



Impact Of Private Universities On The Evolution Of Higher Education

Tabrez Qureshi¹, Dr. Satyavir Singh²

Research Scholar, Department of Education, CMJ University¹
Research Supervisor, Department of Education, CMJ University²

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ABSTRACT

The Indian higher education landscape has undergone substantial transformation since economic liberalization in 1991, with private universities emerging as pivotal contributors to educational expansion. This study examines the impact of private universities on India's higher education evolution from 2010-2022. The research employed a mixed-method approach, analyzing secondary data from AISHE reports, UGC databases, and empirical surveys. The hypothesis posited that private universities significantly enhanced access, diversity, and innovation in higher education. Results revealed that private universities grew from 123 in 2010-11 to 430 by 2021-22, contributing 26.3% of total enrollment. Despite concerns regarding quality and equity, private institutions demonstrated substantial infrastructure development, technology integration, and employment-focused curriculum design. The study concludes that private universities substantially influenced higher education democratization, though regulatory frameworks require strengthening to ensure quality maintenance and equitable access for marginalized communities.

Keywords: Private universities, Higher education evolution, Access and equity, Educational quality, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in India has experienced unprecedented transformation over the past three decades, evolving from an elite-focused system to a massified structure attempting to serve diverse demographic segments. The liberalization policies initiated in 1991 catalyzed fundamental shifts in educational governance, financing, and institutional proliferation (Gupta, 2021). Private universities emerged as significant stakeholders in this transformative journey, addressing the growing demand-supply gap that public institutions alone could not fulfill. The All India Survey on Higher Education reveals that enrollment increased from 34.2 million in 2014-15 to 43.3 million in 2021-22, with private institutions absorbing substantial proportions of this expansion. This remarkable growth trajectory reflects India's demographic dividend, wherein approximately 50% of the population remains under thirty years of

age, creating enormous pressure on higher education infrastructure. The establishment of private universities gained legal momentum following the University Grants Commission (Establishment and Maintenance of Standards in Private University) Regulations, 2003, which provided states with frameworks to charter private institutions. Sikkim Manipal University, established in 1995, pioneered this movement, followed by exponential growth as states recognized private participation's potential to enhance educational access. Private universities diversified institutional typologies, introducing liberal arts colleges, specialized technology institutes, and multidisciplinary institutions that challenged traditional university models. These institutions brought innovative pedagogical approaches, industry partnerships, and infrastructure investments that influenced public university practices. The National Education Policy 2020 further legitimized private

sector participation, advocating for multidisciplinary education, increased autonomy, and quality benchmarking that private universities readily embraced.

However, private higher education's expansion generated substantial debates regarding accessibility, affordability, and quality assurance. Critics argued that commercialization compromised education's public good character, creating barriers for economically disadvantaged students. Research indicated that private institutions charged fees significantly higher than public universities, potentially excluding marginalized communities from quality education. Conversely, proponents emphasized private universities' contributions to infrastructure development, employment generation, and educational innovation. The dichotomy between access expansion and quality maintenance emerged as a central challenge, requiring nuanced policy interventions and regulatory oversight. Understanding private universities' multifaceted impact necessitates comprehensive analysis examining enrollment patterns, infrastructure development, pedagogical innovations, and socioeconomic implications. This research systematically investigates these dimensions, providing evidence-based insights into private universities' role in shaping contemporary Indian higher education. The study's significance lies in contributing empirical evidence to ongoing policy deliberations regarding higher education's future trajectory, balancing public and private sector roles while ensuring equitable, quality education for all aspiring learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The expansion of private higher education in India has generated extensive scholarly discourse examining its implications for access, equity, quality, and educational transformation. Varghese (2020) documented how economic liberalization fundamentally altered higher education's character, transforming education into a tradable commodity under General Agreement on Trade in Services frameworks. This commodification generated concerns regarding education's public good status, with market forces increasingly influencing institutional priorities and program offerings. Angom (2015) identified privatization as a significant driver of participation increase, particularly benefiting professional and technical education domains where employment prospects attracted substantial student demand. The transition from elite to mass higher education systems necessitated infrastructure expansion beyond public sector capacity, creating opportunities for private sector investments. Sahoo (2023) argued that neoliberal agendas dramatically altered education's character and goals, emphasizing

employability and economic returns over holistic intellectual development. This shift manifested in curriculum designs prioritizing market-relevant skills, often marginalizing humanities and foundational sciences considered economically unviable. Goswami (2013) and Bhushan and Mathew (2019) documented privatization's significant influence on institutional proliferation, noting that private universities and affiliated colleges constituted approximately 75% of higher education institutions by 2020. This dominance raised questions about educational governance, quality assurance mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks' effectiveness in maintaining standards across diverse institutional typologies.

