

Original Article

Challenges before Higher Education System in India: An Review

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Manuscript ID:

JRD -2026-180214

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 18

Issue 2

Pp. 75-78

February - 2026

Submitted: 16 Jan. 2026

Revised: 26 Jan. 2026

Accepted: 11 Feb. 2026

Published: 28 Feb. 2026

Abstract

Today's Era is the Era of knowledge and wealth based on knowledge. The ability to create wealth from that knowledge has gained importance. Only education can increase this ability. An education system that changes with time and stands the test of quality is the real need of the day. Similarly, knowledge centers are also being established. In developed countries, along with higher education, innovation has been given great importance. At the same time, the backbone of the system is strengthened in that way, so that countries create new knowledge and convert that knowledge into valuable goods, and economic development is achieved through trade in goods. And because of this, today in the advanced and developing countries, a different relationship is created between knowledge and wealth. On the contrary, in countries where education and innovation are not given importance and other things are given importance, knowledge does not develop due to the lack of education and innovation. Present paper discuss on Challenges before Higher Education system in India.

Key words: Higher Education, Globalization, Creativity and Challenges.

Introduction

Challenges facing the higher education system include Increasing Cost, Inadequate Information, Lack of Skilled Faculty, Resulting in Low gross enrolment ratio and Significant gaps between socio-economic groups and regions. In today's education system, education is being thought about in different ways. Is the education we receive really useful? This is a question that confronts everyone. Therefore, in general, everyone is expressing dissatisfaction and disappointment towards the education sector. Higher education is a major tool for the progress of society. Higher education is essential for economic development, social stability, technological advancement and human resource development. But in today's dynamic and competitive world, the higher education sector is facing several serious challenges. These challenges are not only visible in India but also across the world.

Definition

- 1. Education:** Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Education is a process of acquiring and developing knowledge, skills, values and ethics, which leads to the intellectual, personal and social development of the individual and society. It emphasizes not only bookish knowledge, but also the development of skills needed to be applied in daily life and the development of critical thinking skills.
- 2. Higher Education:** Educational institutions include not only universities and colleges, but also various professional schools that prepare in fields such as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art.

Higher education is the third level of education after leaving school. It takes place at universities and further education colleges and usually includes undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Higher education gives you the opportunity to study a subject that interests you and can increase your career opportunities and earning potential.

- 3. Globalization:** Globalization is a process that connects and inter depends economies, markets, cultures, and societies around the world. Globalization is a concept or process in which goods, services; knowledge, ideas, etc. are spread globally.



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrv.org/>

DOI:

[10.5281/zenodo.18920825](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18920825)



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How to cite this article:

Khilare, A. V. (2026). Challenges before Higher Education System in India: An Review. *Journal of Research & Development*, 18(2), 75–78. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18920825>

4. **Creativity:** Creativity is “the ability to generate or use original and unusual ideas.” Creativity is the process of inventing a unique product or idea using imagination and skill.
5. **Challenges:** A challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination. Challenges are difficult problems or situations that require special efforts and preparation to solve. Challenges in life can be personal, psychological, social, and cultural in nature, requiring adaptive responses and strategies to deal with them successfully.

Current status of higher education In India

According to the latest data, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs – colleges/universities) in India has increased by about 13.8% from 2014-15 to 2022-23. At the same time, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the 18-23 age group (higher-education eligible age group) has increased to 28.4% (from 23.7% in 2014-15). This means that more people than ever before are accessing higher education including those from previously marginalized or rural/urban areas. It is seen that boys and girls are currently receiving education in equal proportions.

But Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) still far below standard target While the current GER (28.4%) is a good performance, it is far below the target of 50% set for 2035. According to Economics time report, this target will require about 86 million more students in the next decade a huge increase on the current model. This will require expansion at all levels not just additional seats, but also teachers, resources, infrastructure and administration. The expenditure (budget) on higher education by the Centre and the states is very low as a percentage of GDP. That the reason many colleges lack infrastructure, modern laboratories, quality teachers these are lacking; and this affects the quality of education. The below table shows the number of various universities in India.

Number of Universities in India

Sr. No.	Type of Universities Enrolled University	Type of Universities Enrolled University
1	State Universities	513
2	Deemed Universities	147
3	Central Universities	57
4	Private Universities	544

<https://www.ugc.gov.in/universitydetails/university?>

Challenges before Higher Education System:

1. Increasing Cost :

The major challenge facing higher education in India is the “Rising Cost of Higher Education”. This challenge is having a major impact on students, parents, institutions and the socio-economic development of the country. The fees of many courses have doubled to quadruple in the last 10–15 years especially engineering, medical education, management (MBA), professional courses in private universities. While pursuing this education, students have to pay for hostel/food/transportation/books/digital devices. It is not affordable for the average student to spend this much. The main reasons for the increase in expenditure are the ability of institutions to increase fees due to increased autonomy, the cost of building modern infrastructure, the high cost of salaries to meet the shortage of teachers and experts, and the need for more funds for research facilities, laboratories, and use of technology. Also, the grants received from the government are very low, especially for state universities.

