

## ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TELANGANA: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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*Higher education governance is a key policy issue of the 21st century*

*Kennedy, 2003*

### ABSTRACT

Education is crucial to nation building. It enlightens an individual as well as the country with knowledge and awareness and enables it to establish an effective system in a way to utilize both human and material resources to its maximum. Higher education plays a vital role in the development of a country. Telangana state stands 2nd among all states in higher educational institutions, i.e., 1 institution per 1 lakh people. It has 24 universities, 2041 colleges, 221 HEI's under the Telangana state government of which 123 of them are degree colleges, 53 residential colleges, 6 B.Ed. colleges and 26 medical colleges. Despite such huge number of institutions, the education system in Telangana faces poor quality enhancement and skills development. There are several reasons to it. Firstly, the gross enrolment ratio in Telangana is 36% in 2019-20, one of the lowest figures when compared to all other states, i.e., average 526 students per college. Only 2% of HEIs have more than 3000 student enrolment. Secondly, according to NAAC, only 11% colleges are 'A' grade, while 71% colleges fall in the 'B' grade and the remaining small size colleges either fall in the 'C' grade category or they have not obtained NAAC accreditation. Thirdly, most of the colleges are affiliated to universities, so the burden of regulation and management falls on the affiliated university. As the present scenario manifests the shortage of teaching faculty in the Universities, the management won't be able to work effectively on the regulation and quality enhancement of the education system in the state. Fourthly, due to poor quality of education, the students are unable to find employment for themselves. The national education policy draft of 2020 provides for certain unique initiatives that can help improve the current situation and provide for better imparting of education to the youth of the state. The policy aims at increasing GER to 50% till the year 2035, providing for a cluster-model of the higher educational institutions, providing for research and technology-based education, providing financial support for backward classes and minorities. Besides these, the higher education must also adopt for certain measures to enhance the quality of education. It must ensure the optimum use of human resources and infrastructure. It must encourage colleges to get autonomous status to relieve administrative burden from the affiliated universities. It must create such conditions for learning so that students are exposed to issues at global, national and local levels.

**KEY WORDS:** Higher education, policies, NAAC, Gross enrolment ratio.

## INTRODUCTION

Telangana has made moderate yet notable progress in educational development, overcoming historical neglect during the Nizam regime and the united Andhra Pradesh era. The state has witnessed significant improvements in school education over the past three decades through initiatives like DPEP and SSA, with higher education also seeing steady growth in the last two decades. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) rose from 35.7% in 2017–18 to 40.0% in 2021–22, with female GER surpassing male rates, indicating progress in gender inclusion. PhD enrolments more than doubled during the same period, and the state now hosts a robust network of higher education institutions. However, challenges remain, such as small average college enrolment, a high number of unaccredited colleges, and the burden on affiliating universities. Addressing these issues is crucial, especially in light of NEP 2020. More broadly, education plays an instrumental role in economic and social development, boosting productivity, earnings, and innovation. As the world transitions into a knowledge-based, technology-driven economy marked by the fourth industrial revolution, the importance of higher education and skill development becomes paramount. National and state education policies must therefore focus on quality, learning outcomes, and alignment with future workforce needs to ensure inclusive, sustainable development.

## OBJECTIVES:

1. To evaluate the current status of higher education in Telangana
2. To identify key quality concerns affecting higher education in the state
3. To investigate challenges faced by higher education sectors.
4. To assess the implementation and effectiveness of state and national policies (e.g., NEP 2020)
5. To recommend strategies for enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of higher education in Telangana

## METHODOLOGY:

The present research study is purely based on secondary source of information. For this purpose, the researcher has visited the Central Library, Osmania University Library and referred to the dissertations / thesis's submitted by previous research scholars of the department of Public Administration at Osmania University. The Scholar has also visited BRAOU library and collected information from various books, journals and reports related to the research problem.

## CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TELANGANA

There are 24 universities and 2041 colleges along with 541 standalone institutions listed in the state of Telangana active for the year 2019-20, according to the latest information of Ministry of Education, Government of India source (AISHE). Of the total number of colleges with general and various specializations (general/degree colleges, engineering, medical/nursing etc.), 221 colleges are under the state government management. Of the 221 total colleges managed by the state government departments, 123 are degree colleges offering largely general types of courses. Large number of standalone professional colleges functioning with discipline-specific educational courses and programmes (engineering, management, medical, nursing, law, education etc.) is one of the issues with the higher education institutions in the state, of the total number of colleges almost half of them are standalone professional colleges with discipline specific programmes. To be specific they are not multidisciplinary institutions. Another structural anomaly of higher education system in the state is small-size of HEIs in terms of enrolment. More than two-thirds of the HEIs in the state have enrolment size of less than 500, nearly 87 per cent of institutions have enrolment less than 1000. Less than two per cent of total HEIs in the state have enrolment above 3000, less than five per cent of institutions have enrolment more than 2000. Due to small size of enrolment witnessed in majority of HEIs in the state, the average enrolment per college (525) in the state is one of the lowest in the country

Institutions with less than 500 enrolments, account for one-quarter of the total enrolment of HEIs in the state. Those institutions having enrolment less than 1000, account for 45% of the total enrolment. The

institutions with enrolment more than 2000 account for one-third of total enrolment. The contribution of large-size HEIs (enrolment > 2000) to total enrolment (33.5%) in the state is seven times higher than their percentage in total number of institutions (4.6%). The contribution of small-size HEIs (enrolment < 500) to total enrolment (25.6%) in the state is one-third of their share in total number of institutions (71.0%). In other words, 71% of institutions are holding only 25.6% of enrolment. It means that a large number of HEIs in the state are catering to the educational demands of a few and, a very few HEIs in the state are serving educational demands of larger section.

### **KEY QUALITY CONCERNS AFFECTING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE**

The higher education system in Telangana has experienced significant growth, but it faces various fundamental challenges that hinder its overall quality and effectiveness. These challenges encompass issues related to curriculum design, faculty management, infrastructure, research, access, funding, and governance.

#### **1. Curriculum Relevance and the Employability Gap**

A significant challenge confronting higher education in Telangana is the growing disconnect between traditional classroom learning and the practical skills demanded by a rapidly evolving job market. This gap is particularly pronounced in high-growth sectors such as life sciences, where technological advancements and industry requirements are constantly shifting. The consequences of this misalignment are particularly severe for youth from underserved backgrounds, who are disproportionately affected by the lack of education that combines strong academics with hands-on experience, mentorship, and real-world exposure.

The Telangana Council of Higher Education (TGCHE) has recognized the urgent need for reform and is taking steps to bridge skill gaps. Key initiatives include a skill-based revamp of the undergraduate General English syllabus aligned with NEP 2020, set to launch in 2025–26, with added focus on local culture, free digital materials, and spoken English support. The Chief Minister has also directed universities to introduce market-relevant courses and phase out outdated ones. While these efforts show a proactive approach, focusing mainly on English limits the broader impact. Comprehensive, industry-aligned curriculum reform across all disciplines is essential to truly prepare students for today's workforce.

The table below highlights common curriculum gaps across higher education streams in Telangana, pointing to misalignments with current industry needs.

**Table 1: Illustrative Curriculum Gaps and Industry Misalignment**

Higher Education Stream	Typical Current Curriculum Focus	Industry Demand/Skill Gap
<b>Engineering</b>	Theoretical concepts, traditional programming languages, general design principles	Applied AI/ML, data analytics, cybersecurity, cloud computing, advanced robotics, project management, interdisciplinary problem-solving
<b>Arts &amp; Humanities</b>	Rote learning, historical context, theoretical analysis	Critical thinking, digital humanities tools, content creation, communication skills, cross-cultural competence, research methodologies
<b>Commerce</b>	Traditional accounting, basic economics, general business administration	Financial modeling, data analytics for business, digital marketing, e-commerce strategies, supply chain management, fintech literacy

