Inclusive, Equitable, and Quality Higher Education in India: A Comparative Analysis with Developed Nations

Dr. Mahtab Alam
Department of Management Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) Pune, Institute of Management & Research, New Delhi
mahtab.alam@bharatividyapeeth.edu

Ms. Divya Gupta
Department of Management IITM (GGSIPU) New Delhi
divya.gupta@iitmipu.ac.in

Dr. Aparna Marwah
Department of Management Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) Pune, Institute of Management & Research, New Delhi
aparna.marwah@bharatividyapeeth.edu

Dr. Daljeet Singh Bawa
Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) Pune, Institute of Management & Research, New Delhi
daljeet.bawa@bharatividyapeeth.edu

Abstract **–** The Indian education system plays a pivotal role in the journey toward "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India). Quality education is a significant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4) set by the United Nations, and India must consistently improve its education system to become a developed nation. This paper explores the state of higher education in India, focusing on inclusivity, equity, and quality. By comparing these aspects with higher education systems in developed nations, this paper identifies key challenges and opportunities for improvement. The analysis highlights strategies and best practices that India can adopt to enhance its higher education system, ensuring it is both inclusive and equitable while meeting international quality standards.

Keywords – Inclusive, Equitable, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Viksit Bharat

INTRODUCTION

India envisions becoming "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. To achieve this, India must improve all indicators of the Human Development Index (HDI): life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. As of 2022, India ranked 134th out of 193 countries on the HDI, with a score of 0.644 (UNDP, 2024). he objective of Viksit Bharat can be fulfilled when India secures a score of more than 0.8 on the HDI. Education is a critical indicator, as it enhances both life expectancy and GNI. Higher education in India is a vast and complex system that has evolved significantly over the years. The highlights of Indian Higher education are as follows:

Source: AISHE 2021-22

Indian higher education is undergoing significant transformation, with a focus on improving inclusivity, equity, and quality to meet global standards. Developed nations have substantially invested in their education systems, enabling them to achieve their developed status. This research paper selects the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia for comparative analysis. These countries have HDI scores of 0.927, 0.940, 0.935, and 0.946, respectively, for the year 2022 (UNDP, 2024).

The structure of the manuscript begins with a brief introduction that outlines the current state of the Indian higher education system. This is followed by a literature review where various research papers, government reports, and global studies are examined to identify a research gap. The gap highlights that Indian education policies and conditions have not been adequately compared with those of other nations. This gap serves as a foundation for defining the study's objective: to analyze best practices from developed countries and recommend their adoption by Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The research methodology incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of higher education systems. The study focuses on a comparative analysis of India with selected developed nations, particularly in terms of inclusiveness, equity, and quality in higher education. The findings and insights are presented in the recommendations section, and it concludes with a discussion on the future scope for further research.

Review of Literature

Inclusiveness in higher education is essential for providing diverse groups with access to educational opportunities. In India, numerous initiatives have been undertaken to promote inclusivity across various dimensions, including socio-economic status, gender, disability, and minority groups. UNESCO emphasizes that every learner should be valued equally. Despite this, millions around the world are still excluded from education due to factors such as sex, gender identity, ethnicity, social background, language, religion, nationality, economic status, or ability. The goal of inclusive education is to recognize and remove all obstacles to education, addressing everything from curriculum development to teaching approaches and pedagogy. (UNESCO, 2024). It is important to promote social justice and economic efficiency by empowering every individual to achieve their full potential (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Equality in higher education means offering equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background, to access and succeed in higher education. This includes tackling systemic barriers and ensuring that all individuals have the same chances to enroll in, participate in, and benefit from higher education. Universities play a key role in promoting gender equality across society (Rodrigo & Clavero, 2022).

India faces the intricate challenge of attaining social balance. The nation's rich diversity in cultures, castes, languages, regions, and religions creates a highly dynamic setting for proposing and implementing educational equality (Oza, 2019). Today, there is a strong emphasis on quality education, as it ensures that human resources are well-equipped to thrive in the fast-changing digital world (Solas & Sutton, 2018). The NEP 2020 policy envisions undergraduate education as broad-based, multidisciplinary, and holistic, offering flexible curricula and creative subject combinations. It aims to integrate vocational education and provide multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification. Additionally, NEP 2020 emphasizes the creation of a Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones to support disadvantaged regions and groups (MHRD, NEP 2020). The new education policy addresses several critical challenges in India's higher

education system, such as a fragmented educational ecosystem, insufficient emphasis on cognitive skills and learning outcomes, and rigid disciplinary divisions that result in narrow academic pathways. Other issues include limited access to education in disadvantaged areas, restricted autonomy for teachers and institutions, inadequate systems for merit-based advancement, insufficient focus on research, suboptimal governance, an ineffective regulatory framework, and large affiliating universities that diminish undergraduate education standards.

