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POLICY TRANSFORMATIONS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF HISTORICAL TRENDS AND CONTEXTS USING SECONDARY DATA

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ABSTRACT

The educational sector at higher levels in India has experienced vital changes which result from historical development and modern policy adjustments. The research performs a systematic policy analysis of Indian higher education systems through historical evaluations which incorporate secondary information extracted from government documents and institutional statistics and global performance indicators. The study traces the colonial origins of modern higher education, the post-independence expansion, the liberalization and privatization phase (1990s onward), and the recent reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The analysis focuses on multiple essential metrics which include Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) alongside research finances as well as teaching personnel ratios and educational administration models and worldwide initiatives. The study examines India's funding problems along with quality control deficiencies and equality issues against worldwide perspectives which include China-US and European states while showing expanded admission opportunities. The results demonstrate how Indian education faces a dilemma between granting increased entry to educational facilities while maintaining high educational standards. Furthermore, they show private college expansion and underline the requirement for directed payments into research-based innovation. Future education policies

in India should center on three main elements: enduring funding solutions, digital system development and establishing research-based excellence.

KEYWORDS: Indian Higher education, NEP 2020, Indian Institutions , Indian Education Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Indian higher education sector as most sectors has been changing due to internal and external factors for many decades. Currently standing as one of the biggest and diverse higher learning systems globally, India's higher learning industry provides education to millions of learners in various disciplines and learning centres such as universities, colleges and special research institutes. There are some relevant issues which arise from the sector: The issues are massification which aims at capacity to accommodate a large population, equity in accessing higher education by the disadvantaged groups, quality in higher education in relation to expansion and development of innovation as a way of transforming higher education to compete internationally.

Higher education in India has its origin rooted back in the historical learning centers of Takshashila and Nalanda universities which attracts scholars from around the world. Nonetheless, several changes were enacted during colonial rule at which modern universities that took after the British system were set up mainly with the essential purpose of producing a workforce for administrative purposes. After independence the Indian government gave due importance to higher education for nation building activity and for the establishment of new generation IITs IIMs And other central universities.

The key policies of higher education in the last decades were on expanding access, restructuring towards privatization, quality assurance/audit through accreditation and ranking and affirmative action for the socially disadvantaged. The Change in policy at last back in August 2020 by NEP 2020 gears up to transform the entire higher education system by proposing the integration of multidisciplinary, research, internationalisation and technology in education.

1.2 Objectives of the Review

The primary objective of this review is to examine the policy transformations in Indian higher education by:

- To Trace historical developments: Analyse selected policy shifts in Indian higher education: colonial to contemporary.
- To Analyze policy impact: Examine enrollment, access, quality, equity, and governance in the light of large scale structural changes.
- To Identify implementation challenges: Emphasize barriers and provide recommendations that will be helpful when developing the future policies.
- To Examine regulatory bodies: Learn about the changes that happened in their journey and the roles they play in the HE world.
- To Explore socio-economic implications: Analyse the effects of change in policy direction on socio- economic development at the national level in the context of globalisation and technology.

1.3 Review selection Methodology

This review is based on a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, including:

Government reports: These policy documents include the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, revised NPE 1992 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Further, policy level information from NITI Aayog, Ministry of Education, Planning Commission has been used to aid the policy standpoint.

Institutional data: UGC Bulletin, AISHE, NAAC and other regulatory/ accrediting bodies Reports generated from the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) etc.

Academic literature: Journal articles, books and proceeding- conference papers that express critical analysis on the reforms taking place in higher education in India. This is encompassing scholarly contributions such as privatization, globalization, and the digital age in education among leaders in the field.

Economic surveys and budget reports: Information on public expenditures on education over the years, then looking at trends in the funding given to higher education and research.

International comparisons: Secondary data from global sources including UNESCO, World Bank and OECD reports to situate India's higher education policy in the existing global policies.

This review proposes an original analysis of the trends, contexts, and policy developments that have influenced the nature of higher education in India over a period of different centuries. It aims at presenting a balanced view of development of higher education in India and more particularly, evaluates how policy initiatives have attempted to manage issues of access, equity, quality and governance to meet emerging socio-economic realities of the country.

2. HISTORICAL POLICY LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Evolution of Higher Education in India ,Pre-Independence Era

Establishment of a Fort William College

Key Event: On the British side, the British East India Company started the Fort William College at Calcutta to educate and civilize the young British officers for their stay in India in local language and culture.

Impact: It worked in establishing formative education for the British officers to administer India. Thus, it contributed towards the growth of a mechanism by which knowledge of Indian language, laws and other customs could be trained into the British civil servants.

Limitations: Taking the constructive curve, the syllabi and disciplinary structures were developed primarily with reference to preparing British officials, and subscription to wider educational changes or conforming education for Indians was removed from the main reformist agenda. Instead, it responded to a very particular need of the colonizers rather than was helpful to the public at large.

The Charter Act of 1813

Key Event: The Charter Act of 1813 made provisions for the expenditure for the sake of education and learning, for the formation of schools, and doing so with an emphasis on the "diffusion of light."

Impact: This act revealed the official intervention of the British government in education, which later paved the way to bringing of western education in India and gave impetus to set up universities.

Limitations: The resources were scarce and there was no initiative of general education for the population. The emphasis was made on elite education mainly in the interest of the administrators and there were few investments made to primary or elementary education.

English Education Act 1835

Key Event: English Education Act had been passed by the then Governor-General of India Lord William Bentinck in 1835.

Impact: This act changed the prospects of Indian education dramatically, rejecting the traditional Indian languages, looking at the English language and using the Models from the west as key to the Indian education system. It gave rise to the origin of an English educated and so called' enlightened ' upper crust class in India.

Limitations: This policy excluded indigenous languages and cultures which were very catastrophic for indigenous education for Indians. He established a clear demarcation between the aristocracy which was English speaking and the remaining citizens especially those in the countryside.

Wood's Despatch (1854)

Key Event: One of Sir Charles Wood's policies in his Despatch of 1854 was an extensive structural reform, which addressed education. Some recommendations were made including establishment of universities, adoption of western systems of education, emphasis on scientific and arts education.

Impact: As a matter of fact, the Despatch was intimately connected with the formation of modern education in India by recommending the creation of formal universities as well as the propagation of education in English. It is said that it holds the key to the overall and especially to the modernization of education in India and resulted into the establishment of the first three universities.

Limitations: Although it envisaged the founding of universities, the stated preoccupations were still the training of colonial clerks, and an educated class for colonial officers, thus there was very little placement on local education and African civilization, or intellectual heritage. The effect was more of an urban and thereby phenomenon of the upper crust of society.

Establishment of the First Universities (1857)

Key Event: After the Wood's Despatch the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were founded in 1857 in the British University Model.

Impact: These were the first organised, degree-granting institutions of University education in India. It gave outlet to an English educated elite and offered Western styled educational structure based on arts, science and law.

Limitations: These universities followed a Western curriculum and served the interests of the British colonial state. Their focus was largely on preparing Indians for administrative roles rather than fostering a well-rounded education or critical thinking. The universities were accessible primarily to the urban elite and did not reach the rural population.

Hunter Commission (1882)

Objective: Examine the education policies formulated and then advise on changes needed to be made to the primary and secondary education; this will have an indirect impact on higher education.

Impact: Emphasized women's education, as well as teachers, which contributed to the quality of higher education to an indirect degree. Suggested to expand the concept of secondary schools as junior partners of universities.

Limitations: The principles of education for all were recommended ineffectively.

The Indian Universities Act (1904)

Objective: Recommended solutions were to either reduce autonomy of universities or else to bolster the government's control over them.

Impact: Supported teaching and learning after graduation. He worked assiduously in developing the physical infrastructure and students were offered scholarship packages.

Limitations: Limited university's independence in important areas. Ongoing emphasis on shaping bureaucratic people instead of cultivating an educated mind.

Saddler Commission (1917-1919)

Objective: Such papers encompass notions concerning the assessment of the current state of Calcutta University and proposal of change.

Impact: Suggested a twelve-year school system before university education. Emphasized on the issues of curriculum diversity and vocational training. Supported better preparation of teachers and research facilities for teachers in universities.

Limitations: The recommendations were also followed only partially and with delays.

Overall Impact of British Policies on Higher Education

Positive Contributions

Institutional Foundations: Brought into existence the modern university college and school systems. Implemented western science, arts and commerce curricula.

Development of a New Class: Produced a class of English educated Indians involved in administration, education as well later in the struggle for independence.

Introduction of Research-Oriented Education: Such activities as postgraduate studies as well as scholarships formed the base for executing academic research.

Secular Education: Supported rational curricula, thereby abolishing religious dictated traditional systems.

Limitations and Criticisms

Neglect of Indigenous Systems: Discounted traditional institutions like feudal style monasteries- Gurukulas and Islamic religious schools-Madrasas. Suppressed indigenous wisdom, science, and philosophies such as those regulating Indian classical medical science of Ayurveda besides Indian astro navigation.

Elitism in Education: Favored the city dwellers and the rich, but devoid of the benefits of the countryside and the poor. Education was created to produce clerks and administrators and not innovators or entrepreneurs.