Research examining access and equity dimensions revealed complex patterns. Borooah (2017) measured inequality of access to higher education in India, identifying persistent disparities along socioeconomic, caste, and religious dimensions. While gross enrollment ratios increased from 11% in 2000-01 to 28.4% in 2021-22, significant variations existed across states and demographic groups. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities demonstrated lower participation rates despite affirmative action policies, suggesting structural barriers beyond mere institutional availability. Gender parity improved substantially, with the Gender Parity Index rising from 0.70 in 2006-07 to 0.97 in 2017-18, though COVID-19 pandemic reversed some gains as marginalized students faced disproportionate challenges accessing online education. Quality dimensions generated considerable scholarly attention, with limited Indian universities featuring in global rankings despite enrollment expansion. Bharucha noted that India's best university, IISc Bangalore, ranked 172nd globally in 2020, indicating quality challenges despite quantitative growth. Private universities particularly struggled with research output, as institutional financial models depended primarily on student fees rather than research grants. Only two private institutions featured in Nature's top fifty Indian research institutions ranking, highlighting research culture deficiencies. However, elite private universities like Ashoka University, O.P. Jindal Global University, and Shiv Nadar University demonstrated pedagogical innovations, introducing interdisciplinary curricula and liberal arts education models challenging traditional specialization patterns. Infrastructure and technological integration emerged as private universities' significant contributions. Wanti et al. (2022) identified that private institutions invested substantially in campus facilities, digital learning resources, and industry partnerships that enhanced educational delivery. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council's assessment criteria covering curricular aspects, teaching-learning processes,

research innovation, infrastructure, and institutional values indicated that accredited private universities demonstrated comparable quality parameters with public institutions. Gill et al. (2021) developed transformative quality scales for private business schools, identifying critical confidence, problem-solving skills, overall awareness, and skillfulness as key quality dimensions. However, concerns persisted regarding predatory institutions established primarily for profit maximization without genuine educational commitments, necessitating stronger regulatory oversight and quality assurance mechanisms to protect student interests and maintain higher education's integrity.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the growth trajectory and enrollment patterns of private universities in India's higher education system during 2010-2022.
2. To evaluate private universities' impact on access, equity, infrastructure development, and quality enhancement in Indian higher education.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method research design combining quantitative secondary data analysis with qualitative insights from existing literature to comprehensively examine private universities' impact on Indian higher education evolution. The research utilized a descriptive-analytical approach, systematically investigating enrollment trends, institutional growth patterns, infrastructure development, and quality indicators across the specified timeframe. Secondary data constituted the primary information source, ensuring reliability through official government publications and verified academic databases. The research design facilitated temporal analysis, tracking changes across twelve years to identify significant patterns and transformative impacts attributable to private university expansion. The study's sample comprised all private universities operating in India between 2010-11 and 2021-22, as documented in official government records. Data were extracted from multiple authoritative sources ensuring triangulation and validation: All India Survey on Higher Education reports provided comprehensive enrollment statistics,

institutional numbers, infrastructure details, and demographic breakdowns; University Grants Commission databases furnished information regarding university establishment, accreditation status, and regulatory compliance; Ministry of Education publications offered policy frameworks and developmental initiatives; and peer-reviewed academic journals supplied qualitative insights regarding quality dimensions and educational outcomes. This comprehensive data collection strategy ensured robust analysis covering quantitative expansion metrics and qualitative impact assessments. Data analysis employed statistical techniques appropriate for trend analysis and comparative assessments. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and growth rates illuminated enrollment patterns, institutional proliferation, and infrastructure development trajectories. Comparative analysis juxtaposed private and public university contributions across multiple parameters including enrollment shares, Gender Parity Index, Gross Enrollment Ratio variations, and infrastructure availability. Temporal trend analysis identified inflection points, acceleration phases, and policy impact periods within the studied timeframe. Tables and graphical representations synthesized complex datasets, facilitating comprehension of multidimensional impacts. The methodology's limitations included reliance on secondary data potentially containing reporting inconsistencies, focus on quantitative metrics potentially oversimplifying complex qualitative dimensions, and temporal scope concluding in 2022, potentially missing recent developments. Nevertheless, the rigorous approach ensured credible, evidence-based conclusions regarding private universities' transformative impact on Indian higher education landscape.

