

## PRIVATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACT

*There is growing privatisation of higher education in India giving rise to a plethora of opportunities and challenges. The present research focuses on studying the perspectives and opinions of one of the stakeholders, namely, teachers about the effects of privatisation of higher education in India in this qualitative study. The study adopted the phenomenological method of research. The study included 32 participants from whom data were collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews. The participants were in the age group of 25 to 56 years for teachers and 19 to 22 for students from government colleges, government-aided colleges and universities and private, self-financed colleges and universities. The study found that the positive effects of privatisation of higher education in India included (a) More Access, (b) Better Facilities for Students and (c) Better Prospects for Teachers. The negative effects of privatisation of higher education in India included (a) Lack of Respect for Teachers, (b) Poor Service Conditions, (c) Poor Salary and Teacher Attrition, (d) Stressful Profession, (e) Business Model and (f) Lack of Inclusive Practices. The participants suggested that there was a need to improve Managerial & Administrative Practices and (b) Clean up Negative Influences. The study also concluded that privatisation of higher education in India has failed to enhance equality of educational opportunity.*

**Key Words :** *Privatisation, Higher Education, Equality of Educational Opportunity*

### Introduction :

The Indian higher education system has been witnessing innumerable changes and challenges over the last three decades. The remarkable increase in enrolment of students has occurred on account of the growing number of higher education institutions (HEI) in the public as well as private sector. The National Policy on Education (1986) stated that “higher

education has to become dynamic as never before and to this effect outlines a series of steps including encouraging autonomy, specialization, vocationalization, emphasis on research and development.” Since 1990, there has been a phenomenal increase in private HEIs in the subjects like engineering, pharmacy, education, medicine, law, management, allied science, biotechnology, biophysics, biotechnology,

computer science, information technology and nanotechnology with the objective of fulfilling the demands of the youth and enhancing opportunities for employment. Government-aided institutions are yet to strive toward the new challenges thrown up by the private sector due to lack of funding from the government. On the other hand, private HEIs including colleges and universities survive on the fees collected from the students. The admission policy, fee structure, student support facilities, research assistance, extension activities, infrastructure, faculty recruitment and salary structure differ vastly in government-aided and self-financed HEIs. Most students from the lower middle class are unable to pay the fee prescribed by private HEIs. In India, central and state governments provide free and compulsory primary education to all students up to the age of 14 years. Girls get free education up to higher secondary level. In addition, the private sector taken up the challenge as an opportunity to provide education at all levels in general and higher education in particular throughout India.

### **Privatisation of Higher Education in India**

Private enterprise in higher education, is not completely new to India. For instance, the Banaras Hindu University and the Aligarh Muslim University came up with the efforts of devoted individuals and financial support

of the community at large. Again, a large number of HEIs in the country especially in the fields of general and professional higher education have been established on private and voluntary initiative of individuals or trusts with (private-aided) or without financial subsidy from the Government (private-unaided or self-financed). However, in the prevalent situation of dwindling public resources and growing need for higher education in India, there is a strong need for private HEIs since the government or the private-aided HEIs cannot cater to the mass need for higher education. Thus, after 1990, there has been a paradigm shift in Indian economic and political philosophy leading to the demand of private universities so as to meet the needs of anticipated open economy and the demand for qualitative human resources and high level of Research & Development.

There is a growing need to analyse the perspectives of various stake-holders about effect of privatisation of higher education in India. One of the important stake-holders of higher education is teachers since they are an important input into the system. The present paper therefore analyses these perspectives as perceived and experienced by teachers especially since it is a developing country with huge number of under-privileged students.

**Objective of the Study:**

The present investigation was conducted with the specific objective of studying the perspectives of college teachers and students on the effect of privatisation on higher education in India.

**Research Questions :**

1. What are the positive effects of privatisation of higher education in India?
2. What are the negative effects of privatisation of higher education in India?
3. What are the suggestions for alleviating the problems related to higher education in India especially concerning privatisation?