Urban-Centric Development: Concentrated mainly on the learners in urban areas thus neglecting the rural systems of education.

Examination-Oriented System: Primacy of memorization and tests as well as a lack of the former also suppressed originality and analysis.

Gender Disparities: A weak attempt was made to increase female literacy empowering more female education than male in higher education.

Legacy of British Colonial Policies in Higher Education

However much the British colonial policies may have been wanting, they set the tone for modernity in Indians' higher education system. Courtesy it became possible for Institutions like University of Calcutta, University of Madras, Bombay University and others to emerge as centers of learning which helped many an Indian leader. However, the elitist and examination-oriented model which they have brought is still highly relevant to Indian education and it really requires changes to make it more democratic and creative.

2.2 Post-Independence Developments

The Radhakrishnan Commission or the University Education Commission of India (1948-49)

Key Event: After India's independence the Government of India set up the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan which aimed to appraise and suggest changes in higher education.

Impact: The commission Said It sounded a bit like the fantasy of academic freedom, university autonomy, a system that breeds creativity and encourages free thinking. It extended the necessity of the values, which should be introduced into the system of education for students, such as national integration and social responsibility, etc.

Limitations: Despite the fact that the commission provided very useful recommendations, the application of the proposed solutions has been tardy. A notable stitch was inadequate funding and general political will to bring into operation the conception of an extensive, mixed, and self-governing personnel formation. It continued to target a few privileged institutions not bearing in mind the expansion of education to all, especially to the rural and vulnerable groups.

University Grants Commission- 1956

Key Event: The University Grants Commission (UGC) was started in India in 1956 by an act of Parliament with the major objectives of coordinating and controlling the standards of university education in India.

Impact: The UGC was endowed with financial accountability, supervisory authority over the academic standards, and university development. Its major objectives and functions were to coordinate standards across universities and colleges and strive to improve research as well as teaching standards in institutions of higher learning.

Limitations: In fact, for the most part, the UGC laid more stress on matters of funds than on the qualitative uplift of education. It also had its problems in ensuring compliance with its set guidelines; administrative and political problems.

The Mudaliar Commission - 1959 and 1960.

Key Event: The Secondary Education Commission headed by Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar was set up to solve the problems in secondary education and yet it too posed certain changes for higher education also.

Impact

T**eacher Preparation:** Suggest the enhancement of training for teachers at secondary and tertiary level. Included professional education for teachers, which focus on the application of the knowledge obtained by the teachers.

Curriculum Reform: Called for an expansion of the curriculum offerings as a way of addressing the needs of learners with diverse needs and talents. Proposed splitting academic and vocational streams in equal measure to try and link education with society.

Examination and Evaluation: Emphasized on the importance of changing examination methods to pay emphasis on comprehension rather than memorization. Suggested that continuous internal assessment should be used as an addition to final examination.

Administrative Efficiency: Suggested SOA of educational administration to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Limitations:

Limited Higher Education Focus: Although its core concern was secondary education, it had relatively vague, and at times circuitous, suggestions for higher education.

Implementation Gaps: Most of the recommendations highlighted including on training of teachers and the diversification of the curriculum were marred by poor implementation due to shortages of infrastructure, and political will.

Overemphasis on Vocational Education: Call for vocationally oriented streams remained ill-supported with resources control thus resulting in sub-optimal performance.

Inability to Address Systemic Issues: In one way or another, the reforms and paradigms did not sufficiently address some of the more global problems with education systems, including the disparities involved with funding and access granted to HEI's.

Kothari Commission - 1964

Key Event: Honorable Prime Minister Shastri Ji constituted an Indian Education Commission of six members in August 1964 with Dr. Kothari as Chairman The commission functioned up to 1966 to review, the whole structure of education in Pakistan and suggest changes, if any, for the growing needs of the country in the phase of developments post independency.

Impact: As per the recommendation of the Kothari Commission, the education system of India should be nested so that there will be, on one hand the general education and on the other hand vocational education in the field of science and technology. It also demanded one

standard in education all over the nation and also cleared a proposal of a 10+2+3 system of education**.**

Limitations: But, the complete enforcement of the commission's recommendations was again and again frustrated by such factors as insufficient funds, imbalance geographical allocation and politics. This concentration of education on science and technology, however, provided a toll to students and the system of education as where some institutions left off humanities and social sciences studies.

National Education Policy - 1968

Key Event: Hence, for the general growth of education in the country, it was for the first time that a comprehensive policy concerning the education in India was thought of under the National Policy of Education formulated in 1968 with particular appeal for educational revolution and handwriting of elementary education**.**

Impact: The policy presupposed that universities' number and scope of education would grow, as well as the availability of education in rural and periphery areas. It also aimed at increasing the quality of education by demanding growth of teachers' education and including the vocation courses. It was the first substantive campaign by the ministry in an attempt to convince the public of the need for a more equitable structure of education, and integration of Kuwait into the territory.

Limitations: Some of the challenges include; implementation and funding was poor, and was earmarked poorly to the policy. Despite its contribution in calling for establishment of new universities and institutions, it will never be adequate in boosting up enrolment ratios of the urban as against rural or the socially and economically disadvantaged as against the privileged. However, it was opposed because it refused to recognize regional and linguistic differences in doing so.

National Education Policy: 1986

Key Event: The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 was a major step for the Government of India towards learning from the issues in the education system. It desired to make education an instrument for creating unity and membership of the country as well as increasing social and economic growth. The policy talked of 'education for all' keeping in view specially deprived sections, SCs(STs), women and minorities. To enhance the primary education infrastructure it launched Operation Blackboard; and in 1993 it gave priority to vocational education and adult literacy.

Impact

Universal Access and Equity: Stressed the importance of equitizing and extension of elementary education and education for all especially out of school children.

Improvement in Quality: Concerned specifically with teacher professional development, with demands for more effective curricula aimed at improving education delivery.

Vocationalization of Education: Ensure to provide vocationally oriented secondary schooling to reduce unemployment and populate the gap market.

Decentralization: Promoted community participation to enable the community to become responsible for the running of schools within the community.

Focus on Technology: Supported the use of technology in learning, teaching computer literacy as well as using aids such as visuals and audio.

Adult Education: I developed programs that helped enhance literacy for adults particularly women and those in the rural areas.

Limitations

Ineffective Implementation: Most programmes like Operation Blackboard were marred by problems of infrastructure and implementation.

Funding Challenges: Lack of adequate funding limited the achievement of several policies as the following objectives reveal.

Regional and Linguistic Barriers: The policy was criticized on the basis that it failed to address linguistic as well as cultural diversity of India.

Neglect of Higher Education: The governmental attention to the reforms was paid mainly to the elementary and vocational education and much less to the higher one.

Persistent Inequalities: Therefore, various barriers to access and quality education between and within urban/rural areas and among different social strata persisted.

National Knowledge Commission - 2005-09 :

Key Event: The objective of this organization was to provide recommendations that can help improve the performance of the knowledge sector in India and the quality of education that is being offered in educational institutions of the country which was again set up by the government in the year 2005 during the term of the prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh headed by Mr. Sam Pitroda.

Impact

Creation of New Institutions: According to the Commission, there was a need to establish new and quality institutions of higher learning in the country.

Focus on Research & Development: He laid a great deal of stress upon improving research and development effort and urged for the creation of centres of excellence and increased research expenditure.

Use of Technology: The Commission suggested implementation of technology in education in order to ensure equity and quality of education.

Quality Enhancement: It pinpointed major concerns which required radical changes in the nature of teaching, learning and research with an overall concern with competitiveness of universities in the global arena.

Limitations

Slow Implementation: However, it seems that executive inertia and lack of funds hindered the use of the Commission's recommendations even when they were highly desirable.

Limited Funding: Although the goal was to improve the research and development in the institutions, the fund to support such objectives was sometimes lacking.

Overambitious Goals: Concerning the proposals of the commission, certain measures were predicted to be challenging due to the current infrastructure and the financial commitment towards higher learning in India.

The YashPal Committee (2009)

- **Key Event:** This committee was established in 2009 to examine the scenario of higher education in India and to suggest the ways for its Reconstruction.

Impact:

Autonomy for Universities: The Committee suggested a measure to devolve powers relating to innovation and operations and curriculum setting with a view of decentralising power over institutions.

Unified Regulatory System: It demanded the formation of a single authority of higher education to make the regulatory mechanism less unattended and confusing that is in practice by UGC and AICTE.

Holistic Education: Adhered to liberal education concept calling for concept integration, innovation and problem solving as major learning strategies as opposed to memorization.

Curriculum Revitalization: Writing was diagnosed that university curriculum should be changed to a more modern approach reflecting the global economic needs and situations, in other words, making education practical in nature.

Limitations

Resistance to Change: The idea of devolution of more powers to universities was not well received especially by those who felt they would lead to minimal government interference and less responsibility.

Structural and Political Hurdles: A major type of structural and political barrier was realized when the idea of harmonizing the body regulating education was proposed since this was characterized by a high level of education bureaucracy.