These challenges can be addressed through new initiatives modelled after those adopted by developed nations to enhance their higher education systems. The literature review identifies a research gap, showing that Indian education policies and conditions have not been adequately compared with those of developed nations in the context of achieving "Viksit Bharat." This research paper aims to analyse the best practices from developed countries and recommend their implementation in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a comparative analysis using a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively understand higher education systems. This research considers a comparative analysis of India with selected developed nations: The United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia. The research design is exploratory, utilizing secondary data sources, including government reports from global institutions,

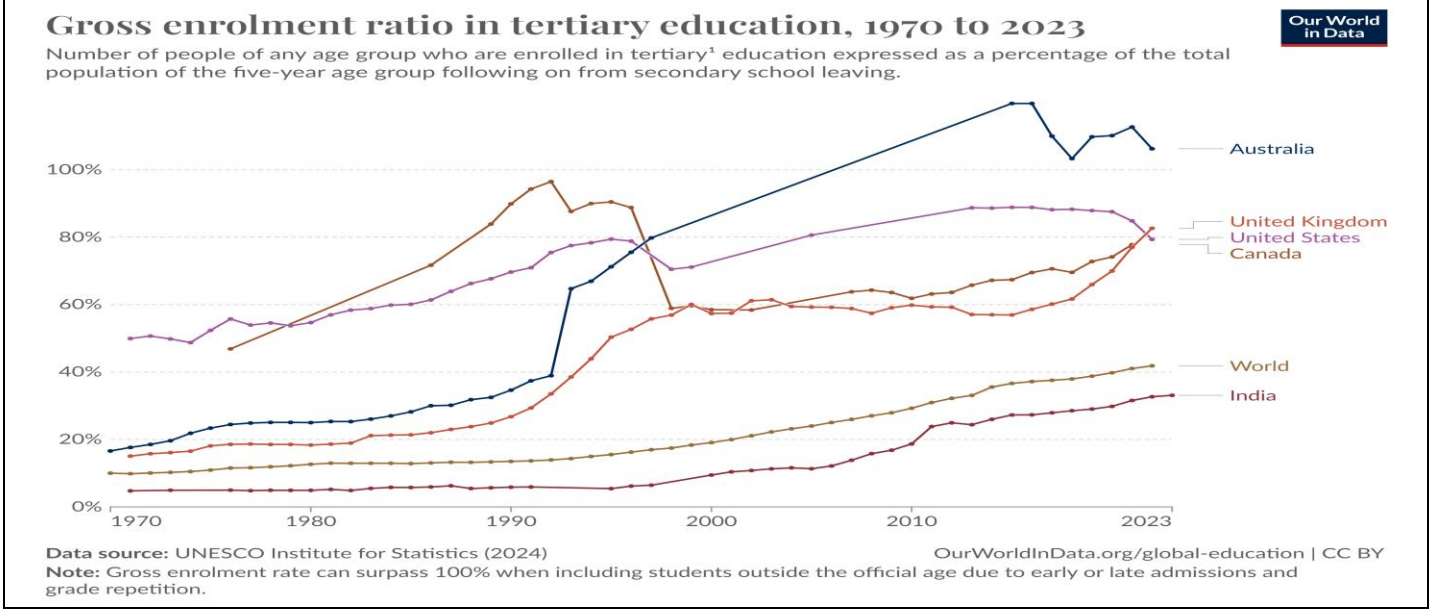
RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The analysis thoroughly examines the critical factors influencing the situation, providing a detailed understanding of their impacts. Based on these findings, recommendations are offered to address the identified issues.

Inclusive Higher Education

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is one of the prime indicators of inclusiveness worldwide. T.G. Sitharam, Chairman of the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), highlighted a major concern in India's education system. Despite nearly 250 million students enrolling in school annually, only 28.3% continue to higher education. The Indian government aims to increase the GER in higher education to 50% by 2035. To achieve this target, Prof. Sitharam pointed out the need to expand the number of universities and colleges in India. Currently, with 1,100 universities and 45,000 colleges, the system accommodates only 43 million postgraduate students. To ensure that all 250 million students enrolled in school can pursue higher education, the educational infrastructure must double in size (The Hindu, 2024). The comparative analysis indicates that India lags behind the global average GER and that of the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia, necessitating efforts to improve infrastructure and ecosystem.