Although private universities are growing rapidly but their fees have generally increased many times more than government institutions, so this is a challenge in Higher Education. India's expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP is very low compared to developed countries. As a result, state universities do not have much financial resources, spending on new research, infrastructure, and teacher recruitment is limited, so students turn to private institutions and have to spend more money. Rising costs force students to take out education loans. So debt burdens build up after graduation, economically weaker students face barriers to getting loans, and many students have to base their career choices solely on ‘jobs that can pay off their loans’ Although access has increased in the country, cost remains the biggest barrier for rural families, farmers or those in unorganized employment, as well as for SC/ST/OBC and EWS groups. The NEP 2020 aims to make higher education more accessible to all but rising cost poses a barrier to achieving this goal.

2. Inadequate Information :

The “Inadequate Information” is a major challenge facing higher education in India. This means that students, parents, teachers and decision-makers do not have access to complete, accurate and up-to-date information. This problem affects many levels. Students lack information on courses and career options. Many students opt for only popular or traditional courses (MBA, Engineering, and Medical) while choosing higher education. They are less exposed to new fields Such as Data Science, Artificial Intelligence, Biotech, Renewable Energy Multidisciplinary or Interdisciplinary courses etc. Lack of information about courses leads to wrong career choices, or students do not realize their potential.

Information about government scholarship schemes is often unclear or not communicated to students in a robust manner. Due to these Eligible students cannot avail financial assistance. Higher Education it is not possible for students from economically weaker sections to get education. Many students are unaware of what skills are currently in demand, which subjects are employable. This results in wasting time and money on useless courses and also reduces students' inclination towards entrepreneurship and research fields. Currently, there is a strong discussion on multidisciplinary, flexible, skill-based education in NEP 2020, but it is not clear to teachers, students, and parents how to accurately understand the policy and how to benefit from it. So this appears to be a challenge in pursuing higher education.

3. Lack of Skilled Faculty :

Another challenge facing higher education in India is the “shortage of skilled teachers. This not only affects the quality of education, but also research, students’ careers and the country’s knowledge-based economy. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022, a large proportion of sanctioned posts in universities and colleges in India are vacant. An estimated 30-40% of posts remain unfilled (especially in science, engineering, technology, research disciplines). In some states, this vacancy rate is more than 50%. Although there are a certain number of teachers, not all teachers are Ph.D. or up to research-ready standards. Some colleges/state universities are run without experienced or research-capable teachers. This leads to a decline in the quality of higher education, research is not done to the desired extent, and skills required for industry and employment are not properly taught.

4. Resulting in low gross enrolment ratio :

A key challenge facing higher education in India is the “Low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and its implications”. This challenge directly impacts India’s education policy, social inclusion, and employability. Reasons for low enrolment include financial constraints, rising cost of education, lack of scholarships, lack of access in rural and remote areas, concentration of private and central universities in cities, fear of unemployment due to lack of relevant skills, some families unwilling to invest in higher education and low enthusiasm of students to enroll due to poor quality. This information is based on the current state of higher education in India, which has a gross enrollment ratio that is much lower than that of the US, China and Brazil countries.

5. Significant gaps between socio-economic groups and regions :

One of the most important challenges facing higher education in India is “Significant Disparities across Socio-Economic Groups and Regions”. This challenge affects access, quality, and opportunities in higher education. One of the important social group gaps in higher education is the gender gap, which includes female students. The participation of women in higher education is lower than that of men. In some states, female enrolment is as high as 70–80% of that of men, particularly in rural areas. Another difference is the caste-based difference. The participation of students from SC/ST/OBC/EWS categories is found to be relatively low. The GER of SC/ST students in the age group of 18–23 is 10–15% lower than the average due to financial constraints, barriers to entry, lack of awareness. At the same time, students from middle-class or poor families face difficulties in accessing private colleges or increasing fees, resulting in reduced access to higher education.

In this regard, if we look at the state-wise GER, states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand have low GER (20–25%). Whereas in states like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Delhi, the GER is up to 30–45%. Doing this means that there is no economic development in the state, availability of higher educational institutions and awareness among parents. Some of the other reasons for this include lack of budget and resources, low government investment in higher education in some states, uneven distribution of educational institutions, concentration of central/private universities in cities, entanglement in social norms, traditions and lack of awareness, especially for women in rural areas, which limits access to higher education. Also, insufficient grants i.e. scholarships and financial assistance are not available for admission to the economically poor groups. This is a challenge facing higher education.

6. Lack of infrastructure :

Infrastructure is also a challenge facing higher education. Laboratories, research machinery, computer facilities, libraries, modern technology are inadequate in many colleges. Many colleges in rural areas are still seen to be running without basic facilities. The lack of smart classrooms, high-quality internet, and practical tools required for modern education is felt especially in government colleges. This is a reason or challenge that needs to be addressed.

7. Lack of internationalization :

Compared to developed countries, India has less participation of foreign students and faculty. The number of initiatives like international research collaboration, student exchange programmes, and joint degrees is limited. In the global university rankings, Indian universities lag behind in criteria like research output, international reputation, industry collaboration, etc.



Journal of Research and Development

A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access

ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: <https://jrdrvb.org> Volume-18, Issue-2| February - 2026

Summary

Although higher education in India has made great progress, there are still many obstacles to India becoming a world-class higher education hub due to disparities in quality, lack of research, skills shortages, weak infrastructure, economic and social barriers. These obstacles require modern curricula, industry-university collaboration, digital facilities, teacher training, financial investment and increased transparency in governance.

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