Resource Constraints: While the proposed reforms included a number of significant changes the funding necessary to put these into effect was often inadequate, hence the slow pace of reform.

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA, 2013)

Event: RUSA was initiated by raising funds and reforms for the development of state universities in order to enhance its quality.

Impact: Improved physical facilities and quality of education in State Universities. Supported the equality and inclusiveness in un-served or under-served geographies.

Limitations: The bureaucratic proceduralism hampered the process of the disbursement of the funds. This problem is caused by dependence on central funding, which is normally adequate for conventional business models but insufficient for platform business models.

The Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching- 2014

Key Event: An initiative of the Government of India initiated for improvement in quality of teaching in higher education by way of capacity building of teachers, professional development and innovativeness in teaching learning process.

Impact:

Capacity Building: Primarily committed to supporting professional development consistencies for teachers and teacher trainers. Built additional facilities for the improvement of the faculties and regional centers for educational development.

Revitalization of Teaching: Supported and advertised the profession of teaching by recommending teaching aids. Promoted fresh ideas in the learning teaching process and the development of curriculum to address the needs of tertiary institutions.

Research and Innovation: Encouraged research oriented teaching to meet the International Standards of Education. Offered venues for exchange of experiences between teachers.

Limitations:

Implementation Challenges: Partial implementation across states and institutions mainly due inadequate funding and human resource development.

Limited Reach: Targeted more on certain institutions especially larger ones thus there was little service provision to most rural and small institutions.

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) - 2015

Key Event: Initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to evaluate the performance of Indian institutions of higher learning with regard to certain parameters that define institutional quality.

Impact

Quality Enhancement: Relates them to the notion that institutions should seek to enhance their performance in teaching and learning as well as in research. Globalisation and thus, the concept of benchmarking was integrated into the higher learning system in India.

Transparency and Accountability: Provided the offered students and other stakeholders with a credible means of assessing the institutions. Greater pressure on organizations to concentrate on outcomes.

Global Recognition: Assisted Indian institutions to get visibility and recognition in the international market.

Limitations

Narrow Parameters: An emphasis on research production and on research facilities which can be a disadvantage or at least not an advantage for institutions with an educational focus.

Resource Constraints: Most institutions did not have the capacity to provide for the requirements stated by NIRF, and therefore the results were skewed.

Subjectivity in Weightage: There were also parameters like the "perception" scores that were subjective in nature.

Expansion of Universities and Technical Institutes (IITs, IIMs)

Table 1

Category	Universities	Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)	Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs)
Name	Numerous universities across India (e.g., University of Delhi, University of Mumbai)	IIT Kharagpur, IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, etc.	IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Calcutta, IIM Bangalore, etc.
Year Established	Varies (from 1857 for University of Calcutta)	1951 (IIT Kharagpur)	1961 (IIM Ahmedabad and IIM Calcutta)
Specialty	General education across multiple disciplines (arts, science, commerce, etc.)	Engineering, Technology, Computer Science, Research	Management, Business Administration, Leadership, Research
Expansion (as of 2023- 2024)	Over 1,195 universities, including central, state, deemed, and private institutions	23 IITs across the country	20 IIMs, with 13 new ones established in the last 9 years
Reputation	Varies by university; prestigious ones include University of Delhi, JNU, Banaras Hindu University	IITs are globally recognized for excellence in engineering and research	IIMs are internationally recognized for their management education and are ranked highly globally
Limitation	Quality and facilities can vary; challenges in maintaining standards across diverse institutions	Limited number of seats, high competition, primarily focused on technical fields	Highly selective, expensive, and limited to business education
Growth Drivers	Increase in demand for higher education,	Expansion to meet growing demand for	Demand for skilled management

	government initiatives (NEP 2020)	technical education and research	professionals and global business competition
Key Challenges	Funding, infrastructure, quality control, faculty retention	High pressure, intense competition, limited diversity in course offerings	High cost, limited to business-related education, exclusivity

2.3 LIBERALIZATION ERA AND ITS IMPACT IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Table 2

Aspect	Before Liberalization (Pre-1991)	After Liberalization (Post-1991)
Government Control over Education	Higher education is primarily state-controlled, with fewer opportunities for private institutions.	Increased privatization, with significant autonomy granted to private universities. Empirical evidence: In 2023, private universities in India constituted around 30% of the total number of universities (ThePrint, 2022).
Private Sector Participation	Very limited private participation. Only a few private institutions were allowed, with major emphasis on government-run universities.	Surge in private universities, technical colleges, and international partnerships. Empirical evidence: In 2022, private institutions accounted for 33% of India's higher education institutions (University Grants Commission, 2023). Example: Ashoka University and O.P. Jindal Global University is among top private universities post-liberalization.
Commercialization Trends	Education was largely a public service, with low tuition fees and limited	Rise in commercialization: universities began focusing on fee-based models, education as a marketable product.

	commercialization.	Empirical evidence: The average fee in private universities has increased significantly in recent years, with institutions like Amity University charging upwards of ₹10-12 lakh for certain undergraduate courses (India Today, 2023).
Foreign Institutions	Very few foreign educational institutions operate in India; primarily due to strict regulations and restrictions.	Greater international collaboration and entry of foreign universities. Empirical evidence: The Foreign Universities Bill (2010) aimed at easing regulations for foreign institutions. In 2022, Southampton University set plans to open its first campus in India (Financial Times, 2022).
Policy Focus	Focus was on accessibility, affordability, and providing opportunities for marginalized groups.	Shift towards privatization, autonomy for universities, and creating a competitive education environment. Empirical evidence: The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) introduced in 2015 ranks universities based on metrics like teaching, learning, and resource utilization, incentivizing market competitiveness.
Regulatory Environment	Strict government control, with limited flexibility for institutions to operate independently.	Easing of regulations, fostering greater autonomy for private and public institutions. Empirical evidence: In 2019, the University Grants Commission allowed private universities to establish their own fee structures, which increased

		institutional flexibility (UGC, 2022).
Private Sector Funding and Investment	Very limited private investment in higher education.	Major surge in private funding, including foreign investments in education. Empirical evidence: Eruditus, an edtech platform, raised $150 million in 2024 from investors such as TPG and Bessemer Venture Partners, reflecting private sector confidence in the education market (Reuters, 2024).
Access to Higher Education	Access was mainly through government institutions, with limited opportunities for students from rural areas or marginalized backgrounds.	Expansion of educational institutions, but higher fees limit access for lower-income students. Empirical evidence: The number of higher education institutions grew from 150 in 1991 to over 1,000 in 2023, but affordability and access remain key barriers for underprivileged students (Target Study, 2022).
Quality of Education	The quality of education was relatively stable in government institutions but lacked modern infrastructure and resources.	Mixed quality across institutions, with private universities focusing on quality but others suffering from inconsistent standards. Empirical evidence: Ashoka University is considered one of the best private universities in terms of quality, but many other private institutions face criticism for lacking academic rigor (ThePrint, 2022).
Impact on Employment	Government-run institutions often had strong connections with public sector jobs.	Focus on employability, with many private institutions emphasizing skill development for industry readiness. Empirical evidence: Graduates from

		elite institutions like Indian School of Business (ISB) or Ashoka University find high-paying jobs, whereas many from lower-ranked private institutions struggle to secure placements (ThePrint, 2022).

2.4 Recent Reforms and NEP 2020

Table 3 Comparison Table: NEP 2020 vs NEP 1968 vs NEP 1986

Aspect	NEP 1968 (Indira Gandhi)	NEP 1986 (Rajiv Gandhi)	NEP 2020 (Narendra Modi)
Goals of Access, Equity, and Quality	Focused on improving educational access, particularly for disadvantaged groups.	Strengthened focus on improving equity and quality in primary and secondary education.	Comprehensive focus on universal access to quality education from pre-school to higher education. Inclusion of diverse groups like ST/SC, economically weaker sections.
Economic Development Focus	Focused on increasing literacy, but lacked a strong connection with economic development.	Introduced vocational training to align education with economic needs.	Strong focus on skill development, entrepreneurship, and industry partnerships for economic growth. Creation of multi-disciplinary institutions to connect education with economic outcomes.
Social Development	Emphasized social integration through educational equity.	Focus on social justice through better distribution of resources, especially for marginalized communities.	Promotes social mobility and inclusive education through flexible learning pathways and emphasis on linguistic diversity. Focus on improving gender parity and inclusion in education.
Cultural	Focus on national	Recognized cultural	Emphasizes cultural diversity,

Development	integration and promotion of India's cultural heritage.	diversity but focused more on technology integration.	mother tongue-based education, and Indian knowledge systems.
Technical Development	Little focus on technical education; mainly focused on primary and secondary education.	Introduced vocational education and technical skills training.	Major reforms in vocational education, technical institutes, and skill development. Launch of National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) for technical advancement.
Environmental Development	No direct emphasis on environmental concerns in education.	Some focus on environmental awareness in education.	Environment education integrated at all levels with a focus on sustainable development and climate change awareness.
Human Development Focus	Early focus on basic literacy and primary education for human capital development.	Emphasis on quality education for holistic development of children.	Emphasizes holistic development of children through a 4+3+3+4 system, focusing on cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Integration of mental health and well-being.
Flexibility in Curriculum	Rigid curriculum focused on academic subjects.	Introduced flexibility in curriculum with some choices in secondary education.	Offers greater flexibility with multiple exit points in higher education, allowing students to pursue multiple disciplines.
Policy on Higher Education	Minimal focus on higher education; emphasis on primary and	Focus on expansion of higher education, establishment of new universities.	Comprehensive reform with emphasis on multidisciplinary education, global standards, and the creation of National

	secondary.		Research Foundation (NRF).
Governance and Regulation	Centralized control with the University Grants Commission (UGC).	Introduced autonomy to institutions but still largely centralized.	Major shift towards decentralized governance with greater autonomy to institutions. The establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
Implementation Mechanism	Slow implementation, lack of clear strategies for monitoring.	Better implementation with clear structures like district education officers.	Strong focus on digital governance, online learning, and robust implementation frameworks via state-level action plans.

