



EQUITY AND EQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION - INDIA CALLING...

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Abstract

Higher education in India is always a socio-political way and a powerful engine of social mobility. It adds to the benefits to society as more people earning Higher Education credentials. It is proven that college graduates earn more. They are less likely to be unemployed. They are more likely to vote, more likely to volunteer, and more likely to maintain good health. India as a Globalised and developing nation has been little systematically progressing on the educational front since its independence. The government is making progress in reaching out to all the classes of its society. The improvement in the country's economic front has resulted in the upscaling of communication technology. The advent of the internet, have vastly leveraged the promotion of education across all verticals. But at the same time, the idea of Equity and Equality need to be redefined in the present context of the newly established notion of 'Inclusivity'. This paper deliberates on the various ideas and approaches of Higher Education in India on 'Inclusivity' in general and Equity and Equality in particular.

Keywords: Higher education, Equity, Equality, Socio-political barriers

Introduction

According to UNESCO's Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, education must be organized around four fundamental types of learning: the four pillars of knowledge – learning to know, i.e., acquiring the instruments of understanding; learning to do, so as to be able to act creatively in one's

environment; learning to live together, so as to participate and cooperate with other people in all human activities; and learning to be, an essential progression which proceeds from the previous three (Delors, 1996). Formal education has traditionally been focused mainly, if not exclusively, on learning to know and to a lesser degree on learning to do. Learning to live together is an essential

part of the socialization process of formal education. (Agarwal, 2006)

The multi-fold growth in all the sectors in India since the last ten years has been remarkable. The accelerated growth of the educational sector in the last decade is a sparkling testimony to this fact. These are some facts and figures showing an unprecedented improvement in higher education in India.

- The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of the country.
- It has resulted in a staggering enrolment in schools over the last four years.
- The educational movement has been receiving tremendous government support through comprehensive planning in its various five-year

plans.

- For the first time, we can see the active involvement of the private sector in the field of Education. The involvement of the private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in the field. Today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector.
- This has supported the establishment of institutes which have originated over the last decade making India home to the largest number of Higher Education institutions in the world, with student enrolments at the second highest.

But even after such a huge leap and development, there is still no balance of Equity and Equality in Higher education. There are many problem areas where this imbalance is quite visible:

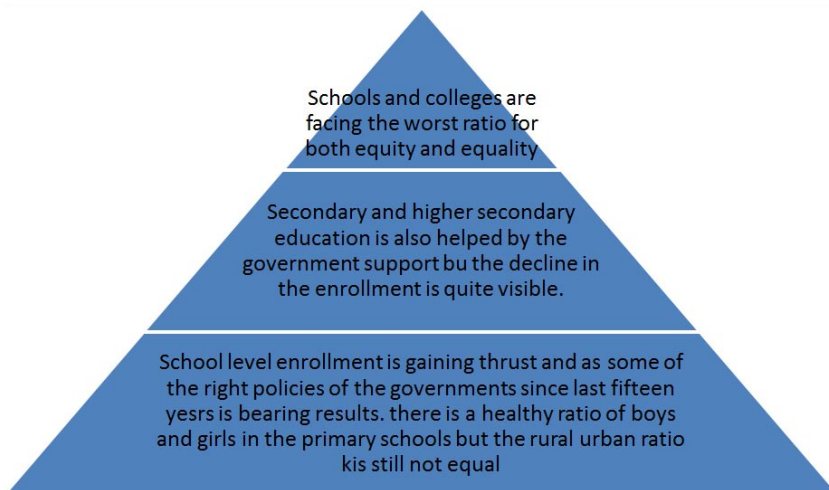


Fig. 1: Hierarchy in the enrolment equity in the growth of education. As per the latest ASER report 2019 (<http://www.asercentre.org/>)

An Overview of Higher Education in India India's higher education system stands third in size in the world after the US and China with nearly 26 million students in over 45,000 institutions in the country. In the last decade, the country has witnessed a particularly high growth rate in student enrolment at a CAGR of 10.8% and institutions at 9%. The University Grants Commission (UGC) which enforces its standards is the main governing body at the tertiary level and advises the government, coordinating between the center and the state. Accreditation for higher learning is monitored by twelve autonomous bodies established by the UGC. Indian higher education has been progressing at a fast pace adding over 20,000 colleges and about 8 million students between the ten year periods 2001 - 2011. As of 2011, the Indian higher education system is spread over 42 central universities, 275 state universities, 130 deemed universities and 90 private universities.

