, creates an ideal setting for focused learning. Unlike the sweltering heat or harsh winters in other parts of India, Sikkim offers a balanced environment that enhances concentration and well-being. This natural advantage supports year-round academic activities without the disruptions common in extreme weather zones. Coupled with the state's commitment to sustainability—being India's first fully organic state—Sikkim ensures a healthy ecosystem that promotes

mental clarity and physical health, essential for delivering the highest quality of education.

CULTURE, DISCIPLINE, AND PEACEFUL LAW AND ORDER

Sikkim's rich cultural tapestry, blending Nepali, Bhotia, Lepcha, and other ethnic influences, instills values of discipline, respect, and harmony among its residents. Education here is not just about textbooks; it's interwoven with cultural ethos that emphasizes ethical living and community bonding. The state's peaceful law and order situation stands out, with no history of insurgency or major ethnic conflicts, unlike some neighbouring regions. Smart policing initiatives, backed by efficient governance, ensure a safe environment for students and faculty. Sikkim has been recognized as the most improved small state in law and order, reflecting proactive measures like community engagement and technology-driven surveillance. This tranquility allows institutions to thrive without security concerns, making it a haven for intellectual pursuits.

SUPERIOR QUALITY OF LIFE AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Life in Sikkim is synonymous with high standards—clean air, organic food, and access to natural beauty contribute to an enviable quality of life. The state has been adjudged the best-performing small state in cleanliness and governance, underscoring its commitment to holistic living. This environment directly translates to academic success. Sikkim boasts one of the highest literacy rates in India, currently at around 90.8%, with ambitions to achieve 100% literacy by 2027. Student performance is exemplary, surpassing national averages in enrollment and achievement metrics. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is notably high at around 50-55%, reflecting effective policies and quality schooling. Initiatives like free educational supplies for government school students and the Chief Minister Charter School further bolster this, ensuring equitable access and fostering a culture of excellence.

SURGE IN UNIVERSITIES: A MAGNET FOR PAN-INDIA STUDENTS

The proliferation of universities is a key driver of Sikkim's educational renaissance. From established institutions like Sikkim Manipal University (established in 1995) to newer ones such as the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Sikkim, ICFAI University, SRM University Sikkim, Sikkim Professional University (erstwhile Vinayak Missions University) and the recently introduced Medhavi

Skills University with specialized colleges in pharmacy and nursing, the landscape is expanding rapidly. The Scholars University of Skills and Innovation Bill, 2025, which was passed in the state Assembly, signals further growth, focusing on creativity and entrepreneurship. This influx makes Sikkim a favourable destination, attracting students from pan-India.

With more universities coming, enrollment is surging, bringing diverse perspectives and boosting the state's academic vibrancy.

As of mid-2025, Sikkim has a total of 36 universities based on acts passed in the state Assembly, reflecting the rapid expansion in higher education infrastructure. This includes 3 public/government universities (1 central and 2 state) and 33 private universities. However, not all are fully operational; recent reports indicate that around private universities are actively functioning, with others in various stages of establishment or awaiting full approvals. This growth positions Sikkim as an emerging education hub, though concerns about sustainability and quality have been raised due to the state's small population.

Sikkim has 10 government colleges. These institutions are affiliated with universities like Sikkim University and offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs across arts, sciences, commerce, law, education, and vocational fields. Examples include Nar Bahadur Bhandari Government College, Tadong; Sikkim Government College, Burtuk; Namchi Government College; Gyalshing Government College; Soreng Government College; Sikkim Government Law College; Sikkim Government B.Ed College, Soreng; Government College Rhenock; Government Pharmacy College, Rumtek; and Government Vocational College, Dentam. The most recent comprehensive data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for 2021-22 reports a total enrollment of 33,761 students in higher education in Sikkim (16,274 male and 17,487 female). This includes students across universities, colleges, and standalone institutions. Enrollment in government institutions is approximately 13,186, while in private institutions it is around 1,061 in un-aided setups. With the surge in new universities since 2022, actual enrollment for 2024-25 is likely higher, potentially exceeding 35,000-40,000, but official AISHE data for 2022-23 or later is not yet available as of July 2025.

ECONOMIC RIPPLE EFFECTS: INVESTORS, DEVELOPMENT, AND PROSPERITY

As an education hub, Sikkim is

unlocking economic potential. Quality local manpower, trained in these institutions, draws investors seeking skilled talent. Sectors like IT, healthcare, and tourism benefit from this workforce, leading to job creation and innovation. Land prices are on the rise due to increased demand for infrastructure, signaling robust real estate growth. Development at local and block levels is accelerating, with improved roads, hostels, and amenities. Locals are increasingly focusing on employability and mobility, upskilling for global opportunities. Overall, economic conditions are elevating, reducing the state's dependency on central aid and fostering self-reliance. Good governance by the Sikkim state government, marked by transparency and efficiency, minimizes liabilities and maximizes outcomes.

HEIGHTENED AWARENESS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There is growing awareness about higher education in Sikkim, driven by government campaigns and community initiatives. The state government's proactive stance—evident in delegations studying best practices and integrating technology in education—ensures sustained progress. With less dependency on external factors, Sikkim's model of governance emphasizes accountability and innovation, setting benchmarks for other states.

REFLECTIONS FROM MY MANIPAL DAYS: A DRASTIC TRANSFORMATION

Reflecting on my journey as Registrar at Sikkim Manipal University in 1999-2003 and as Vice Chancellor of ICFAI University Sikkim from 2018 to now, the changes have been profound. The enrollment has skyrocketed, infrastructure has modernized, and research output has intensified. From handling a handful of students to managing a diverse, pan-India cohort, the shift mirrors Sikkim's broader educational ascent. Challenges like remote access have turned into strengths, thanks to digital advancements and state support.