**Scope and Delimitations of the Study :**

The scope of the present study included studying the effect of privatisation of higher education in the Indian society. The study is expected to help understand teachers' views and opinion in regards to privatisation of higher education, it does not include students' point of view. The study was qualitative in nature and does not include quantitative approach. The study was conducted on teachers from higher education institutions (HEI) and does not include school teachers. The study was carried out in teachers teaching HIEs

situated in Greater Mumbai, New Mumbai, Sindhudurg and Thane. The study was delimited to teachers teaching in senior colleges only and not junior colleges. It included teachers of state as well as private universities. It included teachers teaching in Government colleges, private-aided colleges and self-financed colleges.

**Research Paradigm :**

A research paradigm is a set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs as to how the world is perceived which then serves as a thinking framework that guides the behaviour of the researcher (Jonker and Pennink, 2010). In the present study, the constructivist or the interpretive paradigm was adopted. Interpretive research is a research paradigm that assumes that social reality is subjective and multiple rather than singular or objective. Further, it is shaped by human experiences and social contexts known as ontology and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants known as epistemology.

**Research Approach :**

The present study adopted the qualitative approach.

**Epistemological Dimension of the Study :**

My epistemological position regarding the study I undertook can be

formulated as follows: a) data are contained within the perspectives of people that are involved with privatisation of higher education for equality of educational opportunity either as a teacher or as a student; and b) because of this I engaged with the participants in collecting the data. i.e. the study has adopted the inter-subjective epistemology.

### **Ontological Dimension of the Study :**

In the present research, an attempt is made to understand that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence. The ontological position in the present study posited that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors i.e. reality is socially constructed.

### **Methodology :**

The present study has adopted the phenomenological method wherein an in-depth analysis of the experiences and perceptions of selected teachers and students in HEIs has been conducted with the objective of understanding the essence and meaning of the teachers' and students' perspectives and perceptions about the effect of privatisation of higher education. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach and is aimed at describing the experiences of human beings regarding a certain phenomenon. A

phenomenological study attempts to go beyond biases and preconceived notions and assumptions about experiences, feelings and responses of human beings to a particular situation. In the present research, there is an attempt to understand the effects of privatisation of higher education for enhancing equality of educational opportunity in India through phenomenological research. It allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings and feelings of those teachers who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of privatisation of higher education for enhancing equality of educational opportunity in India. Therefore, phenomenology, in the present study, is defined as the direct investigation and description of effect of privatisation of higher education as consciously experienced by teachers and students living those experiences. Phenomenological research is conducted in the present study through the use of in-depth interviews of small samples of teachers and students (participants). By studying the perspectives of multiple participants, an attempt is made to make generalizations regarding what it is like to experience the effect of privatisation of higher education from the perspective of those that have lived the experience.

### **Participants of the Study :**

In order to select the research participants for this study, a combination

of purposive sampling technique and quota sampling was used. Purposive sampling design in a qualitative research study is concerned with the depth and richness of experience and points to choosing those students and teachers who can provide this kind of data. There is also a general acceptance that a relatively small number of participants provide a great deal of data, which takes time to analyse and it is not concerned with demonstrating statistical significance or generalization. Quota sampling was used which is a non-probability version of stratified sampling since the researcher wanted to study the perspectives of teachers and students from private-aided as well as self-financed HEIs.

#### **Sample Size :**

The participants selected for the present study consisted of thirty two teachers, six from government run colleges, twelve teachers from private-aided colleges and fourteen teachers from self-financed colleges from Greater Mumbai, New Mumbai, Sindhudurg and Thane. Of these twenty one were female teachers and eleven were male teachers in the age group of twenty five to fifty six years. Besides, the study included twenty eight students in the age group of nineteen to twenty two years from the nine colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai from government run colleges, private-aided colleges and self-

financed colleges from Greater Mumbai, New Mumbai, Sindhudurg and Thane.

#### **Tools :**

The researcher conducted in-depth individual face-to-face, unstructured interviews of selected teachers and students from private as well as public HEIs. Each interview lasted usually for at least one hour and sometimes two and a half hours.

#### **Data Collection :**

The data were collected through individual as well as face-to-face interviews of teachers as well as students.

#### **Steps of Data Analysis :**

Phenomenological research study typically follows the four steps listed below:

1. **Bracketing:** The process of identifying and keeping in check any preconceived beliefs, opinions or notions about the phenomenon of the effect of privatisation of higher education for equality of educational opportunity. In this process, I tried to “bracket out” any presuppositions in an effect to approach the study of the phenomenon from an unbiased perspective. Bracketing is important to phenomenological reduction, since it isolates the phenomenon and separates it from what is already known about

it. For this purpose, I first wrote down my own opinions and perceptions about the effects of privatisation of higher education for equality of educational opportunity in India.