Additionally, 5 institutions were established functioning under the State Act, along with 33 Institutes of National Importance. Nearly 33,000 institutions function as Government and Private Degree Colleges which also include 1800 exclusive women's colleges. Today the number of private higher education institutions stands at 64% and enrolments at 59% of the total number of institutions and enrolments in the country. This is a significant

jump from the statistics of the decade before where private institutions stood at 43% enrolments at 33% and is an obvious index to an improving educational system through private participation. The current emphasis in Indian higher education has been mostly on science and technology. Distance learning and open education also is an essential feature of the Indian higher education system. Indira Gandhi National Open University run by the Indian government is attributed to be the largest university in the world by a number of students with over 3.5 million students from across the globe.

Premium institutions of India, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), National Institute of Technology (NITs) and Jawaharlal Nehru University have attained global acclamation for their high standard of education. About 8000 students are enrolled annually by the IITs and the alumni have made significant contributions to both the growth of the private sector and the public sectors of India. While figures convey a positive picture of the growth of higher education, in terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio – GER, India remains at a dismal 16% against the global average of 26%. Though the government has undertaken several initiatives for the inclusion of all communities in its educational front its success has largely been questionable. Delivery of quality higher education

has become a severe shortcoming in governance with several issues posing an overwhelming challenge.

At the end of the eleventh five-year plan 2007-2012, India has achieved a Gross Enrolment Ratio – GER 17.9% upward from 12.3% from the beginning of the plan period. The twelfth five-year plan of the Indian government for 2012-1217 envisages several revolutionary initiatives to exponentially improve the quality and reach of higher education across the length and breadth of the country. (Courtesy- <http://www.asercentre.org/>)

Equity or Equality?

Sometimes we use these terms ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ in an interchangeable agreement. There is a common misconception that equity and equality mean the same thing and that they can be used interchangeably, especially when talking about education. But the truth is they **do not** — and **cannot**. Yes, the two words are similar, but the difference between them is crucial. If the government is funding

education of all the students in every college, this is a matter of Equality. But the admission in the college on the basis of merit and aptitude is a matter of Equity.

It is an important goal to make sure that all students have equal access to resources. Especially in a country like India which has a very strong history of Socialism, all students should have the resources necessary for high-quality education. But the truth remains that some students need more to get there.

India’s multicultural; multi-ethnic and multilingual socio-culture milieu requires a great deal of equity for learners in various education frameworks. Students from poor economic class or the lower social class need a bigger push to come to a common ground to even start the competition. Here’s where equity comes in. The students who are furthest behind because of the difference in socio-economic status require more resources to catch-up succeed and eventually reach the same level as others. Many government schemes and policy decisions have helped to bridge this gap in the last many years but there is much left to be done still. Equality has become synonymous with “levelling the playing field.” So let’s make equity synonymous with “more for those who need it.”

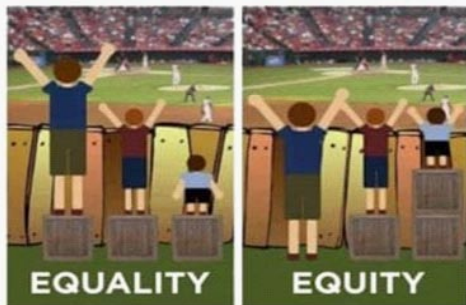


Fig. 2: Equality and Equity. Credit: United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

Equity in Higher Education:

Equity in Higher Education is a

measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education. We cannot discuss education equity without studying equality and equal opportunity. For school level education, there are different challenges to getting equity. OECD, in its policy document, has provided some guidelines for it.

