

Case Report

“Higher Education Access and Employability in Remote Areas of Jammu and Kashmir”: A Study

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Abstract

One of the most fundamental or the basic aspects of any dynamic and harmonious society is its vibrant “Higher Education System”. The Higher education sector is profoundly influenced by policy of liberalization. The national aspiration to establish “Knowledge Society” in the context of increasing globalization is based on the assumption that higher and technical education essentially empowers people with the requisite competitive skills and knowledge. Shaped by universal ideas on what works most effectively in the pursuit of excellence, the components of structured opportunity markets act as a powerful model that is gradually emerging. What is emerging is more a consumer-driven approach to enrollment management and capital gains of higher education investments. While intensive and rigorous efforts are underway to build well improved and productive higher education system, the policy mission cannot afford the inclusive character to lose sight of. The higher education, being a powerful tool to build knowledge-based society and a critical input underlying sustainable development, investment and policy efforts towards tertiary education and enrolment will go a long way in achieving extraordinary “Human Development Index”. “It is the primary responsibility of the State to provide the eligible with good quality higher education at a reasonable cost. There shall be no withdrawal of the state from the responsibility to provide the eligible citizens with good quality higher education at a very reasonable cost. The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir has long been struggling with developmental challenges exacerbated by its geographical conditions and the conflict for the past 36 years. Characterized by its mountainous terrain, political sensitivities, remote access and cultural diversity; The state of Jammu & Kashmir faces unique strengths and challenges in ensuring inclusive access to higher education and employment opportunities which is critical for economic stability of the region. This study explores the disparities in higher education access and employability in the remote districts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India. Despite efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations, several challenges like socio-cultural, socio-economic, technological-digital access, educational and political challenges still persist. The present research identifies key barriers to development and proposes inclusive strategies to bridge the educational and economic divide, thereby enhancing future prospects for youth in the region. It highlights infrastructural, socio-political, economic, and digital barriers that impede academic progress and employment opportunities. Through qualitative insights and secondary data, the paper proposes strategies to enhance educational equity and employability among youth in these underrepresented areas.

Keywords

Jammu & Kashmir, Educational Survey, Higher Education, Employability, Urban-rural Literacy Rate, RUSA, SWAYAM, Pratham

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1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir has long been struggling with development challenges exacerbated by conflict and geography. Characterized by its mountainous terrain, political sensitivities, remote access, and cultural diversity, the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir faces unique strengths and challenges in ensuring inclusive access to higher education and employment opportunities, which is critical for the economic stability of the region. “The disparities remain evident in enrollment rates, digital access, and post-graduation employment opportunities” [1, 6].

Despite the positive efforts of government and non-governmental organizations, the remote areas still remain under-served, resulting in limited educational attainment and poor employment outcomes for the youth. The interconnection between higher education and employability in these areas requires critical analysis and targeted policy intervention. It is crucial for higher education institutions in India to prioritize the implementation of effective assessment and feedback practices. By doing so, they can address the concerns and challenges highlighted by students regarding the quality, timeliness, and level of detail of feedback. Furthermore, aligning feedback with students' expectations and providing clear explanations of assessment criteria can enhance the usefulness of feedback and promote student engagement in the learning process.

Statement of the problem:

The present study shall attempt to study the Access of the students to Higher education and the Employment Opportunities thereof in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir. The Erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir, now the UT of Jammu & Kashmir comprises of two divisions and each district comprises of 10 districts. It may not be possible to make a study of all the districts hence the study is entitled as:

“Higher Education Access and Employability in Remote Areas of Jammu & Kashmir” A study.

Delimitation of the Study:

The research is delimited to Rural Areas of South Kashmir.

The research is delimited to Access to Higher Education in Rural Areas.

The research is delimited to Employment Opportunities in rural areas.

Objectives of study:

- (1) Examine current status of higher education in remote areas of J&K
- (2) Identify key barriers in Higher education in remote areas of J&K
- (3) Examine the status of Higher education infrastructure in J&K
- (4) Assess the level of employability in J&K
- (5) Study the impact of Government Schemes and policies

2. Review of Related Literature

Sources of Literature

The researcher tapped the various sources of available literature pertaining to the present study. This study draws upon secondary data sources including government reports, NSSO surveys, Indian Educational Surveys, Research Journals, scholarly articles, Newspapers, etc. Data was also collected through a structured questionnaire and interviews. In order to adequately represent the urban and rural households of the society, the purposive random sampling technique was used. A comparative analysis of Access and Employability indicators in rural v/s urban areas of J&K was conducted, which was further supplemented by secondary data.

Related Studies

A study by Bhat and Mir indicates that gross enrollment ratios in higher education institutions in rural J&K remain below the national average [2]. Moreover, the employability among graduates is hindered by inadequate skill training and a lack of exposure to real-world job markets [8].