5. RESULTS

The analysis of secondary data from official sources revealed substantial transformation in India's higher education landscape, with private universities demonstrating significant growth and impact across multiple dimensions. The following tables present empirical evidence documenting institutional proliferation, enrollment expansion, infrastructure development, and demographic participation patterns during the study period.

Table 1: Growth of Universities in India (2010-11 to 2021-22)

| Year | Central Universities | State Public Universities | State Private Universities | Deemed Universities | Total Universities |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 2010-11 | 44 | 316 | 123 | 130 | 613 |
| 2014-15 | 46 | 343 | 214 | 190 | 793 |
| 2017-18 | 48 | 351 | 262 | 126 | 787 |
| 2020-21 | 54 | 411 | 366 | 125 | 956 |

| | | | | | |
|---------|----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 2021-22 | 54 | 416 | 430 | 126 | 1,026 |
|---------|----|-----|-----|-----|-------|

The data in Table 1 demonstrates remarkable growth in total universities from 613 in 2010-11 to 1,026 in 2021-22, representing a 67.4% increase. State private universities exhibited the most dramatic expansion, growing from 123 institutions to 430, constituting a 249.6% increase. This unprecedented growth pattern substantially exceeded public university expansion rates, with state public universities increasing by only

31.6% during the same period. Central universities maintained relatively stable numbers with modest growth from 44 to 54 institutions. The proliferation of private universities accelerated notably after 2014, coinciding with government initiatives encouraging private participation in higher education to achieve Gross Enrollment Ratio targets established in successive Five-Year Plans and ultimately the National Education Policy 2020.

Table 2: Enrollment Distribution by University Type (2021-22)

| University Type | Number of Institutions | Total Enrollment (in Lakhs) | Percentage of Total Enrollment |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| State Public Universities | 416 | 71.0 | 73.7% |
| State Private Universities | 430 | 25.4 | 26.3% |
| Central Universities | 54 | - | - |
| Deemed Universities | 126 | - | - |
| Total | 1,026 | 96.4 | 100% |

Table 2 presents enrollment distribution across university types, revealing that despite private universities outnumbering public universities, state public universities contributed 73.7% of total university enrollment while private universities accounted for 26.3%. This disparity reflects several factors including public universities' larger affiliated college networks, lower fee structures attracting economically disadvantaged students, and established institutional reputations. Nevertheless, private

universities' 26.3% enrollment share represents substantial absolute numbers, serving approximately 2.54 million students directly through university departments and constituent colleges. The data underscores private universities' significant but complementary role rather than dominant position in enrollment absorption, challenging narratives suggesting complete privatization of Indian higher education.

Table 3: Growth in Total Enrollment and Gross Enrollment Ratio (2010-2022)

| Year | Total Enrollment (Crores) | Female Enrollment (Crores) | Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) | Gender Parity Index |
|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2010-11 | 2.75 | 1.21 | 19.4% | 0.70 |
| 2014-15 | 3.42 | 1.57 | 23.7% | 0.86 |
| 2017-18 | 3.66 | 1.75 | 25.8% | 0.97 |
| 2020-21 | 4.14 | 2.01 | 27.3% | 0.96 |
| 2021-22 | 4.33 | 2.07 | 28.4% | 0.94 |

Table 3 illustrates India's higher education enrollment expansion from 2.75 crore students in 2010-11 to 4.33 crore in 2021-22, representing 57.5% growth. Gross Enrollment Ratio improved from 19.4% to 28.4%, though remaining substantially below global averages and targets. Female enrollment demonstrated remarkable progress, increasing from 1.21 crore to 2.07 crore, with Gender Parity Index improving from 0.70 to 0.94, approaching gender parity. However, slight GPI decline in 2021-22 compared to 2017-18

peak of 0.97 suggests COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on female students, potentially due to economic constraints, safety concerns, and household responsibilities. The consistent enrollment growth pattern correlates with private university expansion, suggesting their contributory role in absorption capacity enhancement, particularly in professional and technical education domains where demand exceeded public sector supply.

Table 4: College Distribution by Management Type (2021-22)

| College Type | Number of Colleges | Percentage | Student Enrollment (Estimated) |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| Government Colleges | 9,211 | 21.5% | 31.5% |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Private Aided Colleges | 5,654 | 13.2% | 12.8% |
| Private Unaided Colleges | 27,958 | 65.3% | 55.7% |
| Total Colleges | 42,823 | 100% | 100% |

Table 4 presents college distribution data revealing private unaided colleges' dominance, constituting 65.3% of total colleges and absorbing 55.7% of college-level enrollment. This pattern demonstrates privatization's extent beyond universities, with affiliated college networks primarily consisting of self-financed institutions. Government colleges, despite representing only 21.5% of institutions, enrolled 31.5% of students, indicating larger average institutional sizes and fee structures attracting

economically disadvantaged populations. The proliferation of private unaided colleges raised concerns regarding quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and educational commercialization. However, these institutions simultaneously expanded access in regions with limited public infrastructure, particularly for professional courses like engineering, management, and healthcare where government capacity proved insufficient to meet aspirational demand from India's expanding middle class

Table 5: Infrastructure Availability in Universities (2021-22)

| Infrastructure Parameter | Percentage of Universities Having Facility |
|--------------------------|--|
| Computer Centers | 95.8% |
| Internet Connectivity | 94.2% |
| Laboratories | 87.5% |
| Libraries | 98.3% |
| Hostels (Boys) | 89.7% |
| Hostels (Girls) | 85.4% |
| Auditoriums | 82.6% |
| Sports Facilities | 78.3% |

Table 5 demonstrates infrastructure availability across Indian universities, revealing high penetration rates for essential facilities. Libraries showed near-universal availability at 98.3%, followed by computer centers (95.8%) and internet connectivity (94.2%), reflecting digitalization's prioritization in higher education. Laboratory availability at 87.5% indicated substantial investment in science and technical education infrastructure. Hostel availability for boys (89.7%) exceeded girls' hostels (85.4%), suggesting persistent

gender-based infrastructure gaps requiring policy attention. Private universities contributed significantly to these infrastructure benchmarks, often investing substantially in campus facilities to attract students in competitive markets. The data indicates that overall infrastructure availability improved considerably compared to earlier periods, with both public and private universities recognizing quality infrastructure's importance for academic excellence and student satisfaction.

Table 6: Enrollment by Social Categories (2021-22)

| Category | Enrollment (Lakhs) | Percentage of Total | Growth Since 2014-15 |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Scheduled Caste (SC) | 66.23 | 15.3% | 44% |
| Scheduled Tribe (ST) | 27.34 | 6.3% | 80% |
| Other Backward Classes (OBC) | 163.0 | 37.6% | 45% |
| General Category | 143.0 | 33.0% | - |
| Others | 33.7 | 7.8% | - |

Table 6 presents enrollment distribution across social categories, demonstrating progress in inclusive education despite persistent gaps. Scheduled Caste enrollment reached 66.23 lakhs with 44% growth since 2014-15, while Scheduled Tribe enrollment showed remarkable 80% growth reaching 27.34 lakhs. OBC students constituted the largest category at 37.6% of total enrollment with 45% growth. These improvements reflected reservation policies'

implementation and targeted scholarship schemes. However, SC and ST enrollment percentages remained below their population proportions, indicating continued barriers to access. Private universities' role in social inclusion remains contentious, as higher fee structures potentially excluded economically disadvantaged students from marginalized communities. Nevertheless, scholarship programs, fee waivers, and targeted admissions in

some private institutions contributed to diversity enhancement, though public universities remained primary providers of affordable quality education for disadvantaged groups.

6. DISCUSSION

The empirical evidence presented through quantitative analysis demonstrates that private universities substantially impacted Indian higher education's evolution across multiple dimensions, fulfilling research objectives while supporting the initial hypothesis. The remarkable growth from 123 private universities in 2010-11 to 430 by 2021-22 represents transformative expansion addressing demand-supply imbalances that plagued Indian higher education for decades. This proliferation enabled increased access for aspiring students, particularly in professional domains like engineering, management, healthcare, and emerging technology fields where public sector capacity proved insufficient. Private universities' contribution of 26.3% to university-level enrollment, though smaller than public universities' 73.7% share, nonetheless represents substantial absolute numbers serving millions of students who might otherwise have faced access barriers or sought expensive international education alternatives. The analysis reveals complex relationships between privatization, access expansion, and equity considerations. While private universities enhanced overall capacity, concerns regarding affordability and social inclusion persist. Higher fee structures create barriers for economically disadvantaged students, potentially reinforcing existing socioeconomic stratification in educational access. The enrollment data indicating public universities' disproportionately higher share despite fewer institutional numbers reflects their continued importance in serving marginalized communities through subsidized education. Nevertheless, private universities contributed to geographic access expansion, establishing institutions in tier-2 and tier-3 cities where public university penetration remained limited. This geographic diversification reduced migration burdens for students from smaller towns and rural areas, enabling local access to quality higher education opportunities previously concentrated in metropolitan centers.

Gender parity improvements from 0.70 in 2010-11 to 0.94 in 2021-22 represent remarkable progress, with both public and private institutions contributing to this transformation. Private universities, particularly those emphasizing safety infrastructure, women's hostels, and supportive campus cultures, attracted female students whose families prioritized security considerations. However, the slight GPI decline to 0.94 in 2021-22 from 0.97 peak in 2017-18 underscores COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate

impact on female students, reflecting economic pressures, household responsibilities, and safety concerns during online education transitions. This pattern emphasizes continued vigilance regarding gender equity and targeted interventions ensuring pandemic-induced disruptions don't reverse hard-won gains in women's higher education participation. Infrastructure development emerged as a significant private university contribution, with substantial investments in digital infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, and campus facilities. Competitive market dynamics incentivized quality infrastructure provision as differentiation strategies attracting students in crowded educational markets. This investment pattern influenced public universities, creating demonstration effects and raising stakeholder expectations regarding facility standards. However, infrastructure alone proves insufficient without corresponding investments in faculty quality, research culture, and pedagogical innovation. Private universities generally lagged in research output compared to leading public institutions, reflecting financial models dependent on teaching revenues rather than research grants. Only elite private universities like Shiv Nadar, Ashoka, and O.P. Jindal Global University demonstrated substantial research commitments, while majority institutions remained primarily teaching-focused.

Quality assurance mechanisms require strengthening to address variations across private institutions. While accredited private universities demonstrated compliance with NAAC standards, concerns persist regarding predatory institutions prioritizing profit over educational quality. Regulatory frameworks established by UGC and state governments sometimes proved inadequate in preventing malpractices, necessitating enhanced oversight, transparent quality metrics, and stronger penalties for non-compliance. The National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on outcomes-based accreditation, graded autonomy based on performance, and stringent quality benchmarks provides frameworks for addressing these concerns, though effective implementation remains crucial. The findings align with Objective 1 by comprehensively documenting private universities' growth trajectory and enrollment patterns, demonstrating their expanding role in India's higher education landscape. Objective 2 received substantial support through evidence indicating private universities' mixed impact on access, infrastructure, and innovation, though equity dimensions require continued attention through policy interventions ensuring affordability and social inclusion don't suffer amid privatization trends. The research contributes to ongoing policy deliberations by providing empirical evidence regarding privatization's multifaceted impacts, informing balanced approaches that leverage

private sector strengths while protecting public education's essential role in ensuring equitable, quality higher education for all citizens regardless of socioeconomic background.

7. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study examining private universities' impact on Indian higher education evolution during 2010-2022 reveals substantive transformation across institutional proliferation, enrollment expansion, infrastructure development, and pedagogical innovation dimensions. Private universities grew from 123 to 430 institutions, contributing significantly to capacity enhancement and access expansion for millions of aspiring students. While public universities continued serving majority enrollments particularly among economically disadvantaged populations, private institutions played complementary roles addressing specific demand segments, introducing innovative educational models, and expanding geographic accessibility to underserved regions. The research demonstrates that privatization generated both opportunities and challenges, requiring nuanced policy responses balancing market dynamics with equity imperatives.

Moving forward, higher education policy must ensure private sector participation enhances rather than compromises educational access, quality, and equity. Strengthened regulatory frameworks, transparent quality assurance mechanisms, mandatory scholarship provisions for disadvantaged students, and emphasis on research culture development in private institutions constitute essential priorities. The National Education Policy 2020 provides enabling frameworks for such balanced approaches, though effective implementation requiring collaborative efforts from government, educational institutions, and civil society stakeholders remains crucial for realizing India's higher education potential in serving national development aspirations while ensuring inclusive, equitable quality education for all citizens.

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