



# DESIGNING EFFECTIVE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

**Emroj Alam, Hemanshu Rai, Krishna Pal Singh, Kriti Shukla, Monika Shah**

Department of Management, Axis Institute of Higher Education, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

**ABSTRACT- Purpose:** In the 21st century, higher education is essential for the socio-economic growth and progress of a nation. The Sustainable Development Goals' fourth goal focuses on achieving quality education, inclusivity, and uniform opportunities for all by 2030. India is the 3rd largest education center, after China and the United States, in terms of student population and number of institutions. However, Indian universities do not rank among the top 150 globally according to international rating agencies. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of education policies in promoting inclusive growth, the challenges faced by the Indian education system, and how Indian universities can be converted into world-class institutions. This study aims to identify key challenges, highlight opportunities, and propose ways to elevate Indian universities to world-class status.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The research is predominantly descriptive in nature and is based on sources from national and international literature. Information was gathered from surveys, websites, academic papers, articles, journals, and governmental publications.

**Findings:** The research indicates that, despite the establishment of numerous universities and colleges in India since gaining independence seven decades ago, access to higher education remains uneven. Enhancing the quality and standards of education, expanding the number of educational institutions, and increasing financial resources are imperative to sustain growth in the education sector. Moreover, challenges encompass low female participation in the gross enrollment ratio (GER) at the higher education level, insufficient infrastructure in colleges and universities, a scarcity of qualified teaching professionals, and shortcomings in research standards, innovation, and library amenities. University and college administration also grapples with issues like excessive centralization, bureaucratic and political interference, as well as a lack of transparency, accountability, and professionalism.

**Research Limitations/Implications:** The present research investigates the existing condition of higher education and policy-making procedures in India, and its conclusions may not be relevant to other nations. The study heavily depends on secondary data, and the precision of its analysis is contingent upon the dependability of these sources.

**Originality/Value:** The findings of the research can support policymakers in creating strong, durable, and adaptable educational strategies to enhance the higher education system in India. Scholars may utilize this information to create frameworks that help Indian universities become top-tier institutions in line with sustainable development goals.

**Keywords:** Education Policy, Higher Education, Indian University, Sustainable Development, World Ranking.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in driving national development and enhancing the standard of life. It is not only essential for economic growth but also for individual human development. Despite more than seventy years of independence, many individuals still do not have uniform access to education, especially at higher levels. Inclusive education strives to offer opportunities to all learners and ensure that educational systems are accessible to everyone. The Government of India has established various commissions and committees to regularly update education policies in order to improve the system. Numerous institutions and universities have been founded to promote higher learning. However, despite the growth in educational institutions, Indian universities have not been ranked among the top 150 globally by QS World University Rankings (2019).

The initial NEP of 1968 called for a significant reform of education policies, an enhancement in education quality across all levels, the encouragement of scientific thinking, and an emphasis on moral values. The National Policy on Education of 1986 included provisions for policy reviews every five years. The most recent policy update is the revised National Education Policy and Program of Action of 1992. Furthermore, the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has introduced the 'Draft National Education Policy, 2019' to align with current developments in education.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Howlett's (2019) research delved into the development and execution of public policies in governance structures, emphasizing the array of tools, mechanisms, and instruments utilized to tackle policy challenges. The study underscores the significance of comprehending the rationale behind policy formulation and the guiding principles of policy selection.

Corney, Froumin, Leshukov, and Marginson's (2018) study assessed the influence of federalism on the configuration of higher education in nine federal nations. They conducted a comparative examination of the relationships between national and regional entities in higher education, investigating legal, economic, and other pertinent factors. Their investigation illuminates the ways in which educational systems have adjusted to diverse cultural environments.

Stewart (2012) observed that while the United States led global education in the 20th century, other countries have since learned from its practices and are now achieving superior results in higher education. Stewart advocates for enhanced educational approaches to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving, globalized, and innovation-driven world.

Rao (2009) discovered that recent policy and program changes in various sectors have significantly influenced the education sector, both directly and indirectly. Rao emphasizes the need for equitable knowledge distribution to support human development.