2. **Intuition** : I made every possible attempt become totally immersed in the study and the phenomenon of the effect of privatisation of higher education for equality of educational opportunity and I also remained open to the meaning of the phenomenon as described by teachers as they experienced it. The process of intuition resulted in an understanding of the phenomenon and required me to vary the data collection methods or questions until that level of understanding emerged.
3. **Analysis** : The process of analysing data involved me in becoming fully immersed into the rich, descriptive data and using processes such as coding and categorising to organize the data. The goal was to develop themes that can be used to describe the experience from the perspective of teachers and students who experienced and lived it.
4. **Description**: This is the last phase of the process. I used my

understanding of the data to describe and define the phenomenon and communicate it to others.

The first step in data analysis process was to get familiarized with the data through thoroughly reading the transcriptions. This helped the researcher to have in mind what exactly was in the data. This was followed by generation of initial categories by developing labels or descriptions on a list of ideas developed from the transcription already read by the researcher. Related categories were then organized into different themes.

#### **Data Analysis :**

In order to have a better understanding of data, teacher and students responses were segmented into three major themes as follows:

- Positive Aspects in Higher Education in India
- Negative Aspects in Higher Education in India
- Suggestions for Improvement

Following table 1 shows the views expressed by teachers as well as students about the effect of privatisation in higher education in India.

Table 1 : Categories of the effects of privatisation of higher education in India.

	Statements	Categories
<b>Participants</b>	<b>Theme I : Positive Effects</b>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of colleges and universities have increased.</li> <li>• Possibilities of catering to mass education.</li> </ul>	More Access
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More opportunities for technical education.</li> <li>• Access to higher education has improved.</li> </ul>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some good private universities provide higher education equivalent to western universities providing cheaper alternative to expensive developed countries.</li> <li>• Due to the privatisation of higher education, systematic teaching, discipline, regularity and quality education can be available to students compared to government sector at a higher price.</li> <li>• There is less government control and more autonomy is private colleges and universities.</li> </ul>	Better Facilities for Students
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retired, highly experienced teachers from state or central universities available.</li> <li>• Fast evaluation of students.</li> <li>• Better use of teaching technology in some private colleges.</li> <li>• Better, faster administrative procedures in private universities.</li> </ul>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More teaching jobs are available.</li> </ul>	Better Prospects for Teachers
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of teachers is faster as compared to private-aided and government colleges.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Theme II : Negative Effects</b>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College teachers are no longer respected since now a teacher is a mere service-provider.</li> <li>• In India there is no respect for the teachers now.</li> <li>• The students do not respect teachers and treat them very badly since they pay very high fees.</li> <li>• Students don't respect teachers.</li> </ul>	Lack of Respect for Teachers

	Statements	Categories
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The language used for teachers in their absence is derogatory.</li> <li>• Teacher's potential, academic excellence, capability and dedication are completely ignored.</li> <li>• Students have scant regard for teacher's efforts.</li> <li>• Teachers are not respected in India and they have to face daily battles for survival irrespective of whether they are working in a government institution or self-financed institution.</li> <li>• Importance and respect for guru and teachers have reduced.</li> <li>• No facilities for confirmed staff. Newly appointed teachers, too have to bear the brunt of it.</li> </ul>	
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Times have changed. At present teaching is not a respected profession.</li> <li>• Bright students do not opt for teaching due to lack of attractive salary. The insulting commentary from the public that wants to reduce their already inadequate wages, seems to have forgotten who it is that has the responsibility of educating their children.</li> <li>• This is a fact of today's scenario that not only students but also the government and other members of the society are not respecting teachers.</li> </ul>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No incentives for working hard and making efforts.</li> <li>• Contract systems, no pension in private colleges, clauses in the appointment letters force the teachers to look out for better job opportunity elsewhere resulting in vacancies in which students suffer.</li> <li>• Although, stated by teacher that —teaching is the best job, ever. I love it but I am frustrated with the politics played in the college.</li> <li>• In India, there is no job security.</li> <li>• Appointments are based on criteria such as caste or</li> </ul>	Poor Service Conditions