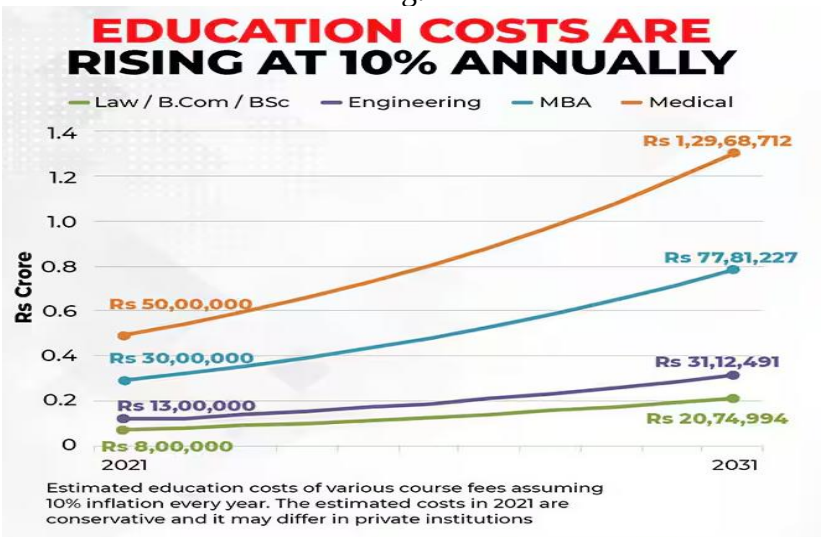
Fig. 1



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024)

Affordability is a crucial aspect of inclusive higher education, directly impacting the ability of students from diverse backgrounds to access and complete higher education programs. Ensuring affordability involves addressing tuition costs, providing financial aid, and creating supportive policies that minimize the financial burden on students and their families. Rising education costs prevent many aspirants from enrolling in higher education. Developed nations ensure affordable education through scholarships, grants, and part-time paid internships.

Fig. 2



Source: Moneycontrol 2021

Equitable Higher Education

Gender Parity Index. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in higher education assesses the comparative educational access between males and females. A GPI of 1 indicates gender parity, meaning equal numbers of males and females participate in higher education. A GPI less than 1 indicates more males than females, while a GPI greater than 1 indicates more females than males. Proximity to gender parity indicates equity in higher education access. Any deviation from gender parity suggests inequality. The GPI for India is 0.641, USA 0.747, UK 0.789, Australia 0.780, and Canada 0.761 (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Quality Higher Education

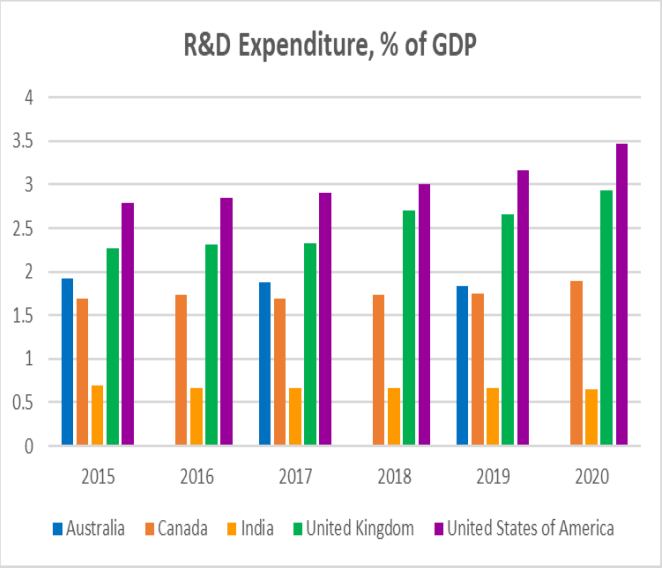
Global Rankings: Global academic rankings are often used as indicators of the quality of higher education institutions. They provide a comparative assessment based on various criteria, helping stakeholders such as students, faculty, policymakers, and funding bodies make informed decisions. India lags in this quality parameter, which is indispensable for quality education.

Table 1: Number of Universities in Global Top 200 Rankings

S.No	Countries	QS Ranking 2024	The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024	Academic Ranking of World Universities 2023
1	India	2	0	0
2	USA	42	56	61
3	UK	27	25	20
4	Canada	9	8	7
5	Australia	15	11	8

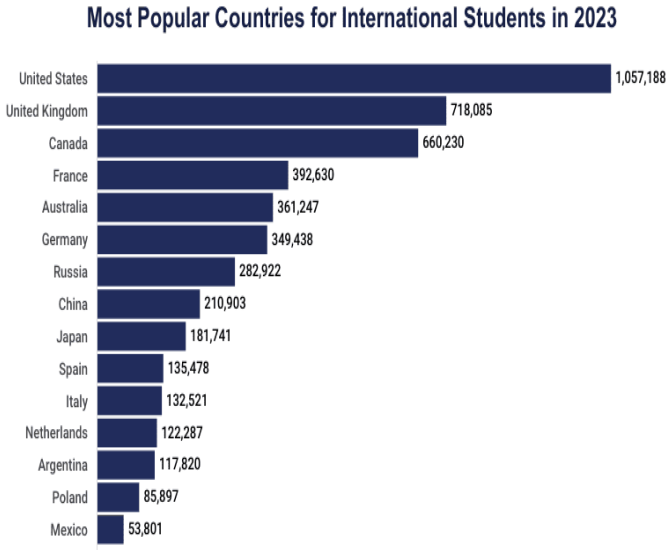
Source: Compiled by Author

Fig. 3



Source: Compiled by Author (World Bank Group 2024)