HOW EDUCATION INVESTMENT IN SIKKIM DRIVES PAN-INDIA GROWTH

Investing in education at the state level in India plays a pivotal role in fostering overall economic growth, particularly by enhancing human resources (HR) demand and manpower supply nationwide. This occurs through the development of human capital, which refers to the skills, knowledge, and health of the population that contribute to productivity and innovation. According to economic theories

and empirical studies, such as those from the World Bank, a one-year increase in average schooling can boost GDP growth by 0.37%, while a 1% rise in literacy rates can elevate it by 0.3%.

Below, I'll outline the key mechanisms, supported by evidence, and provide state-specific examples—including Sikkim—to illustrate how this translates to pan-India benefits.

Key Mechanisms Through Which Education Investment Drives Growth in HR and Manpower Demand Building a Skilled and Productive Workforce Locally:

State-level investments in education—such as improving school infrastructure, teacher training, and vocational programs—increase literacy, enrollment rates, and skill levels. This creates a more employable population within the state, raising productivity in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

For instance, initiatives like vocational training under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Skill India have trained millions, bridging the gap between education and employment. In Sikkim, programs like the Niyukti Kendra and German Institute of Vocational Education are vital centers for this. This leads to higher wages, enterprise profits, and overall GDP contribution from the state, which in turn stimulates national economic growth. As productivity rises, businesses expand, creating more HR demand for roles like engineers, managers, and technicians.

Attracting Industries and Investments:

A well-educated workforce makes a state more attractive to domestic and foreign investors, leading to industrial hubs that generate jobs. This not only boosts local HR demand but also contributes to national supply chains. For example, aligning education with industry needs reduces talent shortages, as highlighted in analyses of India's higher education system, where faculty shortages and quality gaps currently hinder progress.

Addressing these through state investments can support sectors like IT and manufacturing, increasing demand for skilled manpower across India. In Sikkim, the establishment of skill-focused universities like Scholars University is drawing such investments.

Facilitating Skilled Migration and National Manpower Supply:

Educated individuals from investing states often migrate to other regions for better opportunities, fulfilling manpower needs pan-India. This is particularly evident in high-growth sectors where demand outstrips local supply.

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Nationally, India's incremental HR requirement is estimated at 109-291 million by 2022 across 24 sectors, and state education investments help meet this by producing graduates who can reskill or upskill for emerging jobs. This migration reduces unemployment in source states while addressing skill mismatches elsewhere, promoting inclusive growth. Sikkim's graduates in healthcare and IT are increasingly filling national gaps.

Overcoming Challenges for Sustainable Impact:

Despite potential, low productivity in education investments—due to factors like inadequate budgets (often below 6% of GDP), unregulated private institutions, poor teacher quality, and lack of skill focus—can limit outcomes. States can mitigate this by increasing allocations, regulating institutions, and emphasizing practical, skill-oriented curricula, as suggested in policy recommendations. This

enhances employability, with only 3% of the workforce currently having formal training, and boosts women's participation, which rose from 38% to 47% in skill programs between 2016 and 2019. Sikkim's focus on quality amid rapid university growth addresses these concerns.

STATE-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES AND PAN-INDIA IMPACTS

Kerala: Known for high education investments, Kerala boasts a literacy rate over 96% and a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 41.4% in higher education, with strong focus on gender parity (GPI of 1.44) and digital initiatives like 'Let's Go Digital'. This has produced a highly skilled workforce in healthcare, teaching, and IT, supplying manpower nationwide—e.g., Kerala nurses and educators fill gaps in other states and abroad. Economically, it contributes to India's human capital by

reducing poverty through employability, though challenges like youth migration highlight the need for local job creation. Overall, Kerala's model supports pan-India growth by exporting skilled labour, helping meet national demands in service sectors.

Tamil Nadu: With a GER of 47% (highest in India) and investments like 7,237 crore in higher education (2020-21), plus programs such as the Chief Minister Research Fellowship, Tamil Nadu excels in accreditation and research. This has fueled industrial growth in IT, automobiles, and manufacturing, attracting firms like Infosys and Hyundai, creating local HR demand for over 2 lakh teachers and graduates. Nationally, it supplies skilled engineers and technicians, contributing 22% to India's top 100 universities and enhancing manpower for sectors like electronics, where demand is projected to grow exponentially.

Karnataka: Home to IT hubs like Bengaluru, Karnataka invests heavily in education, with 43 state public universities, a GER of 43.5%, and initiatives like 'English Skills for Youth' with Microsoft, targeting thousands of students for workplace readiness.

This has positioned the state as a leader in tech manpower, supplying over 25% of India's IT workforce. Pan-India, it addresses HR shortages in digital and innovation sectors, supporting national programs like Digital India and boosting GDP through exports of skilled professionals.

Sikkim: As highlighted throughout, Sikkim's investments are creating a skilled workforce in emerging areas like skills and innovation, with new bills and institutions aligning with NEP 2020. This not only boosts local economy but supplies talent to national sectors like tourism and

healthcare, reducing dependencies and enhancing pan-India human capital.

In summary, state education investments catalyze a virtuous cycle: local skill development drives state growth, which spills over nationally via migration, industry attraction, and GDP contributions. To maximize this, states should prioritize quality, inclusivity, and alignment with market needs, as per NEP 2020, potentially adding billions to India's economy through enhanced human capital. This not only meets rising HR and manpower demand but also positions India as a global talent powerhouse.

In conclusion, Sikkim's blend of natural advantages, cultural depth, and strategic governance is crafting an education hub that promises not just degrees, but holistic growth. As more students and investors flock here, the state's future looks brighter than ever, paving the way for a prosperous, educated India.