Talyor (2012) highlighted the importance of scientific research for enhancing intelligence, creativity, academic performance, health, and moral reasoning. He argued that improved research can lead to increased self-actualization and job performance, ultimately contributing to personal success.

The United Nations (2015) established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which consist of 17 goals and 169 targets. Goal 4 specifically aims to improve the quality of education, promote inclusive education, and provide equal educational opportunities for all by 2030.

Sen and Dreze (1999) stressed the critical role of education in socio-economic and cultural development. They argued that education leads to societal empowerment and transformation and highlighted that female education can effectively address gender disparity and discrimination.

The All India Survey on Higher Education (2017) gathered extensive statistics from various higher education institutions in India. This data assists central and state governments in formulating future policies and provides insights into the current state of the education system, enabling strategic planning for educational development.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development's revised Draft National Education Policy (2019) aims to tackle challenges in India's education sector. The policy focuses on enhancing education quality and ensuring equal opportunities from pre-school to higher education. It aims to address issues related to quality, research, innovation, and the shortage of skilled manpower in the education system.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To evaluate the education policies put into effect by different administrations in order to enhance the Indian education system.
2. To evaluate the obstacles encountered in the higher education system with regards to the formulation and execution of education policies.
3. To suggest suggestions for improving the higher education system and elevating Indian universities to globally recognized institutions.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is predominantly descriptive in nature, utilizing secondary sources from national and international literature. Information has been collected from various sources such as books, websites, surveys, research papers, articles, and journals. Given the lack of primary data, the analysis is heavily reliant on secondary sources. Therefore, the validity of the results hinges on the dependability of the data supplied by these secondary sources.

##### The Role of Policy Design in Public Policy-Making

Public policy is an essential component of political systems, playing a vital role in addressing societal issues. Governments create policies to meet the needs and demands of the public, with the goal of shaping society and promoting socio-economic development while maintaining national unity and integrity. Effective policy design involves gathering and applying knowledge to develop and implement policies that achieve specific objectives. According to Peters et al. (2018), policy effectiveness is a fundamental goal that supports other objectives such as efficiency and equity. However, policymakers often encounter challenges due to uncertainties, including resource constraints, corruption, inefficiency among bureaucrats, and flawed implementation and evaluation. Translating policy aspirations into practice is challenging due to the high level of uncertainty in policy-making (Howlett, 2019a). Successful policy formulation requires overcoming technical and political challenges and having adequate resources (Hiller & Leaman, 1974). The policy-making environment has evolved to encompass various sectors and levels of public administration, extending beyond health, education, and civil society (Angelides & Caiden, 1994). Policy science has emerged as a critical field of study to address public issues, although it is primarily influenced by Western, particularly American, perspectives. Developing countries, with their unique socio-economic and political contexts, may find that Western models and approaches are not universally applicable. Rational models for solving societal problems often fall short due to conflicting interests and elite preferences. Decision-making theorists, such as Simon (1955), argue that policymakers often "satisfy" rather than "optimize," suggesting that a "good" decision is sufficient even if it is not the best possible one. Simon (1997) proposed that intelligence, design, and choice are key phases that support policy formulation. In democratic systems, elected leaders or ministerial groups play a crucial role in policy-making, influencing.

