

Access to Higher Education in India: An Overview

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This paper reviews the education system of India which comprises of structure of different stages in education, the educational institutions, quality and access to education for all the sections of society and the allocation of government expenditure on education. The secondary sources data has been used for analysing the objectives.

Keywords: Educational attainment, elementary school, demographic dividend, school enrolment

I. Introduction

The education system is ancient in India that dates back to the vedic period (1500 to 500BC). Before the European colonialist arrived, education used to take place in hindu village schools called as *gurukuls* and for muslim community it was called as *madrasa*. Then, after British colonist arrived and imposed an education system and made English as a medium of instruction. Initially, Indian higher institutions were the University of Calcutta, the University of Bombay and the University of Madras. These institutions were founded in 1857 based on the model of British Universities.

The post-independence period has changed the education system drastically and made an attempt to create a modern mass education system under the leadership of first Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru.

The first constitution which was adopted in 1950, called for the provision of free public and compulsory education for all children upto 14 years of age which is still being followed with the enormous expansion in the education system. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges having 2.1 lakhs students in higher education at the time of independence. The number has increased 52.35 times in case of degree awarding universities, 83.87 times in case of colleges and the students enrollment has increased upto 178.09 times in terms of higher education (UGC annual report, 2019). India

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(with over 1.5 million schools, over 8.7 million primary and secondary teachers and more than 260 million enrolments) is home to the largest and most complex education system in the world due to its huge demography. The quality and access to education have drastically improved.

The human development starts with getting education which leads to escaping poverty and becoming one's basis of survival (Sivakumar and Sarvalingam, 2010). It is the most significant part of human resources development as it imparts knowledge, values and develop skills which increase the productivity of the nation. There are different courses and a proper structure designed for the educational system to progress smoothly. Indian economy has been progressing on the educational front since its independence and reaching out to all the classes of the society. In today's scenario, education is becoming the most challenging sector in India due to the demographic profile of the country and the gap which is bridging the requirements of the industrial sector. In developing countries like India, it is a tedious task to educate the children due to the allocation of resources on the basis of caste, religion, category etc. A lot of children are unable to get the education due to numerous factors like poverty, child labour etc.

To strengthen the Indian Educational System, there are different policies and guidelines

have been made. It has brought about a revolution in the education of the country with statistics revealing a staggering enrollment in schools over the past few years.

Government has taken full responsibility for the education of the children and adults. Hence, the primary education is the fundamental right. The education system of our country is divided into three categories viz. primary, secondary and higher education.

The quality of education is the top most priority for the growth. The country is experiencing demographic dividend due to its young population which could be beneficial for the economic prosperity of the country if given proper education and skills training. If India manages to expand and transform its educational system which could meet the demand of the labour market. Then, we will have the competitive advantage over other countries.

The study is based on secondary data taken from published government reports and from different online and offline research reports. The paper reviews the education system of India with regards to public expenditure on education and access to better quality education to all the sections of society. The following paper is divided into sections: 1. Brief overview of different stages of education system 2. Expenditure on education 3. Analysis and interpretation 4. Findings and conclusion.

II. Brief overview of stages of education system in India

There are broadly two stages of education system in India which are: 1. The Indian School system and 2. The Higher education system.

1. The Indian school system

The system includes 10 years of general education which is categorized into different stages of schooling as follows:

- i. Pre-elementary (pre-school, lower or higher kindergarten)
- ii. Elementary school, classes 1-5, ages 6-10
- iii. Upper elementary/middle school, classes 6-8, ages 11-14
- iv. Secondary, classes 9-10, ages 14-16
- v. Higher/senior secondary education, classes 10-12, ages 16-18

Primary or elementary education is free for all the children up to the age of 14 which makes it accessible to all the sections of the society including the vulnerable sections. This step has become very helpful in order to bring all the children to attain education and move further to different stages in schooling.

India has a National curriculum framework that seeks to harmonize curricula at public schools nationwide. The schools need to get affiliated with one of the boards which prepares students for external examination like CBSE, ICSE or state boards etc. Affiliated schools can be public or private. Curricula is similar throughout India, but concrete subject requirement may vary by examination board of the respective states. The general education prepares the student for pursuing higher education. India has successfully managed to build a formal educational system which is homogeneous overall but it has different state wise implications.

