
TRENDS, DISPARITIES, AND PROGRESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A STUDY OF AISHE FINAL REPORT (2021-2022)

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Abstract

The All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022 underscores significant strides in India's higher education landscape, reflecting increased inclusivity and gender parity. Total enrolment rose by 26.5% between 2014-2022, with female enrolment increasing by 32%, surpassing male enrolment in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) since 2017-18. This study delves into these trends, focusing on the enrolment dynamics of socially marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). The paper evaluates progress in gender parity, particularly among female SC and ST students, whose enrolment grew by 51% and 80%, respectively. Furthermore, the paper highlights improvements in doctoral enrolment, infrastructural developments, and faculty participation, emphasizing the increase in female representation in academia.

Using comparative data from 2014-2022, the study critically examines the role of government initiatives, policy frameworks, and institutional investments in bridging educational gaps. Challenges such as regional disparities and discipline-specific enrolment trends are discussed, along with actionable strategies for enhancing equity and accessibility. This research contributes to the discourse on achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4) by fostering inclusive and quality education in India, thereby setting a precedent for other developing nations. However, for the convenience of the reader, the study is divided into parts. Part I is the *introduction*; Part II will focus on *AISHE* mainly; III Part illustrates the comparative analysis of the years; IV Part are the *initiatives of the Government* for scholarship etc; Part V will provide the *recommendation* for Higher Education Institutes for their quality and other enhancements; VI part is the *Conclusion* of the study.

Key Words: India, Gender Parity, Enrolment, AISHE, Ministry of Education, Social Equity.

I Introduction

Higher education is a cornerstone for socio-economic development, fostering knowledge creation, technological advancement, and societal transformation. In India, higher education has undergone significant changes in the last decade, driven by policy interventions and government initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity and

accessibility. The Government of India's Ministry of Education launched the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) as a way to gather and examine statistics on the nation's higher education system. AISHE was established in 2011 to provide thorough insights into a range of topics related to higher education, such as student enrolment, faculty expertise, infrastructure, research

output, and financial investments. It was established to address several critical needs such as comprehensive data for Policy Making which can generate reliable, up-to-date data that can be used to formulate policies for the development and improvement of higher education; Standardized monitoring mechanism to create a centralized and uniform database to track progress across states, institutions, and demographic groups in the higher education ecosystem; focus on marginalized groups to monitor the impact of government initiatives aimed at improving access and equity for marginalized communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC); global competitiveness to align Indian higher education data collection with global standards, enabling comparisons with other countries and contributing to international rankings and reports; to formulate strategic planning to help policymakers identify gaps in infrastructure, faculty, research output, and enrolment, and to allocate resources strategically for optimal results.

II

AISHE has key parameters like student enrolment, faculty details, institutional infrastructure, research and innovation, and financial resources. The data collection is done through a web-based platform, ensuring accuracy and reducing delays. AISHE has a large scope as all recognized higher education institutions in India, including universities, colleges, and standalone institutions are included on a single platform. The Central and state governments, university administrators, researchers, and policymakers are the stakeholders in AISHE. The All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022 provides a comprehensive overview of these developments, highlighting trends in

enrolment, gender parity, and the participation of marginalized communities. This paper explores the progress made in higher education between 2014 and 2022, focusing on the interplay of gender and social equity. It examines the role of government initiatives, such as the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, in driving these changes. The analysis also identifies persistent challenges and proposes strategies to address them, contributing to the broader discourse on achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4): ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of AISHE data with qualitative insights from policy reviews and academic literature. Key parameters analysed include:

- Total enrolment trends (gender and social group-wise)
- Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Gender Parity Index (GPI)
- Enrolment by disciplines and academic levels
- Infrastructural and faculty development

III

Comparative analysis of data from years 2014-15 and 2021-22 highlights progress and disparities, while policy reviews provide context for these changes. The Key findings of the analysis show the growth in Student enrolment for the Year 2014-15 and then 2021-22 year, where the total enrolment in higher education increased from 3.42 crore in 2014-15 to 4.33 crore in 2021-22, marking a 26.5% growth. Female enrolment grew by 32%, reaching 2.07 crore in 2021-22. This indicates a narrowing gender gap and an overall improvement in access to higher education. As far as the GER Trends are concerned it has increased from 23.7 in 2014-15 to 28.4 in 2021-22, with female GER surpassing male GER for five consecutive

years since 2017-18. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) reached 1.01, reflecting equitable participation of women in higher education.

Apart from this the Social Equity in Enrolment clearly illustrates that the SC student enrolment increased by 44%, from 46.07 lakh in 2014-15 to 66.23 lakh in 2021-22. Female SC enrolment rose by 51%, demonstrating significant progress in inclusivity. Additionally, the ST student enrolment grew by 65.2%, with female enrolment experiencing an 80% increase. This highlights improved access for tribal communities, a traditionally underrepresented group in higher education whereas the OBC enrolment increased by 45%, with female enrolment growing by 49.3%. This reflects targeted efforts to uplift OBC communities through reservation policies and financial assistance.

However, enrolment in the Northeastern states increased to 12.02 lakh in 2021-22 from 9.36 lakh in 2014-15. Interestingly, female enrolment in these states exceeded male enrolment, indicating progress in gender equity despite regional challenges.

The Doctoral and Discipline-Specific Enrolment i.e. Ph. D. enrolment increased by 81.2%, from 1.17 lakh in 2014-15 to 2.13 lakh in 2021-22, with female doctoral enrolment doubling during this period. At the undergraduate level, Arts (34.2%), Science (14.8%), and Commerce (13.3%) remained the most popular disciplines, while Social Science dominated at the postgraduate level. Notably, in this period the number of female faculty increased by 22%, reaching 6.94 lakh in 2021-22. However, the proportion of female faculty remains below 50%, highlighting the need for further efforts to promote gender equity in academia.

IV Moreover, Government initiatives, including scholarships, reservations, and infrastructure development, have played a

pivotal role in increasing enrolment among marginalized groups. The NEP 2020's emphasis on flexible learning pathways and skill development will enhance access and equity. Despite progress, challenges like regional disparities, underrepresentation in STEM disciplines, and limited access to quality education in rural areas persist. The digital divide, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further widened inequalities, necessitating targeted interventions.

Every institution in the nation that offers higher education through self-declaration is included in the poll. Numerous criteria, including teachers, student enrolment, programs, exam results, education budget, and infrastructure, are the subject of data collection. The information gathered by AISHE will also be used to calculate indicators of educational development, including institution density, gross enrolment ratio, pupil-teacher ratio, gender parity index, and per-student expenditure. These helps do research for the advancement of the education sector and in making well-informed policy decisions.

V Stakeholders can evaluate the current status of education and pinpoint areas for improvement thanks to this thorough data gathering. Policymakers can create focused plans to improve educational quality and accessibility by examining these factors. Though based on the above analysis, the following recommendations can be put forward:

1. **Strengthening Digital Infrastructure:** Investing in broadband access and digital resources for remote and rural areas can help close the digital divide.
2. **Encouraging STEM Participation:** By offering targeted scholarships and mentorship programs, we hope to increase enrolment in STEM fields, especially among women and underrepresented groups.

3. **Faculty Development:** Using professional development initiatives and affirmative action, more women are represented on faculty.
4. **Regional Focus:** Giving funding for universities in developing areas—especially the Northeast and tribal areas priority.

VI Significant advancements in social equity and gender parity have been made in India's higher education system, according to the AISHE 2021–2022 report. However, persistent efforts to address gaps are necessary for universal access to high-quality education. India can lead other emerging countries in attaining fair educational outcomes by utilizing data-driven policymaking and promoting inclusive growth.

AISHE has developed into a vital instrument for monitoring India's advancement toward attaining educational objectives, including those delineated in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and for guaranteeing equal and inclusive access to high-quality postsecondary education.

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