<b>Sciences</b>	Foundational theories, basic lab techniques, disciplinary silos	Advanced research methodologies, bioinformatics, computational science, interdisciplinary collaboration, data interpretation, scientific communication
<b>Medical &amp; Allied</b>	Disease diagnosis, treatment protocols, clinical practice	Telemedicine, digital health records, patient-centered care, interprofessional collaboration, evidence-based practice, health informatics

This table outlines the curriculum-employability gap across academic domains, identifying key areas for revision and industry collaboration. It underscores the need for practical relevance and calls for strategic curriculum updates and stronger ties with industry.

## 2. Faculty Shortages, Qualifications, and Welfare

One of the most pressing challenges facing higher education in Telangana is the acute shortage of qualified faculty. Nearly 65% of positions in state universities remain vacant, with even prestigious institutions like Central Universities, IITs, and IIMs reporting over 30% vacancies. Government medical colleges are particularly affected, some operating with as few as four permanent faculty members. Recruitment has stalled since June 2023, pushing qualified candidates to seek jobs elsewhere, especially in private hospitals or outside the state. As a result, many departments rely on temporary staff, undermining the quality and continuity of instruction.

The National Medical Commission has issued show-cause notices to 26 of Telangana's 34 medical colleges due to inadequate staffing and infrastructure. Private universities also struggle with faculty retention, often failing to comply with salary norms and transparent hiring practices due to weak regulatory oversight. Meanwhile, faculty experience growing frustration over mismatched recruitment and evaluation standards, with teaching-focused hires later judged on research output despite limited institutional support. Delayed promotions and lack of research incentives further demotivate faculty, contributing to a public-sector brain drain. Together, these issues form a vicious cycle: faculty shortages degrade quality, which deters new talent, further worsening the crisis. Without urgent reforms and stronger regulatory enforcement, the credibility and effectiveness of Telangana's higher education system remain at serious risk.

**Table 2: Faculty Vacancy Rates Across Public and Private HEIs in Telangana**

Institution Type	Estimated Faculty Vacancy Rate	Specific Examples/Notes
Overall State Universities	~65% <sup>9</sup>	General vacancy across state-run universities.
Central Universities	~32.6% <sup>9</sup>	Includes institutions like University of Hyderabad.
IITs and IIMs	~31.5% <sup>9</sup>	Refers to Institutes of National Importance within Telangana.
Government Medical Colleges	At least 50% <sup>10</sup>	Some institutions, like Government Medical College in Kumaram Bheem, have as few as 4 permanent faculty members. <sup>10</sup> 26 out of 34 medical colleges received NMC notices for deficiencies. <sup>11</sup>

The data highlights the severity of the faculty shortage, pinpointing areas where immediate recruitment and policy action are essential to stabilize the academic workforce and enhance educational quality.

### **3 Infrastructure Deficiencies and Digital Learning Readiness**

Inadequate infrastructure remains a major obstacle to improving the quality and competitiveness of higher education in Telangana. Most state-run institutions struggle to meet NIRF standards, limiting their recognition and excluding students from central schemes like the PM Vidyaxmi loan. Only four state institutions currently qualify. Rapid expansion—especially in medical education—has outpaced investment in essential facilities. Additionally, poor digital infrastructure leaves many HEIs unprepared for online and blended learning, worsening the digital divide and employability gap. Experts stress that without strategic investment in physical and digital infrastructure, alongside faculty development, public institutions will continue to lag behind, both in quality and equity.

### **4 Challenges in Research Output and Innovation Ecosystem**

The overall quality of higher education in Telangana is hindered by weak research output and poor university rankings, indicating systemic gaps in innovation and R&D. While institutions like the University of Hyderabad—ranked 5th among central universities—and JNTU Hyderabad, with its dedicated R&D Cell, show strong performance, these are isolated successes. The broader higher education ecosystem continues to struggle with building a robust and supportive research environment.