Fig. 4



Source: Hanson, M. 2024

The comparative graph shows that India's expenditure as a percentage of GDP on research and development is low, and this needs to be increased to enhance the quality of education. All the developed nations

examined in this research are among the top destinations for international education, whereas India lags behind and must improve efforts to become a more popular destination for foreign students. The AISHE 2021-22 states that a total of 46,878 foreign students have been enrolled in India from 170 nations in various courses, but this number still lags behind developed nations. The Indian government spends a small percentage of GDP on research and development, which is significant for quality higher education.

Analyzing the outcome of secondary data in this research paper involves several reports, charts, and tables from renowned global bodies. Each contributes to understanding and interpreting existing information to draw meaningful conclusions. The study's outcome provides insights into the current state of higher education in India and highlights areas for improvement, considering comparisons with established systems in developed countries like the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia. Suggested outcomes for education upgrades include:

- A strong educational ecosystem to increase enrollment rates and access to higher education in India compared to developed countries.
- Identifying disparities in access for marginalized groups, including women, low-income families, and rural populations.
- Infrastructure and resources are needed to accommodate the targeted GER in higher education.
- Minimizing education costs to reduce the financial burden and dropout ratio.
- Increasing financial support through easy and subsidized loans, grants, and scholarships.
- Aligning teaching curriculum and pedagogy with developed nations, emphasizing activity-based learning.
- Implementing equity measures to support underprivileged sections of society.
- Capacity-building measures, including faculty development programs, research support, innovation, and incentivization, to attract talented faculty.
- Executing NEP 2020 up to the grassroots level for social educational change.
- New policy reforms to attract international students, contributing to national income and educational status development.

The sound education system will ultimately support increased HDI and help India realize its dream of "Viksit Bharat" in the future.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Future research could involve longitudinal studies to track the progress and impact of policies aimed at improving inclusivity, equity, and quality in Indian higher education. Evaluating the real-world impact of global policies on students from marginalized communities over extended periods will provide deeper insights. Further comparative studies on policy implementation between India and developed nations can identify successful strategies and potential pitfalls. Future research can investigate the role of technology in promoting inclusive and equitable education, particularly in remote and underdeveloped regions. Researchers can focus on identifying and implementing gender-specific interventions to address disparities in higher education access and outcomes. The research scope can also include optimal resource allocation strategies to ensure equitable distribution of educational resources and develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of educational policies and initiatives. The impact of the NEP 2020 policy on Viksit Bharat can also be explored as a future research direction.

REFERENCES

AISHE. AISHE Final Report (2021-22). Retrieved on July 27, 2024 from https://shorturl.at/Ia38b
Data Page: Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education. Our World in Data (2024). Data adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Retrieved from https://shorturl.at/CAtE7
Hanson, M. (2024). Average Cost of College By Country. Retrieved on July 30, from https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-country
Ministry of Human resource Development (2020). National Education Policy. Retrived from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
Oza, P. (2019). Equity and Equality in Higher Education-India Calling. International Journal of Interreligious and Intercultural Studies, 2(2), 18-24.
Rodrigo Rosa & Sara Clavero (2022) Gender equality in higher education and research, Journal of Gender Studies, 31:1, 1-7.
Salmi, J., & D'Addio, A. (2021). Policies for achieving inclusion in higher education. Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 5(1), 47-72.
Solas, E., & Sutton, F. (2018). Incorporating digital technology in the general education classroom. Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 3(1), 1-15.
Thanawala, H (2021). Education Inflation. Retrieved on July 27, 2024 from https://shorturl.at/njEcq
The Hindu (2024). Increasing GER. Retrieved on July 26, 2024 from https://shorturl.at/X3tXH
UNDP (2024). Human Development Report 2023-24. Retrieved on July 25, 2024 from https://www.undp.org/india/publications/human-development-report-2023-24-0
UNESCO. (2024). Inclusiveness in education. Retrieved on July 25, 2024 from https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education
World Bank Group (2024). Research and Development (% of GDP) – Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States , India. Retrieved on July30, from https://shorturl.at/9ZAdd
World Economic Forum (2024). Global Gender Gap 2024. Retrieved on July 27, 2024 from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf