

# ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

**Neha<sup>1</sup> , Poonam Rani<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Electronics & IT , Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science , Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

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## ABSTRACT

From adopting new technologies to adopting innovative thinking, India has been a progressive country. It has produced advances not just in science, art, cinema, and technology, but also in education. It is always aiming to strengthen its educational system. Many measures have been taken, and many changes have indeed been implemented, with the objective of ensuring that every person has access to quality education regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic situation, caste, or creed. With all of these initiatives, India has risen in the Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI). In this paper various initiatives taken by India to provide access, equity and quality in higher education and the actual benefit of these initiatives to the students will be reviewed. The paper will also outline the areas of improvement in these initiatives.

**KEYWORDS:** Access, Equity, Quality Education, MOOCs

## INTRODUCTION

Indian Education system has evolved a lot from Ancient Gurukul System where students used to stay with Guru in ashram to gain knowledge to technology driven Modern Education System where Student learn online on different platforms.

It's been believed that India had it's a system of higher education in the times of 1000 B.C. In fifth century, Nalanda was the first residential university established in Bihar.[1]

Modern System was brought by British in India. They develop the University System. The very first institute of higher learning was established by the British East India Company in the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, the next institute was [Asiatic Society](#) of Bengal established in 1784 followed by Banaras Sanskrit College in 1791 and [Fort William College](#) in 1800.[2][3]

In Vedic times the education given by Guru to his pupils was not limited to books only, they were also taught about moral values, ethics and social responsibility. They students were taught all the subjects as well as trained in different skills and art and craft. The relation between Guru and Pupils was so sacred that they were not charged any fees. They would live the Guru in the ashram till their education is complete. They all were treated equally without any gender or socio-economic bias. They had to perform all their chores on own, this was to impart sense of discipline in them. With invasion of British Rule in the country the traditional Vedic education system becomes less in use as Modern education of system was brought to India by Lord Macauley. This system commercializes the education. In this system teaching of moral and ethical values and development of moral conscience in pupils were missing. This education was only in the reach of affluent people, the students belonging to poor families were not able to afford the education. There was a huge discrimination on the basis of financial and social status.

Though this system focused on good infrastructure and resources but equity, access and quality education were missing.[4]

## **MEANING OF ACCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Access to education means making educational resources and infrastructure available for all the students beyond the region, age, financial status. It includes making policies to ensure that students can avail full advantage of opportunities and resources provided to them and also removing barriers in achieving this goal.

Access to education has become critical in last two years due to Covid-19. To ensure access to education many steps were taken various colleges and universities. For example, shift to online mode of education. Access in education is not just limited to providing access to educational programs but it also includes access to non-academic opportunities to students for example, access to public transport systems, individualized learning programs for students with mental, physical or learning disabilities,

counseling, social services, [academic support](#), advanced learning programs and accessibility to technologies including high speed internet and necessary hardware ( laptop, computers etc.) for it.[5]

Access to education can be improved by making more investments in infrastructure and resources especially in rural and remote areas keeping in view the need of physically challenged and female students for example, providing good toilet facilities for the female students and ramp stairs facility at the entrance of college for physically challenged. Providing better electricity and internet for remotely located students and removing financial barriers for economically weaker students.[6]

### **MEANING OF EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

India is a diverse land with different culture, different languages and with different financial status of people. When we talk about Higher education, the students who come to receive education comes from different background. Some can afford the education few may not. Some can understand the dialect of the teacher some may not. There are students who belong to different categories like Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and Other Backward Class on the basis of Socio-economic conditions. Another difference among students is on the basis of their family situation, student may be fatherless or students with separated parents and similar other situations, one difference is of gender also there is inequality on the basis of gender of student (especially in rural areas). Sometimes on the basis of physical, mental or learning disability of the student discrimination is made, for example some students are physically handicapped and some have special mental conditions like dyslexia. Special attention is needed in such cases. So, it become important to consider all these situations and different background of the students and then design schemes for their higher education so equal opportunities are created for all.

**Equity means giving justice or fairness. In higher education it is giving equal opportunities in academics as well as in other activities to all the students acknowledging their differences.[7]**

In today's time equality not just mean to provide equal opportunity but to provide equal resources, equality of ideas from different students and respect as well.

## **MEANING OF QUALITY IN IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Providing Access and Equity in education is not sufficient, ensuring the quality of all the education and resources is equally important.

Quality education doesn't only mean providing students with educational resources but also ensuring access to excellent teachers, providing a good quality learning tools and opportunities that help them to build a successful career and also ensuring a safe and supportive quality learning environment. For example, providing labs that are equipped with modern equipments, computers with latest softwares and high-speed internet connectivity.[8][9]

## **INITIATIVES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT FOR IMPROVING ACCESS, EQUALITY AND QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

- “DigitalIndia Initiative” was taken by government in 2015 to provide internet accessibility and online infrastructure in which many steps like connecting rural areas to high-speed internet networks was included.
- SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) online portal was launched by government to offer affordable high-quality courses to all in the year 2017. The portal runs MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) for school students to graduates and Post graduates.
- SWAYAM PRABHA, 34 direct to home DTHchannels were launched to broadcast educational content 24×7. So that students from all socio-economic category specially living in remote areas where internet connectivity is not up to the mark can have quality education on TV.[10]
- “National Digital Library” was also launched in 2018 to provide all educational content in the form of books, articles, journals, audio, videos and simulation online on one single platform.ə
- E-Shaudh Sindhu”is a portal for higher education E-resources. It was developed in 2015 to provide access to e-journals, e-journal archives and e-books.
- “Talk to Teacher Program” initiated by IIT Bombay which provide a few selected graduate and post graduate courses free of cost to the engineering students.

- “National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR)” is passed by govt. in budget 2021-22 for advancement of the digital infrastructure.
- “PM E-VIDYA Programme” is introduced in May 2020 to increase accessibility of E-learning, including special content for students with visual and hearing disability.[11]

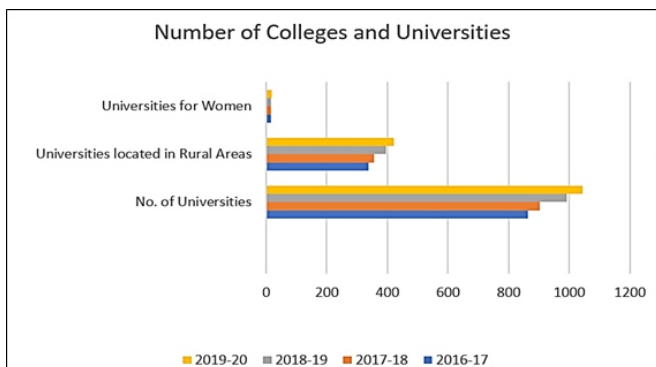
### ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT IN ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY MAINTENANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY GOVERNMENT

**Infrastructure Development Analysis:** According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development's Report on All Indian Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), table 1 and figure 1 shows the development of Universities, Colleges has increased over the years. Number of universities has increased 17%, while there is 19.5% increase in universities in rural areas. Universities for women has increased by 11.7%.

**Table 1: AISHE Report Analysis**

Year/ College	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
No. of Universities	864	903	993	1043
Universities located in Rural Areas	338	357	394	420
Universities for Women	15	15	16	17

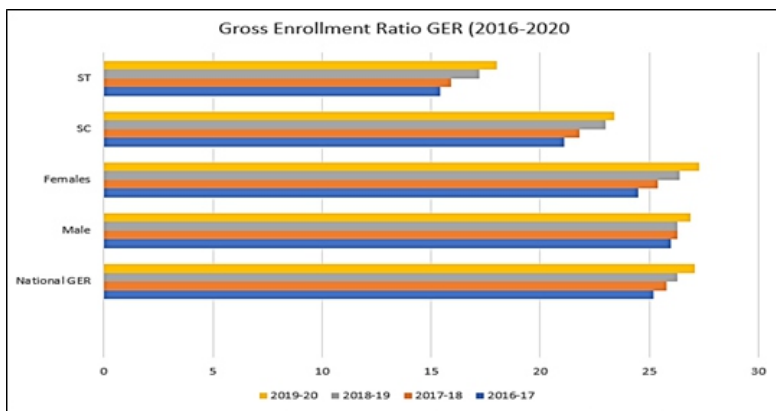
**As per AISHE Reports (2016-2020)**



**1. Gross Enrollment Ratio GER Analysis:** GER over the years shows that overall enrollment in higher education has improved from 25.2 % in 2016 to 27.2% in 2019, enrollment of girls has also improved a bit but it needs more improvement. Enrollment of SC and ST category students has also improved but the overall GER is less comparatively and needs special attention.[12] [13]

**Table 2: Gross Enrollment Ratio GER in Higher Education**  
(Calculated for 18-23 years of age group)

Year/ College	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<b>National GER</b>	25.2	25.8	26.3	27.1
<b>Male</b>	26	26.3	26.3	26.9
<b>Females</b>	24.5	25.4	26.4	27.3
<b>SC</b>	21.1	21.8	23	23.4
<b>ST</b>	15.4	15.9	17.2	18



**As per AISHE Reports (2016-2020)**

**AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT**

- Awareness, encouragement and financial aid for different category of students (beyond gender and financial condition) should be provided to ensure equity and inclusion.

- Final aim of the higher education is to provide job to the students so course should be designed to bridge the gap between industry demand and curriculum. Regular updating of the curriculum should be performed.
- Many policies have been issued by government but regular inspection of institutes should be done to ensure maintenance of quality education in institutes.
- Due to pandemic situations in recent times online study has become integral part of education. More work should be done to ensure better quality E- Resources and accessibility to students by insuring internet connectivity and more hardware needed for it.
- Financial aid in form of many Scholarships is provided to the students by govt. but constant check is needed to ensure how many needy students are getting benefitted by it.
- Special short-term courses should be run by colleges to cater the need of industry to make students job ready.
- Distance learning courses should be added so that students who cannot come to the college or professional who wish to acquire higher degree can get benefitted.
- Online E- Resources and portal should be made easy to access and user friendly so all students can access them easily.
- Students should be made aware and encouraged about all the online portals and important educational websites.
- Facilities like hostel, transport should be provided at lower rates to students belonging to economically weaker sections of society.
- Good quality equipments and latest softwares should be ensured in labs, expert teachers should be hired by institutes to enhance quality education.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper the meaning role of equity and access and quality in education has shown. The steps that can be taken to improve all these factors has been

discussed. The Indian government has constantly worked to bring equality in education, making education and other resources related to it in access of all the students. Many policies have been implemented for bringing quality in education and raising the standards of Indian education. The report of AISHE for last 4 years shows a significant improvement in this area. All these efforts have brought India in third position in Higher education in world after USA and China. However, lot more needs do be done to overcome the areas where education system still lacks. But with the consistent and sincere efforts these gaps can be filled.

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