#### **Key impediments include:**

- Limited financing options directly result in inadequate investment in research, negatively impacting infrastructure development and the overall quality of research conducted.
- Faculty are often hired mainly for teaching roles, yet later evaluated on research output, creating a mismatch that limits research capacity and causes significant stress and dissatisfaction.
- There is a low enrollment of students at the MTech and PhD levels, which presents a significant challenge in fostering advanced research and academic growth.
- Universities often lack an adequate array of modern and advanced research instruments, limiting the scope and quality of research that can be undertaken.
- Restricted access to high-quality academic journals and frequent changes to the UGC Journal list add layers of difficulty for researchers in accessing consistent and reliable academic resources.
- A notable lack of expertise among faculty in writing compelling research proposals hinders their ability to secure approvals for government projects and external funding.
- There is a recognized need for a fundamental shift in the prevailing mindset of faculty towards research engagement.

To promote an innovation ecosystem, the Government of Telangana launched the Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad (RICH) in 2017 as a nodal agency to connect academia, industry, research institutions, and startups. While RICH reflects strong policy intent, the state's research ecosystem remains uneven—dominated by a few high-performing institutions while most others face deep-rooted challenges in funding, faculty support, infrastructure, and



journal access. This "two-speed" system limits broader innovation and undermines Telangana's goal of becoming a global education hub. Bridging the gap between policy and on-ground implementation is crucial to ensuring research excellence is accessible across all institutions, not just a select few.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTORS**

Despite repeated appeals, Telangana has faced continued neglect from the Centre regarding the allocation of national-level educational institutions. Since the state's formation, not a single IIT, IIM, IISER, IIIT, NID, or central medical college has been sanctioned to Telangana, even though over 150 such institutions were established across other states—many of them election-bound—over the past seven years.

Former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhara Rao and TRS MPs raised these issues multiple times, both through formal representations and in Parliament, but without results. The Centre even rejected Telangana's proposal to set up an IIIT in Karimnagar under the PPP model, citing no plans for new institutions.

While the establishment of such institutions in Tier-2 cities elsewhere is welcome for regional development, the complete exclusion of Telangana raises concerns over equitable treatment. For instance, out of 157 medical colleges sanctioned nationally, none were allotted to Telangana. In response, the State government began independently funding 12 medical colleges at ₹500 crore each—four set to open soon, with the rest underway.

Similarly, despite national policies supporting the establishment of Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas based on population and district count, Telangana, with 33 districts, currently has only 30 KVs and 9 NVs. Staffing shortages persist, with over 10% vacancies unfilled.

Further, key promises under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act—such as setting up a tribal university and a mining university in Telangana—remain unfulfilled. These gaps highlight persistent challenges in securing central support for higher education infrastructure in the state.

### **MAJOR CHALLENGES**

1. Nearly 60% of faculty positions in Telangana's universities remain vacant, leaving contract and part-time staff to manage core teaching duties. Delayed recruitment has led to declining academic quality.
2. According to NAAC, only 11% of colleges in Telangana are rated 'A', while 71% are graded 'B', and the rest are either 'C' grade or lack accreditation.
3. Most colleges are affiliated with universities, placing regulatory and administrative burden on them. However, a shortage of Vice-Chancellors hampers effective oversight and quality improvement.
4. Due to poor quality of education, the students are unable to find employment.
5. Poor standards with respect to resources and physical facilities for colleges of education.
6. Unhealthy financial condition of the college of education.
7. Insufficient salaries are given to Private colleges' faculty members. The real staff position on paper and in actual is totally different.
8. In Minority colleges non-minorities are given admissions as a result objective of establishing minority institutes are not fulfilled.
9. Since 2005, no lecturers have been recruited in government Education colleges, IASEs, and DIETs due to a Supreme Court case. This recruitment freeze has paralyzed the system and led to poor monitoring in elementary and high schools, reflecting a lack of decisive action by the authorities in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
10. Training and orientation of Heads of institutions, Heads of School complexes and officers of Education department up to Block level and Mandal level in Planning and Management should be conducted.
11. Uniform education policy of the government treating excellent institutions alike.