However, ensuring conformity in the outcomes of learning in India, different educational boards conduct the examinations for 10th and 12th, these exams serve as formal benchmark qualification. This formal schooling education helps the children to understand and choose the varied higher education fields.

2. The Higher education system

Higher Education is considered to be an individual's guide to enhance their cognitive abilities and overall personality to lead a better life style and also contributing to society and the country as a responsible citizen. It has impeccably grown over the past few years to intensify the quality of higher education over time.

In India, Higher education has become a major concern for both the government and private sector. It was witnessed that there were only 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence with 2.1 lakhs students enrolled in higher education which has tremendously increased to 47.9 times over the period of time and so on. The expansion of Higher education in India during pre and post-globalization period followed certain parameters like universities, colleges, enrolments, streams for analysing the growth (UGC Annual report, 2018). Higher education institutions are categorized into three namely University, college, institutions which are identified and surveyed. Higher education system in India is imparted through about 180 universities and nearly 4500 colleges. Higher education in India has seen an unprecedented growth in post Independence era with establishing numerous central state State/Deemed to be/Private Universities, Technological institutions, affiliated colleges both public and private, Research Institutions and Professional / Non-

professional Colleges all over the country to access to higher education to the common
generate and disseminate knowledge coupled Indian.
with the noble intention of providing easy

Table 1: Growth of Higher Education Institutions in India 1947-48 to 2017-18

Year	Universities	Colleges	Total
1947-48	20	496	516
1950-51	28	578	606
1960-61	45	1819	1864
1970-71	93	3277	3370
1980-81	123	4738	4861
1990-91	184	5748	5932
2000-01	266	11146	11412
2005-06	350	16982	17332
2006-07	371	19812	20183
2007-08	406	23099	23505
2008-09	440	27882	28322
2009-10	436	25938	26374
2010-11	621	32974	33595
2011-12	642	34852	35494
2012-13	667	35525	36192
2013-14	723	36634	37357
2014-15	760	38498	39258
2015-16	799	39071	39870
2016-17	795	34193	34988
2017-18	903	39050	39953

Source University Grants Commission ((1947-48 to 2000-01) & Ministry of human resource development, Government of India (2005-06 to 2015-16)

The expansion in the number of higher education institutions has grown manifold since independence in terms of increase in the number of universities, number of colleges, number of teachers and number of students enrolments. At present, the higher education sector constitutes of 903 universities and 39050 colleges (AISHE report, 2017-18). Undoubtedly, this rapid increase in the higher education curriculum has contributed significantly to the development of the nation. Despite, this expansion in the number of higher education institutions and the increased enrolment ratio, the quality of higher education is still the questionable thing.

Earlier, the growth of Higher education was restricted mainly to science, arts and commerce but in order to increase the scope

of different fields of study, numerous new students enrolment has increased and the subjects have been introduced. According to maximum enrolment is seen under graduate the latest AISHE report, the level-wise level courses across India.

Table 2: Level-wise students enrolment (regular courses) in higher education 2017-18

Level	Male	Female	Total	% to Total
Ph.D	92570	68842	161412	0.5
M.Phil	12287	21882	34109	0.1
Post-graduate	1278165	1657638	2935803	9
Graduate	13484766	12977173	26461939	81.14
Post-graduate diploma	75195	69989	145184	0.45
Diploma	1765994	819196	2585190	7.93
Certificate	40649	50972	91621	0.28
Integrated courses	114233	81293	195526	0.6

Source: AISHE report, 2107-18

III. Expenditure on Education

The University Grant Commission(UGC) provides the development and maintenance assistance to univeristies. Several policies regarding education are made by UGC and also the amendments being made to old policies. There are different grants being provided by UGC to a limited number of universities to meet their recurring expenditure. Scholarships and fellowships are also given to the meritorious students. To maintain gender and social equity, there are schemes of development of women studies in colleges and universities in order to ensure equal access to females. The Government of India and UGC also monitors the process of reservation policies being implemented for SCs, STs, OBC and persons with disabilities

for teaching and non-teaching staff and to admission to all level courses in univeristies.

Community colleges have been launched with an objective to provide low cost, high quality education which encompasses both traditional skills as well as traditional course work which helps the students either to go for employment option or to pursue higher studies. Alongwith it, vocational training courses have been incorporated into the education structure which focuses on developing a particular skill set which helps in getting better jobs. There are open distance and online learning platforms to ensure accessibility to better quality education.

Apart from different colleges and universities, there are portals like SWAYAM which offers 2000 courses like ATL (anytime learning) free for students. 32 educational channels have been launched. IIT-PAL (Professor assisted learning) programme provides free coaching for IIT-JEE exams.

The UGC act empowers the commission to allocate and disburse fund, out of the fund commission to universities, colleges and other higher educational institutions in the form of maintenance and development grants (UGC, 2019).

IV. Analysis and Interpretation

Table 3: All India growth of students enrolment (2010-11 to 2018-19)

Year	Total Enrolment	Increase over the preceding year	Percentage increase
2010-11		27499749	
2011-12	29184331	1684582	6.13%
2012-13	30152417	968086	3.32%
2013-14	32336234	2183817	7.24%
2014-15	34211637	1875403	5.80%
2015-16	34584781	373144	1.09%
2016-17	35705905	1121124	3.24%
2017-18	36642378	936473	2.62%
2018-19	37399388	757010	2.07%

Source: UGC annual report (2018-19)

The above table shows the growth in number of student enrolment which portrays the significance of education in the people. According to AISHE report 2018-19, these enrolments pertain to regular courses and

distance learning programmes in different universities and colleges. In which, out of 373.99 lakhs students, women students constitutes about 48.64% which is 181.90 lakhs.

Table 4: Level-wise student in higher education (Regular and distance education courses) 2018-19

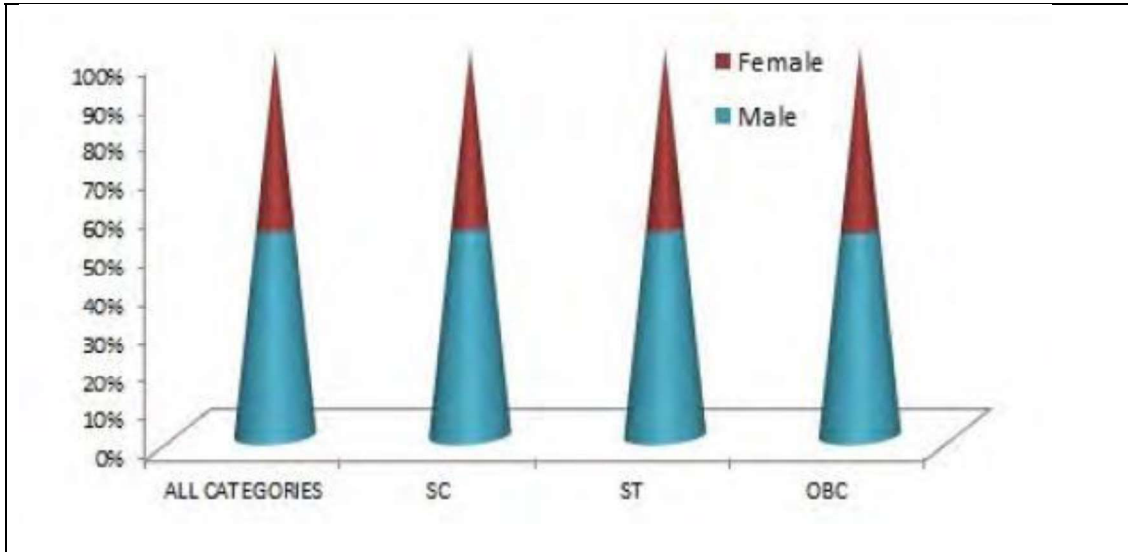
Level	Male	Female	Total	% to Total
Ph.D.	95043	74127	169170	0.45
M.Phil.	11623	19069	30692	0.08
Post-Graduate	1761330	2281192	4042522	10.81
Graduate	15203346	14625729	29829075	79.76
Post-Graduate Diploma	121555	103156	224711	0.60
Diploma	1803208	896187	2699395	7.22
Certificate	75127	87570	162697	0.44