3. ANALYSIS OF POLICY TRANSFORMATIONS USING SECONDARY DATA

3.1 Key Policy Indicators Over Time

Table 4 Comparison year growth Rate of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) Trends

Indicator	2014-15	2020-21	2021-22	Change (2014-15 to 2021-22)
Total Enrolment (Crores)	3.42	4.14	4.33	0.265
Female Enrolment (Crores)	1.57	2.01	2.07	0.32
SC Enrolment (Lakhs)	46	58.95	66.23	0.44
SC Female Enrolment (Lakhs)	20.9	29.01	31.71	0.516
ST Enrolment (Lakhs)	16.4	24.12	27.1	0.652
ST Female Enrolment (Lakhs)	7.5	12.21	13.46	0.795
OBC Enrolment (Crores)	1.12	1.48	1.63	0.455
OBC Female Enrolment (Lakhs)	52.4	72.88	78.19	0.492
Minority Enrolment	21.8	27	30.1	0.38

(Lakhs)				
Female Minority Enrolment (Lakhs)	10.7	14.4	15.2	0.421
North-East Enrolment (Lakhs)	9.36	11.52	12.02	0.284
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	23.7	27.3	28.4	0.198
Female GER	22.9	27.9	28.5	0.245
SC GER	18.9	23.1	25.9	0.37
SC Female GER	18.1	23.9	26	0.436
ST GER	13.5	18.9	21.2	0.57
ST Female GER	12.2	19.1	20.9	0.713
Number of Universities	760	1,043	1,162	0.529
Government Universities	484	642	685	0.415
Women-only Universities	11	16	17	0.545
Number of Colleges	38,498	43,798	45,473	0.181
Stand-alone Institutions	10,755	11,650	12,002	0.116
Government Colleges (%)	21.3	21.4	21.5	0.002
Private (Un-aided) Colleges (%)	64.9	65.2	65.3	0.004
Exclusively Female Colleges (%)	8.1	10.2	10.4	0.284
Ph.D. Enrolment (Lakhs)	1.17	2.01	2.13	0.821
Female Ph.D. Enrolment (Lakhs)	0.48	0.95	0.99	1.062
Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	20:1	19:1	18:1	Improved
Total Teachers (Lakhs)	13.5	15.5	15.98	0.184

Female Teachers (%)	39.2	43	43.4	+4.2 percentage points
Foreign Students Enrolment	45,424	48,035	46,878	0.032
STEM Enrolment (Lakhs)	78.7	92.6	98.5	0.252

INDIAN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION :

1. **Total Allocation (2024-25):**

○ Total: ₹1,20,628 crore (7% decrease from 2023-24 Revised Estimate).

○ Department of School Education and Literacy: ₹73,008 crore (61% of the total, 0.7% increase from 2023-24 RE).

○ Department of Higher Education: ₹47,620 crore (39% of the total, 17% decrease from 2023-24 RE).

2. **Trends in Education Expenditure:**

○ Combined spending (states + center): Between 3.9% and 4.6% of GDP (2013-14 to 2020-21).

○ NEP (2020) recommended: 6% of GDP allocation, yet to be achieved.

3. **Key Expenditure Areas (2024-25):**

○ **School Education:**

■ Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan: ₹37,010 crore (+14% from 2023-24 RE).

■ PM POSHAN: ₹12,467 crore (+25% from 2023-24 RE).

■ PM SHRI Schools: ₹6,050 crore (+116% from 2023-24 RE).

○ **Higher Education:**

■ Central Universities: ₹15,928 crore (+29% from 2023-24 RE).

■ IITs: ₹10,325 crore (-0.6%).

■ UGC & AICTE: ₹2,900 crore (-57%).

4. **Key Issues:**

○ Decreased funding in Higher Education (UGC & AICTE, research funding).

○ Persistent gap in meeting the NEP's 6% GDP spending target.

Table 5:

Category	2022-23 Actuals	2023-24 RE	2024-25 BE	Change (23-24 RE to 24-25 BE)
School Education	₹58,640 crore	₹72,474 crore	₹73,008 crore	0.007
Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	₹32,515 crore	₹33,000 crore	₹37,010 crore	0.14
PM POSHAN	₹12,681 crore	₹10,000 crore	₹12,467 crore	0.25
PM SHRI Schools	₹0 crore	₹2,800 crore	₹6,050 crore	1.16
Higher Education	₹38,557 crore	₹57,244 crore	₹47,620 crore	-17%
Central Universities	₹10,867 crore	₹12,394 crore	₹15,928 crore	0.29
IITs	₹8,990 crore	₹10,384 crore	₹10,325 crore	-0.60%
UGC & AICTE	₹5,512 crore	₹6,809 crore	₹2,900 crore	-57%
Total	₹97,196 crore	₹1,29,718 crore	₹1,20,628 crore	-7%

THE STATUS OF INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Global Recognition: India takes the top spot this year with 105 universities ahead of Turkey and Pakistan in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. Of these, Indian universities have made remarkable achievements in the SDG 7 (Affordable Energy), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and the SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), they have contributed to the national and international premised goals. JSS Academy of Higher Education is in the top position for SDG 3 along with Saveetha Institute and Shoolini University in the SDG 7 among top 10 institutions.

Reforms Driving Change

Internationalization: These new policies comprising more branch campuses, international agreements, and 'education cities' such as Gujarat's GIFT City.

Access Expansion: From 30 million in 2012, the enrolments went up to more than 43 million in 2024 owing to the ambitious National Education Policy 2020.

Research Support: An emphasis on the funds for research and the cooperation of several countries.

Challenges: However, Altbach has observed that a large part of India's higher education is still average as one would find it. However, there are nascent tall 'peaks of distinction' emerging amidst these developments. India's higher education is progressively improving, and universities bear the prime responsibility for overcoming social and economic problems, as well as the quest for international recognition.

3.2 SHIFTS IN POLICY FOCUS

FROM ACCESS AND EXPANSION TO QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

The scenario of higher education in India has changed from the searching for access and enrolment to the concern of quality and excellence. This shift is indicative of an adaptation to the thrown down of the bounty of the new world economy known as the knowledge based economy and the need for human capital.

1. Successes in and Coverage

Enrolment Growth: This enrollment has soared from 8.4 million in 2001 to 43 million in 2021-22. The GER has improved from 11 percent in 2001 to 28.4 percent for the financial year 2021-22. The enrolment of women expanded tremendously, and female GER (28.5%) was higher than the male GER in the year 2021-22.

Infrastructure Expansion: Number of universities increased by 53% from 760 (2014-15) TO 1,162 (2021-22). Colleges rose by 18 percentage points, from 38,498 (2014- 15) to 45,473 (2021- 22). Volumes have been key in addressing gaps created by exclusion of rural and underserved areas.

2. Move to Quality and Quality Thoughts

Policy Frameworks: The NEP 2020 focuses on multidisciplinary, Internationalization, and innovation for development of educational institutions. Schemes such as RUSA granted ₹7,800 crore for funding the up gradation of state universities (2017–2022).

Quality Metrics: The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was implemented in 2015 to rank institutional performance. In the following years, the organizations' involvement has represented more than 4 700 institutions within the year 2023. India lined up the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings out of 105 universities internationally with reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Research and Development: The enrolment to PhD level rose by 81.2% in three years from 1,17,058 (2014-15) to 2,13,408 (2021-22). To some extent innovation is encouraged by creating the National Research Foundation with an envisaged budget of ₹50,000 crore.

3. Balancing Inclusion and Excellence

Social Equity: The overall enrolment to SC students has also gone up by 44% from 46 lakh (2014-15) to 66.23 lakh (2021-22). More women got involved due to efforts to make gender balance for GER.

Regional Imbalances: GER remains uneven across states (Tamil Nadu: 47%, Bihar/Assam: 17%). Lack of infrastructure for quality education coupled with the poor percentage of qualified teachers characterize these schools – gaps which are sought to be filled by PM SHRI Schools and digital infrastructure development**.**

Faculty and Teaching Quality: The pupil-teacher ratio in higher education improved from 25:It has deteriorated from 1 (2017-18) to 23:1: (2021-22). A new year of change leads India to the new level of learning, not only for access to millions of students for the higher education programs' innovative practices but also creating capable promising institutions with an international quality research impact.

INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND ADDRESSING REGIONAL IMBALANCES

The Indian higher education system has paid more and more attention to the equity and provincialization of higher education. They are in tandem with the equity and access philosophies echoed in the NEP 2020 and other government policies aimed at the marginalised sects.

1. Inclusion of Marginalized Groups: Access of Under-represented Population

Scheduled Caste (SC): Eligible enrolement has increased by 44% from about 46 lakh for session 2014-15 to 66.23 lakh for session 2021-22. GER for SC students enhanced from 18.9 % (2014-15) to 25.9% (2021-22).

Scheduled Tribe (ST): Enrolment has been scaled up by 65.2%; from 16.4 lakh in 2014-15 to 27.1 lakh in 2021-22. GER for ST students also increased from 13.5% (2014-15) to 21.2 % (2021-22).

Other Backward Classes (OBC): It has expanded enrolment by 45% with enrolment at 1.63 crore in 2021-22 financial year, up from 1.12 crore in 2014-15 financial year.

Gender Inclusion

Female Participation: Female Gross Enrolment Ratio increases compared to Male Gross Enrolment Ratio at a poor 28.5%, (2021- 22) instead of 22.9%(2014-15). Women's only colleges represented 10.4% of total colleges during the session 2021-22.

Economic Support : Financial support for higher education comes from programmes like PM-USP Yojana and scholarships for the SC & ST & OBC & Minorities. The student financial support was increased to ₹ 1,908 crore for the year 2024-25 from ₹1,603 crore for the year 2022-23.

2. Addressing Regional Imbalances

State-Level GER Variations

High GER States: Tamil Nadu topped in the higher education availability with 47 %, followed by Telangana with 40 % and Kerala with 41%.

Low GER States: Bihar (17%) and Assam (17%) are much lower than the national average of 28.4% while Bihar and Jharkhand (19%) have higher levels of such feminism than Assam.

Institutional Distribution

Skewed Infrastructure: **78% of colleges** are privately managed, with many concentrated in urban areas, limiting rural access.

Government Efforts: Initiatives like **PM SHRI Schools** and **RUSA** target underserved regions to bridge gaps.

Digital and Physical Infrastructure

Digital Divide: Only **34% of schools** and educational institutions have internet access (2021-22). The NEP 2020 emphasizes improving digital access through technology-focused initiatives.

Faculty Shortages: States like Bihar and Jharkhand report **pupil-teacher ratios (PTR)** of **64:1** and **54:1**, far higher than the recommended **15:1** in higher education.

Key Interventions

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA): Focused on infrastructure upgrades and capacity building in backward states.

National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR): Aims to bridge the digital divide in underserved areas.

Targeted Scholarships: Financial aid for SC/ST/OBC and economically weaker sections helps reduce dropout rates and improve enrolment. India's higher education system is evolving to address historic inequities, ensuring inclusion for marginalized communities and reducing regional disparities through focused policies and investments.

3.3 ROLE OF REGULATORY BODIES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Table 4:

Regulatory Body	Year	Objectives	Key Roles	Status	Impact	Limitations
UGC	1956	Promote & coordinate university education, maintain standards, distribute funds	Funding, setting standards, accreditation	Statutory Body	Promotes excellence, supports infrastructure	Bureaucratic delays, overlaps
AICTE	1945	Promote technical education, ensure quality	Accrediting technical programs, faculty development	Statutory Body	Enhances quality, improves employability	Limited private oversight, slow processes
NBA	1994	Accredit technical programs, ensure	Accrediting programs, setting norms	Statutory Body	Improves program quality, global recognition	Limited reach, high cost

		quality				
NAAC	1994	Assess & accredited institutions, promote quality	Institutional assessments, rankings	Statutory Body	Improves quality, promotes reforms	Subjectivity, resource constraints
DEB	2012	Regulate distance education, ensure quality	Accrediting providers, setting benchmarks	Statutory Body	Expands access, uses technology	Inconsistent quality, limited control
NMC	2020	Regulate medical education, set standards	Accrediting colleges, licensing	Statutory Body	Ensures qualified professionals, promotes research	Overregulation, quality gaps
BCI	1961	Regulate legal education, set standards	Accrediting law colleges, licensing	Statutory Body	Ensures quality in legal education	Limited oversight, slow changes
INC	1947	Regulate nursing education & practice	Accrediting schools, licensing	Statutory Body	Ensures a competent workforce	Limited monitoring capacity
PCI	1948	Regulate pharmacy education & practice	Accrediting colleges, licensing	Statutory Body	Enhances pharmacy education & standards	Slow adaptation, inconsistent standards
ICAR	1929	Promote agricultural education &	Accrediting colleges, supporting	Statutory Body	Improves rural education, ensures food	Slow reach, inconsistent quality

		research	research		security	

COMPETITIVE EXAMS AND REGULATORY BODIES IN INDIA

Table 5:

Exam Name	Start Year	Purpose	Applicability	Regulatory Body
UPSC-CSE	1922	For recruitment to civil services like IAS, IPS, IFS, etc.	Applicable to candidates aspiring for top government administrative positions.	Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)
ISI Admission Test	1931	For admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programs in statistics and mathematics.	Applicable to ISI campuses across India for statistics, mathematics, and related courses.	Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)
CAT (Common Admission Test)	1950	For admission to MBA/PGDM programs.	Primarily for IIMs and other leading business schools in India.	Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs)
NDA Exam	1954	For admission to the National Defence Academy.	Applicable to candidates aspiring for a career in the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force.	Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)
XAT (Xavier Aptitude Test)	1954	For admission to management programs.	Primarily used by XLRI, Jamshedpur, and other affiliated institutes for MBA/PGDM admissions.	Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI)

AIIMS Entrance Exam	1956	For admission to MBBS at AIIMS institutions.	Merged with NEET in 2020, previously applicable to all AIIMS campuses.	All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)
GATE	1984	For admission to postgraduate engineering programs and recruitment in PSUs.	Applicable for M.Tech./M.E. programs and PSU recruitment in engineering domains.	Indian Institute of Technology (IITs)
IIFT Entrance Exam	1984	For admission to MBA programs in International Business.	Conducted by NTA for IIFT campuses.	National Testing Agency (NTA)
NET (National Eligibility Test)	1989	For determining eligibility for assistant professorship and junior research fellowship.	Applicable across Indian universities for teaching and research positions.	University Grants Commission (UGC)
NID Entrance Exam	1991	For admission to undergraduate and postgraduate design programs.	Applicable to all NID campuses and select design schools in India.	National Institute of Design (NID)
VITEEE	2002	For admission to undergraduate engineering programs at VIT campuses.	Conducted by VIT for its campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Bhopal, and Amaravati.	VIT University
BITSAT	2005	For admission to undergraduate engineering and science programs at BITS campuses.	Applicable to BITS Pilani, Goa, and Hyderabad campuses.	Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS)

CLAT (Common Law Admission Test)	2008	For admission to undergraduate and postgraduate law programs (LLB and LLM).	Applicable to National Law Universities (NLUs) and other affiliated institutions in India.	Consortium of National Law Universities
MAT (Management Aptitude Test)	1988	For admission to MBA and equivalent programs.	Applicable to over 600 business schools across India for management programs.	All India Management Assoc Universities and Colleges:ation (AIMA)
SNAP	2007	For admission to MBA and PGDM programs at Symbiosis International University.	Applicable to Symbiosis International (Deemed University) and its constituent institutes.	Symbiosis International University (SIU)
JEE (Joint Entrance Examination)	1960 (as IIT-JEE) / 2013 (as JEE)	For admission to engineering programs (IITs, NITs, and other engineering colleges).	Applicable for undergraduate engineering courses across India, including IITs, NITs, IIITs, and GFTIs.	National Testing Agency (NTA)
NEET	2013	For admission to undergraduate medical programs (MBBS, BDS, etc.).	Mandatory for all medical colleges in India for MBBS and BDS admissions, except AIIMS and JIPMER before 2020.	National Testing Agency (NTA)
CUET	2022	For admission to	Mandatory for most	National Testing

(Common University Entrance Test)		undergraduate and postgraduate programs in central universities.	central universities (e.g., DU, BHU, JNU) and other participating institutions.	Agency (NTA)

4. CHALLENGES IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 *Quality vs. Quantity Dilemma: Rapid Expansion vs. Maintaining Academic Standards*

There has always been a problem of growth and quality of higher education in India. Even though access has risen to such unprecedented levels, quality issues continue to arise or persist.

1. Rapid Expansion

I**nstitutional Growth :** Universities rose by 53 % in the seven years from 2014-15 to 2021-22 from 760 to 1, 162. Colleges increased by 18%, from 38,498 during 2014-15 to 45,473 during 2021-22.

Enrolment Growth: Expansion by enrollment increased from 30 million (2012) to 43 million (2021-22). Overall GER rose from 23.7 % (2014-15) to 28.4% (2021-22); for the first time, women have a higher GER than men.