### **THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF STATE AND NATIONAL POLICIES (E.G., NEP 2020)**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational landscape, emphasizing holistic, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and equitable access. Telangana, like other states, has begun aligning its higher education framework with NEP's guidelines by revising curricula, promoting research, and encouraging digital learning initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies widely due to challenges such as infrastructure deficits, faculty shortages, and limited funding. While flagship programs show promise, full-scale implementation remains uneven, particularly in public institutions. Strengthening governance, enhancing capacity building, and fostering stronger industry-academia collaboration are critical for translating policy vision into tangible outcomes. Continued monitoring, adaptive reforms, and stakeholder engagement will be essential to maximize the impact of NEP 2020 and other state-level policies on improving education quality and inclusivity.

#### **Following are the highlights of NEP2020**

- The national education policy draft of 2020 provides for certain unique initiatives that can help improve the current situation and provide for better imparting of education to the youth of the state.
- The policy aims at increasing GER to 50% by the year 2035, providing for a cluster-model of the higher educational institutions, providing for research and technology-based education, providing financial support for backward classes and minorities.
- Besides these, the higher education must also adopt for certain measures to enhance the quality of education.
- It must ensure the optimum use of human resources and infrastructure.
- It must encourage colleges to get autonomous status to relieve administrative burden from the affiliated universities.
- It must create such conditions for learning so that students are exposed to issues at global, national and local levels.

### **STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND INCLUSIVENESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TELANGANA**

Here are several recommendations to enhance the quality of teacher education.

1. Teacher education like higher education and technical education must be the responsibility of the central government.
2. Since IITs and polytechnics have separate directorates and distinct scales, recognizing them as professional institutions, the central government should urgently prioritize teacher education to prevent further decline in the quality of education nationwide.
3. Uniformity among teacher education institution must be ensured and maintained in terms of curriculum, duration and timings of the programme.
4. While granting Affiliation to the Private colleges of education the NCTE, NCERT and SCERTs should not compromise in terms of Standards, quality and physical facilities of the institute. They should strictly adhere to guidelines prescribed. There should not be political interference.
5. Curriculum development should be on a continuing basis to keep pace with current trends. The lab level needs should be identified while revamping the curriculum.
6. The staff recruitment process in Private colleges of education has become nominal and corrupted. This should be strictly reviewed and corrupt officers should be punished.
7. There should be a definite structure of salary to private colleges of education faculty members and strict vigilance to be maintained in this aspect and recruitment process. The affiliation of those colleges should be immediately cancelled which ignore the norms and guidelines prescribed.
8. Teacher educators must be well qualified, experienced with language proficiency and research bent of mind.
9. To practice different methods of teaching in actual classroom situations.
10. Providing pre-service education to prospective elementary teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces several key initiatives aimed at improving education in Telangana and across India. It targets increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035, promotes a cluster model for higher education institutions, emphasizes research and technology-based learning, and supports financially disadvantaged groups. The policy also encourages colleges to seek autonomous status to reduce the administrative load on universities, ensuring better quality and more localized learning experiences. Teacher training institutions are urged to have modern educational technology and cultural resources, while recommending a four-year integrated teacher education program.

The cluster approach, inspired by economic theories and successfully used worldwide, groups educational institutions geographically to pool resources and improve management. This method can relieve state universities, like Telangana's Osmania University, which affiliates over 600 colleges and struggles with administrative burdens affecting education quality. Although not ideal for older universities, cluster models are cost-effective and improve efficiency.

NAAC plays a vital role in maintaining quality in higher education through its rigorous assessment and accreditation processes, promoting excellence, technology use, and national development. Its internal and external quality assurance mechanisms help institutions identify improvement areas. State-wise analyses of NAAC reports, including Telangana's, guide policymakers and institutions in planning future quality enhancement strategies. Together, these frameworks and reforms aim to elevate higher education quality, relevance, and equity in Telangana.

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