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Categories</b>
	<p>religion (at lower levels) or political contacts (for higher posts).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The return over investment in teaching is diminishing.</li> <li>• Semester system, completion of curriculum, extra-curricular activities and changes in assessment pattern have been stressful for the teachers and in comparison the salary scale is less.</li> <li>• The disadvantages of teaching are well recognised. These relate mainly to the pay situation and the issues around student behaviour.</li> </ul>	
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a big disparity in the salary paid to teachers in aided and self-financed colleges.</li> <li>• The main deterrent is the poor salary structure as compared to the corporate houses especially when compared with the qualification levels required to be a teacher.</li> </ul>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With privatisation, teachers' service conditions are becoming extremely vulnerable.</li> <li>• Another impact of privatisation which is degrading the standard of teachers is remuneration paid to them.</li> <li>• Privatisation has led to poor remuneration of teachers.</li> <li>• While teachers in government and aided colleges enjoy high salaries and comfortable working conditions, elsewhere they may have financial issues leading to do two jobs in order to survive or they may not have been paid for months.</li> <li>• Demands in private colleges are never ending and to fulfill those, teachers have to walk on the balancing beam and in returns the payment is also less and nor there is respect.</li> <li>• The college management and management mostly prefer cheap and under-qualified teachers especially in</li> </ul>	Poor Salary and Teacher Attrition

	Statements	Categories
	<p>private colleges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The problem we often face in the system is frequent change in the subject teachers; the reason is teachers are leaving; now the question is why? Either they are paid less or they cannot tolerate stress.</li> <li>• Yearly increment differs from person to person in self-financed colleges.</li> <li>• Teachers in private colleges do not get research grants or chances of promotion.</li> <li>• Private institutions do not follow rules and regulations and also the pay scale for the teachers.</li> </ul>	
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing work pressure.</li> <li>• Work pressure is tremendous.</li> <li>• There is mismatch between salary and teachers' workload.</li> <li>• We, all are less paid and overworked in the system.</li> <li>• Language teacher are burdened with extra jobs of corrections, proof reading, editing and compering for programmes etc.</li> <li>• Whether it is college magazine, college websites, brochures etc. as a language teacher my contribution is there. It is a matter of pride for me but at the same time it increases my workload tremendously and sword of dead-line hanging above my head is very stressful and de-motivating.</li> <li>• This job has become too demanding and stressful.</li> <li>• Teaching as a profession has become a demanding job with more stress on parallel duties and responsibilities along with subject specific knowledge and delivery of the same in classroom.</li> <li>• Teachers are expected to be on toes, follow deadlines and be innovative.</li> </ul>	Stressful Profession

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Categories</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If salary is attractive, work pressure is doubled and there are no fixed working hours.</li> <li>• Frequent exams, government data and election duties make teacher's life more miserable because they are already overburdened with activity based teaching and in-house activities conducted for all round development of students.</li> <li>• Managing 120 students in the class can be very demanding.</li> <li>• Talking for 3-4 hours a day in the huge class without a mike can be quite demanding.</li> <li>• Hampering personal life and health.</li> <li>• Long standing hours, pollution from chalk, mental and emotional stress might hamper their health.</li> <li>• Continuous standing, ill-effects of chalk powder are creating health issues for the teachers.</li> </ul>	
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions in private institutions are based on ability to pay fees and not merit.</li> <li>• Private institutions have become a business which provide expensive service to students without social cause.</li> <li>• Education in private colleges has become a commodity.</li> <li>• Business and politics are mixed with private higher education. This affects the life of lower and middle classes adversely.</li> </ul>	Business Model
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such institutions are not inclusive in that there is no provision for reservation for students and teachers.</li> <li>• There is a lack of equality guaranteed in the Constitution of India.</li> </ul>	Lack of Inclusive Practices

	Statements	Categories
<b>Theme III : Suggestions for Improvement</b>		
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some mechanism for ensuring proper working conditions of teachers including salaries need to be developed.</li> <li>• Some steps need to be taken to ensure that qualified teachers are appointed in self-financed institutions.</li> <li>• Some steps need to be taken to ensure that rules are followed in self-financed institutions.</li> <li>• There should be a HR department in colleges and universities.</li> </ul>	Improving Managerial & Administrative Practices
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mechanism needs to be developed to stop profit-making in higher education.</li> <li>• Nexus between politicians, businessmen and higher education needs to be broken.</li> </ul>	Cleaning up Negative Influences

## Results

### Theme I : Positive Effects of Privatisation of Higher Education :

These include (a) More Access, (b) Better Facilities for Students and (c) Better Prospects for Teachers.