Integrated	138656	102470	241126	0.64
Total	19209888	18189500	37399388	100.00

Source: AISHE report, 2018-19

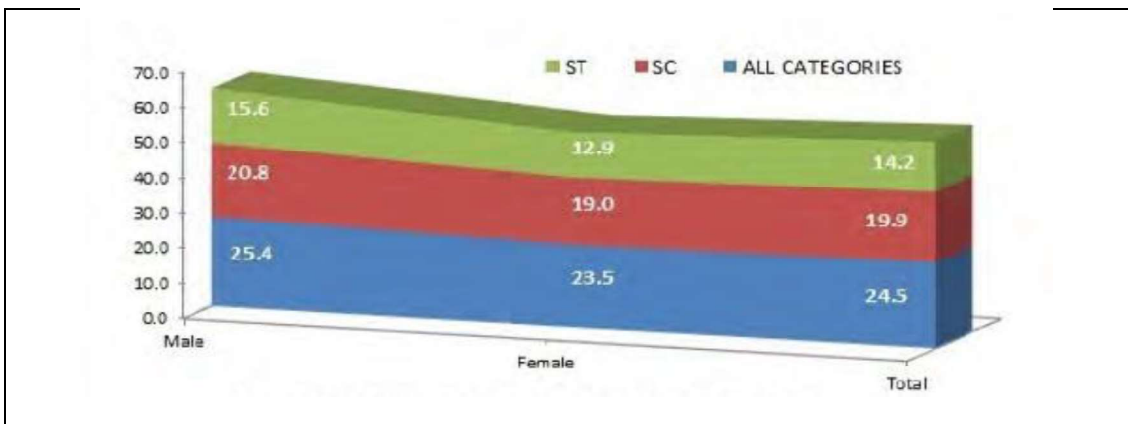
The latest data of the year 2018-19 shows the level-wise enrolments of male and female in higher education is highest for the graduates which indicates that most of the population is reaching upto completing graduate degree.

Figure 1: Social categories and gender distribution on student enrolment



Source : AISHE report 2015-16, Human resource development

Fig 2: GER Distributed according to social category & gender



Source : AISHE report 2015-16, Human resource development

The total estimated student enrolment is 3,45,84,781 out of which nearly 54% are male and rest 46% are female students. The student enrolment in scheduled caste category is 13.91% of the total and the male-

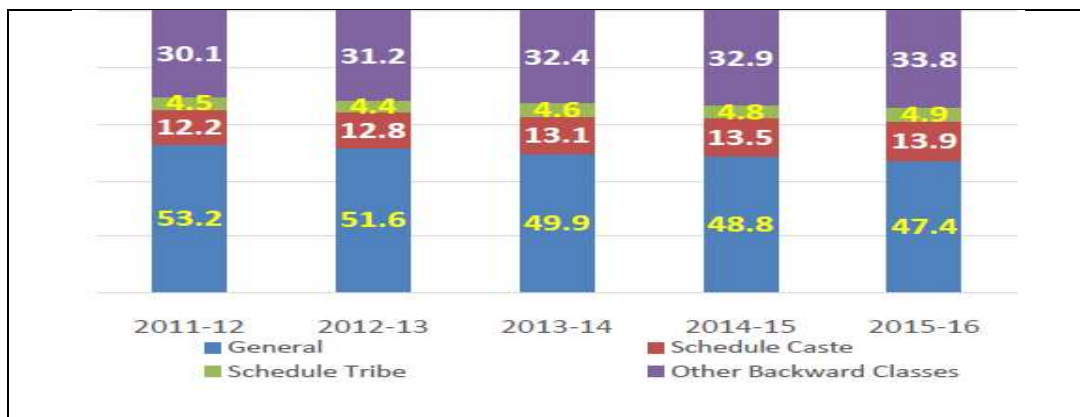
female ratio is similar to the All Category. On the other hand, students belonging to ST category constitute only 4.9% of the total student enrolment and male female ratio is similar to all Category. 33.75% of the total

students belong to OBC with 53.45% of male students.

