

Evolving Perspectives On Quality In Higher Education: A Kerala Perspective

Renju Joseph¹, Dr. Soney John²

¹(Research Scholar, Faculty Of Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia)

²(Faculty Of Management, Marian College, Kuttikkanam Autonomous, Kerala, India)

Abstract:

Background: Kerala is widely recognized for its superior standing with respect to social indicators, educational attainment, and literacy rates. But in terms of higher education, the state's progress is less striking. The article addresses issues of equity and access to higher education in Kerala after giving a brief summary of the state of schooling in Kerala as a foundation for higher education. According to the research, the state's four socioeconomically disadvantaged northern districts—which are partially mired in a cycle of poverty and illiteracy—seem to be the main cause of the state's overall downward trend in the rankings of current development indicators. This article ends with a series of suggestions to improve the equity and access pillars of higher education in Kerala, along with some remarks on the importance of vocational rather than purely academic education.

Key Word: Kerala, Higher Education, Suggestions.

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I. Introduction

In order to achieve sustainable economic and social growth, higher education is crucial for emerging nations like India. A country's higher education system boosts higher skills and encourages innovation, both of which are major contributors to economic growth and development. It is a means of enhancing living standards and tackling significant societal and worldwide issues. In general, one of the key factors influencing growth, wealth, and competitiveness is higher education. Gaining a higher degree opens doors for success in the global economy of today. The Indian higher education system is facing new problems as a result of globalization and privatization. Through a variety of programs, modern institutions throughout the globe give their students the chance to interact with and draw professionals for training and professional growth.

Kerala is a well-known model recognized for its accomplishments in social development metrics. Kerala has made great efforts to create an inclusive, widely accessible higher education system. Kerala still needs significant interventions to improve academic quality at the higher education levels and to increase educational inclusivity across the board. Kerala has generated a large number of highly sought-after scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, teachers, and managers worldwide. The globe has benefited greatly from the manpower and tools that higher education, particularly technological education, has contributed to the population. Kerala has already stepped foot in the explosion of knowledge era. The state is acknowledged as having very advanced educational standards, particularly in terms of higher education. However, some serious threats also persist and the most important among them is the unscrupulous growth of private sector in higher education.

Kerala's higher education sector has experienced remarkable growth. Over the past 20 years, enrollment growth has significantly increased. Kerala outperforms other Indian states in terms of the stock of graduates and the gross enrolment ratio. Kerala has far fewer higher education disparities than the rest of India. Women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes have higher gross enrollment ratios in the state. Kerala stands out among other states in terms of both the overall number of higher education institutions and the infrastructure. Consequently, while it is true that Kerala's higher education system is trending in a constructive direction in terms of its quantitative features, there are also some significant and cause for grave concern.

The quality of higher education has drastically declined to unacceptable levels, as is commonly acknowledged. The majority of people find that higher education is getting harder and harder to pay, and there is a developing trend in Kerala toward higher education's rising family costs. Increasing costs will make it more difficult to maintain an inclusive system of higher education. The state's rising graduate unemployment rate is a contributing factor. According to Kerala's Human Development Report 2005 (Government of Kerala, 2006), the state has the highest unemployment rates. Due to their mutual dependence and interdependence, all of these issues contribute to the increasing trend of higher education becoming privatized and commercialized in the state.

Major legislative changes have affected higher education during the 1990s. The most significant of these changes is the exploding number of self-financed colleges, which has allowed private parties with a variety of

interests, including commercial ones, to enter the higher education market. The state's professional and technical education system, as well as the growth of these institutions, have benefited from the privatization of higher education. It is widely believed that the swift expansion of higher education in the state is mostly attributable to the rise in independently funded colleges, sometimes known as fee-based or student-financed schools. The public sector was greatly displaced and its size decreased as a result of this sector's explosive expansion. Privatisation of public higher education is also taking place at a rapid rate in the form of increase in the student fee, increase in student loan programmes, and introduction of self-financing courses in public universities and colleges on a large scale. Thus the high portion of exclusively fee seeking financing colleges and increasing privatisation of public higher education pose serious problems on enhancing equitable access to higher education in the state.

II. Material And Methods

Objectives of the present study

1. To investigate the evolution and current state of Kerala's higher education system
2. To identify the emerging issues of higher education sector in Kerala.

The present study focuses on extensive study of secondary data collected from various national published reports, Kerala State higher education council report, publications from various websites which focus on various aspects and issues related to Kerala higher education System.

III. Result

The higher education system in Kerala is facing new problems as a result of globalisation and privatisation. Kerala's higher education system has been implementing welfare education since the 1990s, offering educational services to the state's citizens. There are fourteen state universities in Kerala. Four universities—Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi, Calicut, and Kannur—offer a variety of courses to their student body.