The government HEIs and government-aided HEIs are fewer in number and the demand for higher education far exceeds the seats available in such HEIs. Thus, opening of new HEIs has provided greater access to students. The admissions, student evaluation and teacher recruitment in private HEIs is faster as compared to the government HEIs and government-aided HEIs. Besides, the overall unemployment is high and thus, teachers find opening of

private HEIs beneficial to them since it provides them employment opportunities.

### Theme II : Negative Effects of Privatisation of Higher Education :

These include (a) Lack of Respect for Teachers, (b) Poor Service Conditions, (c) Poor Salary and Teacher Attrition, (d) Stressful Profession, (e) Business Model and (f) Lack of Inclusive Practices.

The traditional Indian culture gives immense importance to a teacher and puts him on a pedestal. With growing privatisation, that revered position of a teacher has eroded due to treatment of education as a commodity and that of a teacher as a mere service-provider. It is difficult for teachers to adjust to this

changed scenario. Besides, the salary offered in private HEIs is far below that decided by the University Grants Commission, other service conditions such as leave rules, opportunities for further studies, frequent changes in teachers in private HEIs, focus on making personal profits by the management of HEIs, non-payment of vacation salary of teachers, lack of job and admission opportunities for the marginalised sections of the society are some of the predominant negative effects of privatisation of higher education in India.

### **Theme III : Suggestions for Improvement :**

These include (a) Improving Managerial & Administrative Practices and (b) Cleaning up Negative Influences. Having secured a job, the teachers in private HEIs realise that their working conditions are relatively much poor and thus want better working conditions. Moreover, private HEIs sometimes prefer less qualified teachers so that they would work for less salary. Other rules and service conditions are sometimes violated in private HEIs. There is also a need for HR department so that there is higher professionalism in HEIs. This suggestion was made by teachers from government colleges, government-aided colleges and private colleges. Hence teachers opined that they would suggest improvement in managerial and administrative practices. The teachers interviewed also felt that due to the nexus

between politics and higher education, HEIs have become profit-making entities which needs to be stopped.

**Conclusions of the Study :** There are both, negative and positive effects of privatisation of higher education in India with reference to equality of educational opportunity. Both students and teachers have identified some positive and some negative effects of privatisations of higher education in India. However, keeping in mind the Indian policy of positive discrimination in favor of disadvantaged sections of the society, it may be concluded that privatisation will not lead to equality of educational opportunities to all sections of the society due to lack of reservation and very high fees.

### **Discussions :**

The findings of the present study are corroborated by Akhtar & Akhtar (2016) who stated that teachers of self-financed colleges irrespective of faculty differences agreed towards the statement 'The deserving economically backward students will not be able to achieve it because of high fees', 'It will lead to commercialization', teachers disagreed that privatisation 'It will lead to equality of educational opportunities'. Similar findings have been obtained in a study conducted in Turkey by Erdoğan's (2011) in his postgraduate thesis on analysis of privatization according to worker expectations through a case study which pointed out that workers in general have

negative expectations from privatization. According to the answers that the workers gave, psychological factors such as the concern that wages will fall or becoming unemployed can be listed as factors that negatively affect their expectations. Nijs (2017) from Netherlands in his paper on “Privatisation in Education” stated that by applying a market mechanism to the provision of certain services or products, the provision of these services will be susceptible to market pressures thereby leading to inequality.

#### **Limitations of the Study :**

The data were collected from teachers and students of a few cities only. Besides, the number of teachers and students included in this study is small. Hence there is a need for a large, quantitative survey on this topic. Limitations are those conditions or things beyond the control of the researcher that may place boundaries and restrictions on the conclusions of the study and their application to other situations. The research findings of the present study cannot be generalised as research was based on the interviews and number of participants was limited to a few teachers and students of higher education. However, the findings of the present research can be generalised and validated after conducting a quantitative study in future.

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