On the basis of AISHE report for higher education in India, The Estimated Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is 24.5%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. For SCs it is 19.9% and for STs it is 14.2% .GER for male population at all India level is 25.4% whereas for SC Males it is 20.8% and 15.6%, for ST males. Similarly, GER for female population at all India level 23.5% whereas for SC females is 19.0%

and for ST females, it is 12.9%.The GER for females in all categories is highest in Chandigarh with 70.4%. Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Sikkim, Telangana and Uttarakhand also have GER of more than 30% for their female population. For international comparability, GER has also been calculated taking 18-22 years Population and it comes out to be 28.4% at all India Level.

Fig 3: Distribution of enrollment among various categories



Source : AISHE report 2015-16, Human resource development

In the above figure, State-wise Category wise Student Enrolment during last 5 years is given and the difference can be seen that the enrollment in general category is continuously reducing marginally and on the other hand the enrollments in other categories are increasing year after year. These results show that students other than general category which are mostly residing in rural areas are provided with good

academic infrastructure which ultimately built their interest towards education.

V. Government expenditure, as a part of GDP on education

A certain percentage of GDP is allocated as education expenditure which differs according to the economic situation and other important factors. However, the percentage of spending on education has

been decreasing consistently. The expenditure was 3.1% of GDP in the year 2012-13, then, it fell down to 2.8% in 2014-15, 2.4% in 2015-16, 2.6% in 2016-17, 2.7% in 2017-18, 3.8% in 2018-19. Though, the expenditure on education has increased in absolute terms but the total expenditure has consistently decreased.

Currently, education spend rose from 3.8% to 4.6%. The union minister says that, "Educational infrastructure is being expanded and informed". He also told the graduate students under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi that, "a new india is emerging" we need to take decisions to live for society, this is necessary for a new India which is free of corruption, uncleanness, terrorism, poverty, communalism and casteism".

VI. Challenges faced by Indian education system

The government of India has made primary education free for all the students age upto 14 ensuring the accessibility of basic education to all the citizens but unfortunately, not all children are able to get education due to certain factors. However, it's really challenging and effortful to bring the remaining into the realm of universal primary education because of the following reasons such as Inaccessible areas, Lack of

parent's interest to send their children to school, the discrimination for the education of girl child, difficulties of distance and inaccessibility of schools. The major reason behind it is the dropout rate which is so high that the universal elementary education is quite hard to achieve.

As far as secondary education is concerned, most of the children do not even reach upto that level due to the drop out and also not desiring to get education because of getting involved in the work. Higher education system has a major challenge of skill mismatch in the market. A vast number of youth population who are graduates and post graduates are not getting jobs in the market due to the mismatched demand and supply sphere which creates a situation of unemployment and underemployment.

VII. Conclusion

We need to create a balance system of education provided in rural and urban areas on the basis of different categories. The quality of education in terms of better infrastructure, teachers, accreditation etc. There should be accessibility and affordability of education ensuring the poor and deserving students are not denied education. Avoiding over-commercialization of education will also help in providing a better education system fro the country. The educational courses

must be designed in order to meet the requirements of the labour market. Appropriate education policy amendments are necessary to keep a check on the implementation of the desired functioning of education system. There should not be inequality with respect to education attainment.

The higher education demand is basically a 'derived demand' because it has been derived from the demand for skilled human resources. Without getting better education, it is difficult for developing countries to benefit from global knowledge-based economy (World Bank, 2000).

Though, India claims to be the largest in the world in terms of number of higher educational institutions (UGC, 2011) and also, amongst the third largest system in the world after China and USA in terms of enrolment (Singai, 2018). There are unique challenges faced in higher education system in developing countries, like India, where

the size of the country is comparatively huge and the majority of population is youth which constitutes a situation of 'Demographic dividend'. If the higher education system works well then, this could produce an exceptionally powerful labour force. But, there are some sort of distressed factors which lead to the mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled individual's in the labour market. Higher education is certainly facing the challenges like preparing a workforce which could meet the labour market needs and also discrimination in the occupational choice and earnings of men and women.

The adverse economic conditions and structural changes in education are one of the major factors leading to the mismatch between the education and labour market outcome. Higher education demands great policy intervention and problems needs to be addressed both at micro and macro-level.

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