##### Development and Growth of Education Policy in India

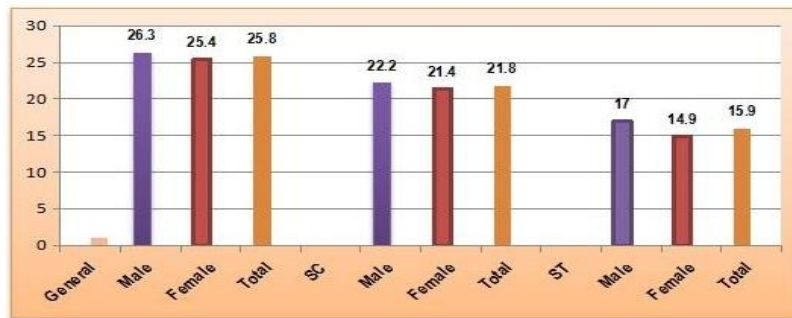
The landscape of education has been greatly influenced by globalization in recent decades. While education is primarily the responsibility of the state, the 76th constitutional amendment has made it a joint responsibility of both the central and state governments. Education now falls under the concurrent list, allowing the central government to legislate in certain areas. Since independence, numerous higher education institutions have been established, along with several commissions and committees aimed at improving the education system and implementing education policies nationwide. The Radhakrishnan Commission, established in 1949, was the first major commission tasked with recommending reforms in higher education. Although the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1968 introduced many positive changes, some recommendations were not fully implemented due to funding issues and inadequate action plans. The National Policy on Education 1986 aimed to prepare students for the 21st century, addressing global development, emerging technologies, and cross-cultural challenges. For the first time, the policy emphasized creating a detailed Program of Action for effective implementation. The NPE 1986 drew on key recommendations from the Kothari Commission 1966, with its core principles of equal educational opportunities, social justice, and development continuing in the revised 1992 policy. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan also emphasized equal opportunities and improved quality in higher education. Recently, the Human Resource Development Ministry introduced the Draft National Education Policy 2019 to address public demands for enhanced education quality, research, and innovation, aiming to position India as a knowledge superpower.

##### Challenges in Higher Education in India: Analysis, Discussions, and Results

Since gaining independence, a multitude of committees, commissions, and educational policies have been created to promote nation-building. Nevertheless, higher education in India is confronted with numerous challenges. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan of the University Grants Commission emphasized the necessity of improving the quality of higher education and addressing regional and social inequalities. As part of this

plan, initiatives were introduced to establish 16 central and 374 model colleges in districts with low Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER). Despite the increase in educational institutions, disparities in GER persist among different groups. The enrollment rates for female students in higher education continue to lag behind their male counterparts, with significant discrepancies evident across various social groups, as depicted in Figure 1.

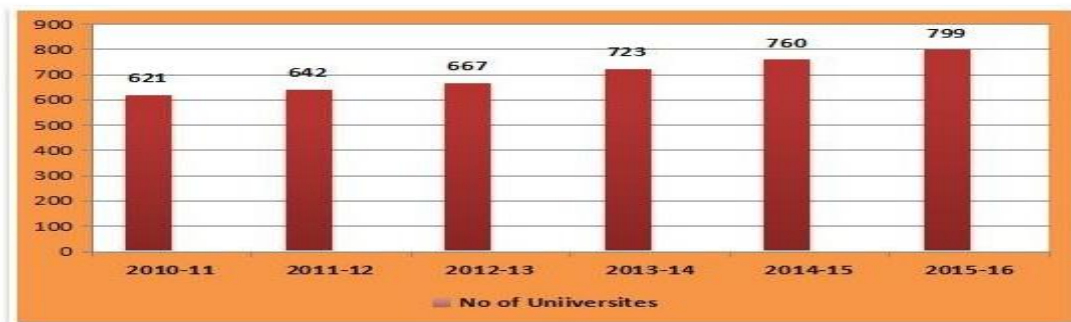
**Figure No. 1: Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at Higher Education level in different Categories 2017-2018 (per cent)**



Source: Economic Survey 2018-2019 (Vol.2)

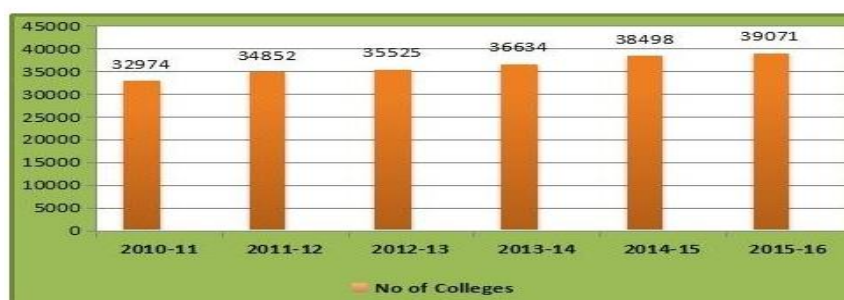
Figure 1 illustrates the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for the general category at 25.8%, with a higher enrollment rate for male students (26.3%) compared to female students (25.4%). This trend is also apparent in category-specific distributions, where the GER for female students is lower among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, at 21.4% and 14.9%, respectively, for the 2017-18 academic year. Taking steps to address these disparities at the school level could contribute to reducing educational inequality in higher education over time.