The following universities offer specialised courses in particular subject areas: Kerala Technological University, Kerala Agricultural University, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University, Kerala University of Health Sciences, Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University, Cochin University of Science and Technology (Economic Review 2018). One of Kerala's primary areas of state intervention, according to the thirteenth five-year plan, is education. The primary state source of input for higher education policy is the KSHEC. It aims to improve excellence, equity, and access in the field of higher education. Kerala's institutional capacity in higher education has come a long way.

Table-1 District wise Arts and Science Colleges (Government & Private Aided) in Kerala 2019-20

S.NO	District	Government	Private	Total
1	Thiruvananthapuram	10	12	22
2	Kollam	2	13	15
3	Pathanamthitta	1	9	10
4	Alappuzha	1	12	13
5	Kottayam	2	22	23
6	Idukki	5	6	8
7	Ernakulam	5	21	26
8	Thrissur	7	17	22
9	Palakad	7	8	15
10	Malappuram	9	13	22
11	Kozhikodu	10	8	18
12	Wayanadu	2	4	6
13	Kannur	4	9	14
14	Kazargodu	4	2	6
Total		63	156	219

Source: All Kerala Higher Education Survey Report 2020

The remarkable expansion of Kerala's arts and science institutions is displayed in Table -1. There is no denying that this is a noteworthy number of universities. Kerala has 219 arts and science colleges, of which 156 are government-run and 63 are private-aided. In addition to these, Kerala is home to a number of independently funded, unaided science and arts colleges that are affiliated with universities. However, Kerala demands top-notch higher education facilities. due to the fact that very few institutions are included in the top list of Indian universities

Table 2 Enrolment of students in arts and science colleges

Course	Total	Percentage to Total
B.A	92753	33%
B.Sc	102134	37%

B,Com	44723	17%
M.A	14,756	5%
M.Com	6056	2%
M.Sc	18083	7%
Total	278505	100

Source: All Kerala Higher Education Survey Report 2020

Table 2 shows that Total number of students enrolled in various arts and science colleges in 2017-2018. Besides this 57104 students enrolled for various engineering courses in Kerala. Out of the total students enrolled for degree courses, 42.62 per cent are enrolled for B.Sc. degree courses, 38.71 per cent enrolled for B A and 18.67 per cent enrolled for B.Com degree courses. During the year 1956-57 the country have 10,079 institutions under the educational department in Kerala state.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Despite significant progress, Kerala's higher education sector faces several challenges, including faculty shortages, infrastructure constraints, and the need for curriculum reform. However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation and collaboration. By leveraging its intellectual capital, embracing emerging technologies, and fostering a culture of excellence, Kerala can further enhance the quality and relevance of its higher education system.

Infrastructure: Inadequate infrastructure, including outdated facilities, limited access to technology, and insufficient resources, can hinder the quality of education delivery.

Faculty Shortages: There may be a shortage of qualified faculty members, particularly in specialized fields, leading to a compromise in the quality of teaching and research.

Curriculum Relevance: Outdated or irrelevant curriculum can fail to meet the demands of the modern job market, leaving graduates ill-prepared for employment opportunities.

Governance and Administration: Issues with governance, including bureaucratic hurdles, political interference, and administrative inefficiencies, can impede the smooth functioning of educational institutions.

Student-Teacher Ratio: High student-teacher ratios can limit individualized attention and support for students, affecting the quality of learning.

Research and Innovation: Limited focus on research and innovation can hinder the development of cutting-edge knowledge and technologies, impacting the overall academic reputation of institutions.

Employability: Graduates may face challenges in securing employment due to a mismatch between the skills they acquire and the needs of the job market.

Access and Equity: Disparities in access to higher education, particularly among marginalized communities, can perpetuate social inequalities and limit opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

Lack of industry interaction: Educational institutions tend to operate in silos, with minimal collaboration with industries. This gap between academia and the job market makes it difficult for graduates to find relevant employment

Addressing these issues would require concerted efforts from policymakers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to invest in infrastructure, recruit and retain qualified faculty, update curricula, improve governance structures, promote research and innovation, enhance employability skills, and ensure equitable access to higher education opportunities.

IV. Conclusion

The pursuit of quality in higher education is an ongoing journey shaped by evolving perspectives, societal needs, and technological advancements. In Kerala, this journey is characterized by a commitment to excellence, inclusivity, and innovation. By embracing emerging trends, addressing challenges, and staying responsive to the changing dynamics of the global knowledge economy, Kerala is poised to consolidate its position as a leader in quality higher education.

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