Government Focus on Access : Programs like Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and PM SHRI Schools targeted underserved regions, improving enrolment among marginalized groups: Overall, SC enrolment rose by 44% over the 2014–2022 period. In the same period of time ST enrolment increased by 65%. Critics should not bring down Academics or lower the status of a learner, or attempt to bring change to the whole academic practice.

Faculty Shortages

Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR): National PTR stands at 23:1, and more 50:1 for states like Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and others. It has become typical for more than 30% of faculty positions to be vacant in many government institutions.

Infrastructure Gaps: Small capacities in new institutions result in poor learning conditions, especially in the rural areas.

Underfunded Research: The percentage of R & D is 0.7% of the GDP which is still lower than the global average. A small proportion of the funding has therefore continued to be

allocated to the research thus affecting the output and competitiveness of the higher education sector on the international market.

Global Rankings: Yet, the trend in the enrollment percentage shows that only a handful of institutions in India such as IITs, IISc etc., figured in the international rankings. The concentration on numbers weakens the attempts to cultivate "world-class universities."

3. Efforts to Address the Dilemma

Policy Reforms:

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Focuses on multidisciplinary organisations and research universities. Intends to minimize fragmentation by the process of integrating more compact establishments into powerful clusters.

National Research Foundation (NRF): Devoted ₹50,000 crore for enhancing research capacity and for encouraging innovation.

Ranking and Accountability : National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF): Promotes the idea of outcomes based, such as the quality of teaching, research conductance, and engagement with the public.

Faculty Development : PMMMNMTT (Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching): Concentrated on enhancing the training of teachers and the selection methods of the school.

Improved Governance : Allowing devolved decision making within high achieving institutions under NEP is meant to promote innovation and the provision of the institution's goals.

India has made impressive progress in expanding access to its higher education, India's higher education needs to continue to invest in faculty, facilities and research to sustain and enhance the quality of its institutions. These are good but the NEP 2020 gives general directions and the crux of the matter is the implementation to balance between quality and quantity.

4.2 Inequities in Access

Although, the enrolment levels to the tertiary institutions have increased over the few years there are challenges regionally and socio-economically. These gaps slow down India's process of integrated development.

1. Regional Disparities:

Gross Enrolment Ratio : Co – variation

High GER States: In the Indian states, Tamil Nadu has the highest HE Inclusion rate at 47%, followed by Kerala at 41%, and Telangana, 40%.

Low GER States: Even now, states like Bihar with 8.8% (2021-22), Assam at 9.3% (Jan-Sep 2021-22), Jharkhand 10.9% (Jan-Sep, 2021-22) are far from the national average of 28.4% (Jan-Sep 2021-22).

Institutional Distribution

Urban Concentration: Most colleges, specifically 78%, are privately funded, and a disproportionately large number is found in the urban section.

Rural Gaps: Rural sectors suffer shortages ofHEIs and may widen marginalization by limiting access.

Infrastructure Disparities

Limited internet access: Literacy rate, even now, near about 34% of total educational institutions have internet facilities in the year 2021-22.

Faculty shortages: States like Bihar and Jharkhand report pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) of 64:One and fifty-four to one, in many cases significantly outstrips the national average of 23 students to one teacher.

2. Socio-Economic Inequities

On most of the occasions, representation of marginalized groups is very important.

Scheduled Caste (SC): These rates for SC students rose to 18.9% in the year 2014-15 to 25.9% in the year 2021- 22 but still lag behind the overall population.

Scheduled Tribe (ST): While GER for ST students increased from 13.5% during 2014-15 to 21.2% during 2021-22 it is still low compared to the national GER.

Gender Gaps: A similar trend was a relatively high level of female GER which exceeded male GER for the first time, 28.5% in 2021-22. However, socio-economic factors have remained high in this regard and deny women in the needy society a chance.

Economic Barriers

Financial constraints: Above 70% of the student respondents are compelled to rely on government scholarships or subsidized fees to finance higher education in India.

Dropout rates: Low income students also dropout in higher proportions and are found in rural and hard-to-fill areas.

3. Addressing Inequities: Policy Interventions

Regional Initiatives

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA): ₹7,800 crore earmarked for up gradation of state universities for 2017-2022, emphasis on area specific development.

Digital Inclusion: The National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) is the idea to further the internet connectivity in rural schools and colleges.

Socio-Economic Support

Scholarships and Financial Aid: The PM-USP Yojana and targeted schemes oriented to SC, ST, and OBC students include provisions of exemptions from tuition and allowances.

Increased Female Representation: The plans that help to increase female enrolment through women-only colleges which are 10.4% of all the colleges in India.

Technology-Driven Solutions

Online and hybrid learning models: Increased during COVID-19, to fill regional shortages, digital inequality is still an issue.

4.3 Role of Private Institutions

Profit Motive vs. Public Good

A large number of private institutions are now present in India and while they have played an immense role in the growing enrolment rate there are questions being asked about the increasing role of private institutions as profitable business entities.

1. Expansion of Private Institutions: Empirical Evidence

Dominance in Higher Education

Institutional Share: 65.3 % Private management for colleges in India is observed to have a status of (2021-22). Among these 21.5% are receiving aid from the government and 78.5% are fully independent and fully sponsored.

Enrolment Contribution: Amongst the total enrolment private institutions dominate in the role of 44.6% as compared to government institutions which are 34.8% and also private aided institutions which are 20.6%.

Growth Drivers : During this period of 2014-15 to 2021-22, 7,975 new colleges have opened including a large number of private colleges. These colleges are found in a position to meet rising demand especially in urban areas where the public colleges are not in a position to expand their facilities to cater for the ever increasing student enrolment.

2. Challenges of the Profit Motive

High Fees and Limited Access

Cost of Education: While costs of education in private institutions are many folds higher compared to public institutions, admission is restricted with economically weaker sections of society. For example, the cost cap for engineering courses in private colleges ranges between ₹ 1.5 to 2.5 lakh while in government and aided colleges, it's ₹ 25000/- to ₹ 50000/-.

Inequities in Access: Since private universities are mostly established in urban areas, there are disparities identified in rural areas. Most of the unaided colleges charge higher fees for professional courses (engineering, management etc.) than for inclusive streams.

Quality Concerns

Faculty Vacancies: Several private institutions are in a position of employing either inadequate or incompetent staff and with many part-time teachers.

Infrastructure: It was also discovered that approximately 20 percent of private colleges and universities do not possess adequate facilities including libraries, laboratories, or even internet connection.

3. Public Good Contributions

Addressing Demand-Supply Gap : Private institutions have expanded the opportunity to attend the professional courses of one's choice such as engineering management medicine etc. They chin a large part of students, especially in the areas where there are few state-run schools.

Concern for the Developmentally Disabled

Inclusion Efforts: There are several private colleges that give scholarships to SC/ST/OBC and economically backward candidates. Women-only private institutions make up a steadily increasing portion, representing 10.4% of total colleges (2021-22).

4. Policies as Interventions for Managing Role Conflicts

Regulating the Profit Motive: Hence, they call for quality and equity accountability of private institutions under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Fee Capping: Even state-level regulatory bureaux for instance the Fee Regulatory Committee control the fees for Professional courses in private colleges.

Encouraging Public Good

Autonomy and Graded Accreditation: There are proving that the high-performing private educational institutions are being allowed to experiment and grow in numbers and scale up without having to requisite quality.

Incentives for Inclusion: Diversity and inclusion guidelines are the criteria which entitle campus-based private colleges to tax benefits as well as grants.

Table 6: Indicators of Private Institutions' Role

Metric	Public Institutions	Private Aided Institutions	Private Unaided Institutions
Share of Total Colleges (2021-22)	21.50%	13.20%	65.30%
Share of Total Enrolment (2021-22)	34.80%	20.60%	44.60%
Average Fees (Engineering)	₹25,000–50,000	₹50,000–1.2 lakh	₹1.5–2.5 lakh
Women-Only Colleges (% of Total)	2.50%	1.30%	6.60%

4.4 Funding Constraints

1. **India:** India has committed 3.1% of its Gross Domestic Product on education but just 0.5% on higher education which is further down than other countries like China (2.4%) and USA (2.7%). Current membership allows per-student expenditure of $400, greatly restricting the possession of quality physical infrastructure, research, and professors. A R & D investment which is equal to 0.7 % of GDP impedes innovation and global competitiveness.
2. **China :** In recent years, HE investment has been given significant emphasis at 2.4% GDP which has led to massive development in research universities and thirty one integral places of universities ranked among QS top 100. With emphasis on STEM disciplines and globalization; however, China improves its positions faster than India.

3. **USA:** The USA remains to be the most endowed country, spending $ 15,000 to every student besides contributing 2.7% of its GDP to research and development. However, the increase in cost of education has made it difficult for students, especially those from developing nations to acquire university education, despite the fact that currently the USA boasts of 8 universities in the Top 10 worldwide.

4. **UK and EU Countries:** The UK invests 1.5% of its GDP in higher education costs and has an average student expenditure of $12 000 with considerable provision given to research as well as teaching quality. approximately 5-10 years ago the figure has shifted to 50:50 which is good for research level but the actual teaching quality is still not proper. EU countries value equity, with an average of 4.8% of the GDP to public education, while Sweden and Denmark took the lead 6.6% and 6.5% respectively.