**Figure No. 2: No of University Established during period 2010-11 to 2015-16**



Source: Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2016-17)

**Figure No. 3: No of Colleges Established during period 2010-11 to 2015-16**



Source: Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2016-17) Report

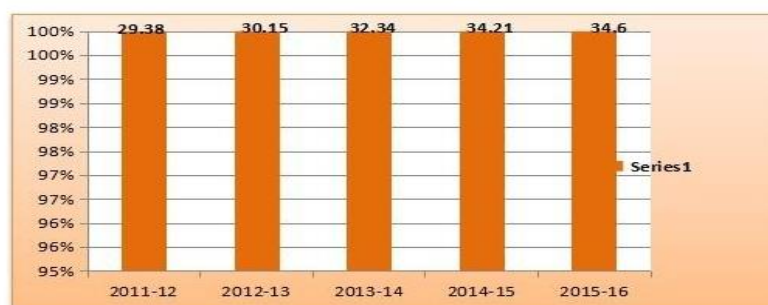
India boasts a rich heritage of academic excellence, with a notable history of prestigious institutions like Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila, renowned for their erudite scholars. Throughout the British colonial period, educational advancements were geared towards serving colonial interests. Following independence, India has struggled to match the higher education enrollment rates of other developed and developing nations. Addressing this issue requires a focus on increasing school-level enrollment to bridge the gap in higher education institutions. Despite government initiatives to enhance equality, quality, and reform in higher education, obstacles remain, particularly in achieving universal access. Public universities in India typically emphasize traditional fields of study, while private institutions cater to market demands with their program offerings. Data presented in Table 1 and Figure 4 depict the total student enrollment across various university and college courses from 2011-12 to 2015-16.

**Table No.1: Number of Students Enrolled in Different Courses of Higher Education from 2011-12 to 2015-16**

Year	Ph.D.	M.Phil	Post Graduate	Under Graduate	PG Diploma	Diploma	Certificate	Integrated	Total
2011-12	81430	34154	3367190	23174950	196159	2071609	184717	74122	29184331
2012-13	95425	30374	3448151	23890309	194072	2207551	191871	94664	30152417
2013-14	107890	31380	38222192	25500325	276502	2285576	187340	125002	32336234
2014-15	117301	33371	3853438	27172346	215372	2507694	170245	141870	34211637
2015-16	126451	42523	3917156	27420450	229559	2549160	144060	155422	34584781
CAGR		4.5	3.1	3.4	3.2	4.2	-4.9	16.5	3.5

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2016-17)

**Figure No.4: Number of Students Enrolled in Various Courses of Higher Education (2011-12 to 2015-16)**



Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (2016-17)

Table 1 and Figure 4 indicate that the enrollment rates across various courses have not experienced the anticipated growth over the past five years. Student enrollment increased from 29,184,331 in 2011-12 to 34,584,781 in 2015-16, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.5% over this period. However, integrated courses saw a significantly higher CAGR of 16.5%, as detailed in Table 1.

Another major challenge facing India's higher education system is inadequate infrastructure. Rural areas, in particular, suffer from a shortage of well-equipped colleges and schools. Many institutions lack basic facilities such as furniture, qualified teachers, libraries, and hostels. Consequently, students often drop-out after primary school due to the insufficiency of secondary and higher education options. The dropout rate is notably high among male students, primarily due to financial issues and disinterest in continuing education. The Economic Survey (2018-19) highlights that the transition rate from secondary to senior-secondary education and onward to higher education remains low.