The OECD has recommended ten steps which would reduce school failure and dropout rates, make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalized adults with few basic skills. Design

1. Limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection.
2. Manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity.
3. In upper secondary education, provide attractive alternatives, remove dead ends and prevent dropout.
4. Offer second chances to gain from education. Practices
5. Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition.
6. Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.
7. Respond to diversity and provide for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education. Resourcing
8. Provide strong education for all, giving priority to early childhood provision and basic schooling.
9. Direct resources to the students with

the greatest needs.

10. Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts. (<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/39989494.pdf>)

But when it comes to Higher Education, India faces many challenges as far as the idea of Equity is concerned. First is there is no Fairness and the second is, there is no Inclusion. There are many factors which interfere with the academic profile and success of a student. Economic, social, political and many other factors directly or indirectly affect the decision and process of higher education. The growing importance of education equity is based on the premise that an individual's level of education directly correlates to the future quality of life. Therefore, an academic system that practices educational equity is a strong foundation of a society that is fair and thriving. However, inequity in education is challenging to avoid and can be broken down into inequity due to socioeconomic standing, race, gender or disability. Educational equity is also based in the historical context of the location, people and structure. History shapes the outcome of individuals within the education system

Factors Affecting Equity in Higher Education:

Equity recognizes that some are at a larger disadvantage than others and aims at compensating for these peoples

misfortunes and disabilities to ensure that everyone can attain the same type of healthy lifestyle. Examples of this are:

1. When government and NGOs offer literacy programs
2. When schools/ Colleges offer courses in English or Communication Skills as a second language,
3. When NGOs, Trusts, Philanthropists, and foundations target scholarships to students from poor families
4. They operationalize a belief in the equity of access as fairness and as justice.

Equity recognizes this uneven playing field and aims to take extra measures by giving those who are in need more than others who are not. Equity aims at making sure that everyone's lifestyle is equal even if it may come at the cost of unequal distribution of access and goods. Social justice leaders in education strive to ensure equitable outcomes for their students.

Equity can be accessed from the context of the position of the learner in the state/ society. Some students coming from the lower socio-political background need more hand-holding to come to the level of similarity to compete with the other mainstream students.

Equality

The American Library Association

defines equality as: "access to channels of communication and sources of information that is made available on even terms to all--a level playing field--is derived from the concept of fairness as uniform distribution, where everyone is entitled to the same level of access and can avail themselves if they so choose."

In this definition of equality, no one person has an unfair advantage. Everyone is given equal opportunities and accessibility and is then free to do what they please with it. However, this is not to say that everyone is then inherently equal. Some people may choose to seize these open and equal opportunities while others let them pass by. In India, the deep-rooted social class structure and the newly developed economic disparities are the biggest challenges for any norm of Equality in higher education.

Challenges for Equity and Equality in Higher education in India:

1. Social Equity and Equality:
2. India is facing a multi-faceted challenge for social equilibrium. Multi-culture, multi-castes, multi-languages, multi-regionality, and multi-religion are making India a very dynamic milieu to propose and provide any Equity and equality for education.
3. Gender equity and equality
4. Economic Equity and Equality
5. Low-income students today are just

now enrolling at the same rate high-income students did 40 years ago. Low-income students and students of lower castes are far less likely than other students to enrol in institutions where most students graduate and far more likely to enrol in institutions that graduate few of their students and saddle them with excessive expenditure on education.

6. Even after accounting for all grant aid, low-income students must finance an amount equivalent to 76 percent of their family's annual income to attend a public university for one year — a far higher burden than the 17 percent required for higher income students.
7. The bachelor's degree attainment rate among Black adults is just over half that of White adults, and the rate among Latino adults is even lower — just over one-third that of White adults.
8. Students from high-income families are approximately five times as

likely as students from low-income families to obtain a bachelor's degree.

9. These disparities result in far too many low-income people and people of lower castes being denied the dream of economic opportunity and upward mobility. And communities and states being denied the talented and diverse workforce so desperately needed to compete in this economy.

Left unchallenged, these disparities will be even more devastating as our nation's population grows ever more diverse. People of lower castes already make up the majority of our nation's young people. And by 2030, the population of Dalits and other marginal groups will increase by 20 % more. The implications are clear: For these students' sake and for our nation's collective sake, more students of lower socio-economic strata and students from low-income families must get to college and graduate.[]

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