5. **Australia:** Currently Australia spends 5.4 % of its GDP in education and places a lot of emphasis in enrollment of international students that give a boost to the country's income. The expenditure per student is 13,000 and quality education and infrastructure facilities are also well provided by the government.

Table 7 Limited Public Investment in Higher Education Compared to Global Benchmarks

Metric	India	China	USA	UK	EU Avg.	Sweden	Denmark	Australia
Public Spending on Education (% GDP)	3.10%	4.01%	5%	4.40%	4.80%	6.60%	6.50%	5.40%
Higher Education Spending (% GDP)	0.50%	2.40%	2.70%	1.50%	1.60%	2%	2.20%	1.90%
R&D Spending (% GDP)	0.70%	2.40%	2.70%	1.70%	2.20%	3.30%	3.10%	1.80%
Per-Student Expenditure (USD)	$400	$4,300	$15,000	$12,000	~$10,000	~$14,000	~$16,000	~$13,000

Top Universities in Top 100	3	11	8	4	7	2	2	7

Recommendations for India

Increase Public Spending: Increase public education expenditure to six percent of the GDP with not less than two percent devoted to the higher education sub sector.

Enhance R&D Investment: Independently, enhance research and development expenditure from 1.2% of the GDP to 2% as part of efforts to boost innovation as well as general global competitiveness.

Improve Per-Student Spending: Concentration and directing attention to legislating an enhancement of per-student expenditure and funding state universities and underfunded institutions at least $ 1,000.

Leverage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Promote private sector financing of campus infrastructure while aiming at providing reasonable cost and accessibility to the disadvantaged.

Focus on Equity and Inclusion: One good way to rectify this is to focus more resources on the low-GER states like Bihar, Assam and Jharkhand where GER is too low.

Higher education's capacity and equity can be enhanced in India to achieve long-term socio-economic growth through international benchmarking of public investment. Limited public investment in higher education compared to global benchmarks.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Comparative Analysis with Global Trends : India's higher education has also evolved especially in terms of access and enrolments. However, when compared to leaders and competitors like China, the USA, the UK, or EU countries like Sweden or Denmark or Australia, the picture is more complex – there are successes to report, as well as challenges.

Access and Enrolment Trends : The Ger has expanded and achieved 28.4 % for the year 2021-22 through the focused approaches under such policies as the rusa and nep 2020 among others. While this marks substantial progress, India still trails behind: China with 57.8% of share has invested enormously to increase the quota of higher education and advancing STEM disciplines. In the USA (88%) and UK (61%) there are very elaborate financial aid regimes and community college systems that guarantee near universal participation. EU countries are, for instance, Sweden that has assured equitable access at 70% and Denmark

with 82%. Australia (53%), thereby ensuring domestic enrolment, and at the same time it attracts a good number of international students. This policy has some strengths for India: It has strong emphasis on marginalized groups (e.g., SC/ST/OBC students) and rural access Despite this a GER ranges between 17% in Bihar and Assam while27 in Tamil Nadu.

Quality and Research Output : They have concentrated too much on availability rather than quality and comparative competency in the international level. The public expenditure on higher education is at 0.5 % of GDP down from 0.8% in 2003, China is at 2.4%, USA 2.7% and the OECD average of 1.1%. The extent of R&D expenditure in India has been put at 0.7 percent of GDP, which restricts innovation. In this regard, only Sweden (3.3%) and Denmark (3.1%) effectively incorporate sound dedicated research and experimental funding in their systems of higher education. The universities like IITs and IISc have however already made their mark within the developing world but out of hundred top universities only three are from India while eleven universities of China figure in the QS top hundred list. The Double First-Class University Plan in China and Horizon 2020 programs in Europe have forced corresponding improvements in research and rank.

Funding and Investment: India spends 3.1% of GDP on education, far below the NEP 2020 target of 6% and global leaders: The countries in the European Union such as Sweden have been spending 6.6% and Denmark 6.5% of the GDP on education. The expenditure per student is $ 400 in India, $ 4300 in China, $ 15000 in the USA and $12000 in the UK. India has the maximum number of private colleges (65.3%) which tend to be expensive, and thus restrict the disproportionately poor from accessing college education.

Internationalization: India has started off with NEP 2020 to internationalize its education system by signing partnerships with foreign universities and establishing branch campuses. However: India has only 46,878 international students for (2021-22) against 500,000 for China and 1 million for the USA. Places such as Australia and the United Kingdom earn considerable income and partnerships internationally by the enrolment of international students. In order to enhance, there lies a need for India to streamline visa regimes, increase English medium instruction and promote branded higher education.

Policy Innovations

India's policy priorities align with global best practices in several areas

USA: Due to openness, community colleges offer affordable and inexpensive means to students in attaining higher education.

China: Combines AI, smart technologies, & the Internationalization in programs like Education Modernization 2035.

EU, Sweden, Denmark: Attention to equity and sustainability directs on providing equality, education for all and improved social mobility.

Australia: Is able to maintain and pursue both research integrity and enrolment expansion through international learners as a quality and revenue asset.

That is why India's focus on the delivery of online education through programs like SWAYAM and on the enhancement of facilities in astronomy-starved areas is a positive trend.

5.2 Findings of Policy Improvements in Indian Higher Education: From Pre-Independence to the Present

The evolution of Indian higher education reflects both the country's social and political direction as well as its economic requirements. Higher education reforms have taken education from an open-door policy to delivering better quality education for everyone while meeting global standards.

1. Pre-Independence Era: Laying the Foundations

Colonial Initiatives: India received its first Western-style universities in 1857 with the founding of Calcutta University then added Bombay and Madras later. Also during that time the focus on producing staff for colonial administration led to minimal support for research and excluded many potential students.

Nationalist Responses: After criticizing Colonial education Tagore and Gandhi launched Visva-Bharati University in 1921 as an independent educational center that connected Indian culture with self-sufficiency.

2. Post-Independence Era (1947–1980s): The growing system created better opportunities for all people to learn while developing national identity.

Radhakrishnan Commission (1948): Urged to build a full-scale higher education network to boost both national growth and social progress. Universities needed more research freedom and independence to operate.

Kothari Commission (1964): Recommended that 6% of GDP should go into educational funding to support both fairness in access and education quality. To enable more diverse students to attend college the government created special entrance rules for SC/ST candidates.

Institutional Expansion: State and national universities increased in number thanks to public support funding. Major academic investment targeted engineering, medicine and agriculture to develop the country through educational establishments including IITs, AIIMS and IIMs.

3. Liberalization Era (1990s–2000s): Privatization and Diversification

Economic Reforms (1991): Higher education accepted private investment which created many new private educational institutions. More students gained entry into professional programs but this created problems about tuition fees and oversight control.

Technological Integration: Institutions brought IT and management education to better fit modern global educational practices. Schools and colleges made vocational and practical education their major emphasis.

Challenges: Private schools show serious variation in their teaching standards. Many institutions located in big cities created gaps between urban and rural areas of India.

4. Contemporary Era (2010s–Present): Our education system now makes quality and equality its main goals while planning to reach international levels.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Our education system supports students by offering combination majors as well as multiple ways to complete their studies. Researchers receive funding for their work from the National Research Foundation. The government wants 50% of eligible students to be enrolled in education systems by 2035 through inclusive practices. Through internationalization India allows global educational institutions to establish physical campuses.

Inclusion Initiatives: Women outpaced men in university enrollment in 2021-22 setting a first for sex ratio in education. Since 2014-15 we have seen SC and ST student enrollment grow by 44% and 65.2%.

Technology in Education: SWAYAM and NDEAR helped create more digital learning options after COVID-19 yet showed how digital access differs between rural and urban areas.

Quality Assurance: The 2015 NIRF system emerged to evaluate and organize educational institutions through performance evaluations. The rural state universities got money from RUSA to enhance their campus buildings through RUSA funding.

Table 7: Key Improvements Over Time.

Period	Focus	Improvements
Pre-Independence	Access for colonial needs	Limited institutions focused on administration; early nationalist reforms emphasized Indian culture.
Post-Independence	Nation-building and public investment	Expansion of public universities; establishment of IITs, AIIMS, and reservations for social equity.
Liberalization Era	Privatization and diversification	Surge in private institutions; increased access to professional courses but with uneven quality.
Contemporary Era	Quality, equity, and global outlook	NEP 2020 reforms, digital education, GER growth, and increased enrolment for marginalized groups.

Limitations in Indian Higher Education Policies

Higher education continues to improve yet structural financial and quality barriers prevent the system from achieving international excellence and equality. These challenges are rooted in systemic, financial, and structural issues:

1. Persistent Underfunding

Low Public Investment: The Indian government allocates only 3.1% of its total economic output toward education despite Kothari Commission recommendations in 1964 which the new National Education Policy in 2020 also approved for six percent spending. The current 0.5% contribution of GDP for higher education severely constrains national investments for modern infrastructure and broader research development efforts.