The presence of qualified and experienced teachers is crucial for maintaining high educational standards. According to government reports, there are around 500,000 vacant teaching positions in the education sector. Many universities and colleges currently rely on a significant number of ad-hoc or part-time faculty, which has a detrimental effect on the quality of higher education. Furthermore, the student-teacher ratio in higher education is relatively high at 24:1, compared to other countries such as Brazil and China (19:1), Sweden (12:1), Britain (16:1), Russia (10:1), and Canada (9:1) (Economic Times, 2019). Outdated curricula are also prevalent in most universities and colleges, failing to keep up with the changing global landscape. Despite increased investments in primary and secondary education, financial support for higher education has not exceeded 4% of GDP, falling short of the 6% allocation promised by previous governments. Table 2 provides an overview of the budgetary expenditures on education from the financial year 2013-14 to 2018-19.

**Table No. 2: Trends in Expenditure on Education Sector (Combined Centre and States) during Financial Year 2013-14 to 2018-19 (Rs. in crore)**

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
	3,48,267	3,53,589	3,91,881	4,34,974	4,92,544	5,66,770
<b>As percentage in GDP</b>	3.1	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0
<b>As percentage of total expenditure</b>	11.6	10.8	10.4	10.2	10.3	10.6

Source: Economy Survey 2018-19 (Vol.2)

Table 2 shows that the total expenditure on education stands at ₹5,66,770 crore, which represents only 3% of the GDP. This is a decrease from over 3% in 2013-14. The proportion of total education expenditure has declined from 11.6% in 2013-14 to 10.6% in 2018-19. As a result, universities and colleges face significant challenges in maintaining their operations due to inadequate government funding.

The private sector has become increasingly important in expanding access to higher education. However, many private universities and colleges prioritize profit over compliance with established regulations, leading to high tuition fees that are unaffordable for many. This issue negatively impacts both the quality of education and the effectiveness of public higher education services in India.

Rural higher educational institutions are still insufficient to meet current needs, creating significant disparities for rural populations. Many colleges and universities fail to meet the minimum standards set by the University Grants Commission Guidelines (2010), and thus, Indian universities struggle to rank among the top 150 globally.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RE-DESIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA

In the era of globalization, Indian higher education is at a pivotal moment. There is an urgent need to map higher educational institutions effectively, particularly in remote and underserved areas. It is crucial to

establish more autonomous and accredited institutions to foster innovation through relevant and skill-oriented programs.

It is imperative to elevate the standard of education by integrating ethics, human values, environmental sustainability, and social justice into the curriculum. Faculty members must hold relevant qualifications and participate in biannual training sessions. Enhancing the student-teacher ratio and organizing regular refresher courses for faculty members at all levels, from Assistant Professor to Professor, are crucial for upholding exemplary performance standards. Moreover, fostering strong partnerships between Academic Staff Colleges and the corporate sector can facilitate the training of new faculty members and assist them in adapting to societal and technological advancements. Encouraging continuous and lifelong learning for faculty members, as well as promoting faculty exchange programs with both local and international institutions, is also highly recommended.

Institutions need to enhance their IT infrastructure to guarantee efficient connectivity and management through computer networking. A formal mechanism for resource sharing among educational institutions needs to be established. Both central and state governments should grant ample autonomy and funding to institutions, along with a strong monitoring system to ensure quality infrastructure and amenities. Existing government institutions should be adequately funded, while private sectors should aid in the advancement of higher and professional education. Higher education institutions should be motivated to create self-financing and self-sustaining programs, while also offering financial assistance to deserving students to promote fairness.

The 'Draft National Education Policy 2019' has been crafted for comprehensive educational progress. Prior to its presentation to Parliament, it is advisable to publish the draft policy online for feedback from stakeholders. This will ensure that the policy is enriched by a variety of inputs from state, regional, and local levels, leading to more efficient implementation. A thorough discussion and deliberation will offer valuable insights for the development and execution of a successful higher education policy.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In order to promote comprehensive development in our nation, it is essential to promote comprehensive education. As emphasized, comprehensive education is crucial in closing the educational gaps between various groups and ensuring equal chances for everyone. Despite significant progress in higher education in India in the last seventy years, accessibility is still unequal. In the era of rapid globalization, it is crucial to revamp higher education policies to meet changing needs. This should prioritize offering fair educational opportunities in all fields and stressing the significance of high-quality research and innovation.

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