Inadequate Research and Development (R&D) Funding: Our GDP allocation for research funding sits at 0.7% of total resources but trails the levels China reaches with 2.4% and the US reaches with 2.7%. Our position internationally and capacity to develop innovative solutions suffer because of insufficient research fellowships and poorly connected academic-professional relationships.

2. Differences Exist Between Different Parts of India and Between High and Low Economic Groups

Uneven Gross Enrolment Ratio Across States: The enrollment rate in Tamil Nadu reaches 47 percent while similar figures for Assam and Bihar stand at 17 percent. Participation in advanced academic programs remains difficult for rural residents because of limited teaching infrastructure.

Barriers for Marginalized Groups

Enhanced numbers of enrolled SC ST and OBC students including the recent 25.9% SC GER in 2021-22 cannot eliminate social economic factors blocking student persistence or affordability and slowing down quality education outreach. Current systemic problems in Indian higher education stand in the way of achieving its dual objectives to provide equal educational access to all students while delivering internationally competitive educational standards. These challenges are rooted in systemic, financial, and structural issues: Higher education makes progress despite structural financial and quality issues that limit its achievement of global excellence and equal access.

These challenges are rooted in systemic, financial, and structural issues:

1. Persistent Underfunding

Low Public Investment: Education expenditure in India makes up just 3.1% of the national economy while the Kothari Commission in 1964 and the recent National Education Policy of 2020 recommended that it should reach six percent. A 0.5% GDP allocation towards higher education finances just 0.5% of real facilities development and research expansion.

Inadequate Research and Development (R&D) Funding: Our research funding represents only 0.7% of Gross domestic product (GDP) files behind China's public funding of 2.4% and USA's spending of 2.7%. Very limited research grants combined with weak ties between universities and industries create obstacles in manufacturing new discoveries and achieving international academic ranking positions.

2. Differences Exist Between Different Parts of India and Between High and Low Economic Groups

Uneven **Gross Enrolment Ratio** Across States: Different states demonstrate contrasting enrollment outcomes with absent-minded education systems in Assam and Bihar resulting in just 17 percent of enrollments yet Tamil Nadu reaches 47 percent enrollment. Fundamental

learning infrastructure shortcomings in rural locations stop residents from pursuing advanced educational degrees.

Barriers for Marginalized Groups: Student retention rates among SC ST and OBC groups have improved while social economic barriers continue to influence affordable educational access and student ability to remain in higher education. Multiple persistent challenges prevent the Indian higher education institutions from delivering their aim of universal student access while achieving global educational standards.

Infrastructure Deficits: Rural educational institutions which operate far from main urban centers do not provide adequate learning resources to their student body. Internet service availability at rural schools underwent a major decline during pandemic times resulting in a double proportion of students without steady internet access because 66% of rural schools lack important internet connection.

4. Many Private Schools Depend Too Heavily on Daily Operations

Affordability Issues: The majority of university spots exist within private colleges which creates postsecondary education barriers against low-income students who cannot afford these high tuition fees. Some private educational institutions receive authorization to teach students badly because they lack enough oversight.

Limited Focus on Equity: The main operational goal of private academic institutions is business profitability rather than societal development and they choose their campuses mainly for revenue generation while offering restricted financial aid.

5. Too many research limitations and a global education gap obstruct the delivery of quality educational outcomes by our present system of learning.

Poor Global Rankings: Despite significant national support for top tier universities India is represented by only three universities placed in the world's top 100 schools along with 11 schools from China.

Fragmented Research Ecosystem: New research development is delayed because of both limited collaboration among faculty experts across departments and weak professional connections between academics and businesses. Research grant applications from young academic researchers decline due to prolonged government processing times which diminish their attractiveness.

6. The difficulties that arise while putting policies into action

Slow Execution: NEP 2020 and related policies move slowly because they require money first and meet resistance to updates while lacking programs to teach new skill sets.

State-Level Variations: When states use national policies differently they make education quality and student access uneven across the nation.

7. Limited Internationalization

Low International Student Enrolment

Indian population size does not translate into international enrollment because the country attracts only 46,878 students for 2021-22 while China and the USA admit over half a million students each. Transnational students choose not to study at Indian educational institutions because their admissions face strict visa requirements alongside minimal English courses and non-recognized international qualifications.

Missed Opportunities in Global Collaboration

India failed to transform its international prestige into meaningful partnerships with foreign university systems since NEP 2020 took effect.

8. A difference in technology access separates communities between those with and without internet connectivity.

Rural Challenges: The advancement of SWAYAM digital platforms encounters difficulties since rural educational institutions lack suitable internet connections and computing technology that support digital education.

Inadequate EdTech Integration: Most institutions have yet to integrate advanced technologies like **Artificial intelligence, Augmented Reality (AR)** and **Virtual Reality (VR)** and data analytics into their curricula. India's higher education system has made commendable progress in expanding access and promoting inclusivity. However, persistent issues like underfunding, regional disparities, quality deficits, and regulatory challenges restrict its ability to meet global standards. Addressing these limitations requires a strategic focus on funding, policy implementation, and equity to create a robust and inclusive higher education ecosystem.

Suggestions for Higher Education Policy Improvements: Social Work and Welfare-Based Perspective

Higher education institutions that follow social work and welfare principles will lead to better community outreach combined with inclusive learning methods. The recommendations seek to provide power to marginalized groups while promoting social responsibility between higher education institutions and social benefits.

1. Enhance Accessibility for Marginalized Communities

Programs to establish community colleges should be created within areas where education access is limited. Educational institutions offering skill development programs combined with employability training should be built in rural and tribal territories. Providing free or discounted courses should be a policy for economically limited student populations.

Expand Reservation Policies and Scholarships: Enhance both financial grants and fee waiver programs for students from groups including SC, ST, OBC, minorities, and people from economically deprived sections. Special fellowships should be provided for higher education to students who focus on social work and community welfare.

Outreach Programs: Remote area students need to receive information about educational opportunities through awareness campaigns which will guide them toward scholarships and career paths.

2. Integrate Social Work into Curriculum

Mandatory Social Work Credits: All undergraduate and postgraduate degrees should include mandatory social work combined with community service assignments. Social projects should tie into the development targets across locations which include the implementation of literacy education along with sanitation management and women empowerment activities.

Specialized Programs in Social Welfare: The establishment of educational programs covering child welfare together with rural development and community health and social justice provides a framework for professionals.

Interdisciplinary Learning: Social work programs should team up with public health, law and urban planning courses to handle complicated social issues in a complete manner.

3. Foster Socially Responsible Institutions

Community Engagement Centers: Universities should maintain specific centers that support teamwork between NGOs and self-help groups and local governments concerning

welfare programs. The institution should use experiential learning opportunities to let students and faculty address actual challenges affecting poverty and health care and education systems.

Inclusion-Focused Rankings : The NIRF institutional ranking system should incorporate social impact and welfare contribution factors into its evaluation criteria.

4. Increase Funding for Welfare-Oriented Education

Government Support for Welfare-Based Programs: Allocate specific funds for courses in social work, Sustainable development studies, and welfare management. Welfare research excellence together with community outreach excellence will receive grants from the institution. The implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility Partnerships stipulates that corporations should use their CSR funds to support scholarships and research projects as well as infrastructure development for social work programs.

5. Promote Research on Social Issues

Focus on Marginalized Groups: The research funding should target studies that examine how social problems affect disadvantaged individuals including poverty and caste prejudice alongside gender bias and tribal population well-being. Community-Driven Research Models: Local communities should guide research project development because their involvement ensures projects remain both significant and effective for them.

6. Digital Inclusion for Social Equity

Expand Rural Digital Education: Internet access when combined with digital devices for rural and tribal students will allow them to become part of online education programs. Create welfare-oriented digital platforms which offer cost-free or low-cost courses for social work education alongside skills development. Digital Literacy Campaigns: Social workers along with NGOs should collaborate to build digital proficiency within students from deprived background communities.

7. Encourage Student-Led Social Welfare Initiatives

Welfare Clubs in Institutions: The foundation should create student-run social welfare clubs which will promote education about mental health along with teaching children and protecting the environment.

Incentivize Volunteering: Academic credits together with scholarships should be awarded to students who participate in welfare activities or volunteer work.

8. Strengthen Partnerships for Social Impact

Collaboration with NGOs and Grassroots Organizations: Civil society organizations should become partners to develop educational internship programs which offer students practical learning opportunities.

Government-Academic Linkages: Higher education institutions need to join welfare programs that focus on rural job creation and health services and programs for women empowerment.

9. Policy implementation needs to combat social inequalities between population sectors.

Localized Policy Execution: Higher education policies need to be adapted for each disadvantaged community in every state region.

Equity-Based Monitoring: The assessment of welfare plans targeting marginalized people should be systematic to track progress and verify accountability toward these groups.

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Higher education policies must adopt a social work and welfare-based approach for improving accessibility and equity and delivering quality benefits that transform society. Indian higher education can deliver substantial contributions to both domestic and international socio-economic objectives through welfare-oriented programs in combination with community participation and inclusive development models.

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