Anantnag's Jammu and Kashmir Human Welfare Foundation was established in 2003 with the goal of improving livelihoods, especially in the rural parts of District Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir, where opportunities and necessary resources are scarce. By providing sustainable livelihood opportunities and focusing on educational projects to address the difficulties faced by children who have dropped out of school, the organisation is committed to improving lives. In order to empower these youngsters and ensure that they receive the high-quality education required for a better future, the foundation works in partnership with nearby schools and communities. Through comprehensive and sustainable projects, the major goal continues to be improving the lives of people in rural communities in a way that is both good and long-lasting.

A statewide survey of households led by citizens, the Annual Status of Educational Report "Beyond Basics"[5] gives an overview of the current activities of 14-18-year-old Indian youth and their readiness for productive adult lives. Four aspects of these young people's lives are covered by the survey: their educational and professional paths, their aptitude for using fundamental skills in everyday circumstances, their access to and proficiency with digital technology, and their future goals. Pratham Education Foundation (NGO) [16].

J & K has seen a significant increase in educational institutions and the reach of educational services, driven by sustained investment and strategic planning, especially in remote areas. According to a Researchgate publication, “The overall literacy rate is lower than national average, and the state faces challenges in bridging the gap in literacy rates, particularly among tribal populations.”

As per the Census 2011, “the literacy rate is 67.16% which certainly is below the national average of 74.04%. According to this Census, there is a notable disparity in male literacy of 76.75% which is higher than the female literacy of 56.43%.

The Literacy rate of female in rural areas of J&K is also lower than the literacy rate of female in urban areas of J&K” [13].

Rather, Tajamul Islam in his paper entitled “Pattern and Differential Literacy in Jammu and Kashmir” in IJARSE. “The state's literacy rate has increased since independence, according to the report, but there are still significant differences in literacy rates between males and females as well as between urban v/s rural areas. According to the study, the literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 67.16 percent; the rates for males and females are 76.75 and 56.43 percent, respectively. This indicates that the literacy rate for males is 9.59 percentage points higher than the overall literacy rate, while the rate for females is 10.73 percent lower. While Ramban district has the lowest literacy rate (54.27 percent), Jammu district has the highest overall literacy rate (83.45 percent) among the state's districts. The rural literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 63.18 percent; the rural male literacy rate is 73.76 percent & rural literacy rate for females is 51.64 percent. This indicates that the rural literacy rate for males is 10.58 percentage points higher than the overall rural literacy rate, while the rural literacy rate for females is 11.54 percent lower. Additionally, Jammu and Kashmir's urban literacy rate is 77.12%, while the urban literacy rate for males is 83.92% and the urban literacy rate for females is 69.01%. This indicates that, for males, the urban literacy rate is 6.8% higher than the total urban literacy rate, while for females, the rural literacy rate is 8.11 percent lower than the urban literacy rate.” [11].

According to a survey conducted on a study on “Habitat, Economy and Society of Recent Migrants from Kashmir Division”. [5] According to the report, the two main communities that occupy the valley are divided politically and

ethnically as a result of the 1988 rise in militancy in the area. “More than 55,000 families, primarily made up of minority Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus), have migrated to Jammu and other regions of the country as a direct and significant result of it. Of these migrating families, 34,105 have found refuge in the Jammu division, while 21,199 are residing outside of J&K State. The general literacy rate of 89.30 percent among Kashmiri migrants is extremely high. At 81.16 percent, the male literacy rate is somewhat higher than the female literacy rate” [7].

Kashmir Life, KL News Network, 3rd Feb 2025, reported that the state has experienced a consistent effort to enhance female enrolment through multiple initiatives under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). These initiatives emphasise the provision of complimentary uniforms, textbooks, self-defence training, scholarships, and the enhancement of infrastructure, including the establishment of separate restrooms for girls. The establishment of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) provides residential accommodations for females from under-privileged families.

Notwithstanding these advancements, the region struggles to retain girls in secondary and higher secondary school, with retention rates declining to 57.1% and 34.7%, respectively. The government's primary educational enhancements in Jammu & Kashmir focus on retention and gender-sensitive learning [3].

Overview of review

- (1) There are wide variations in literacy rates between males and females and between rural and urban areas.
- (2) Gross enrollment ratios in higher education institutions in rural J&K remain below the national average.
- (3) Number of Females per Hundred Males Enrolled by Stages of Education. [4].

Table 1. Depicting Stage wise Enrolment of Females per Hundred Males.

Level & Year	Primary Level	Upper-primary Level	Secondary Level	Senior Secondary	Higher Education
1950-51	39	19	NA	15	13
1960 -61	48	31	NA	26	21
1970-71	60	41	NA	33	28
1980-81	63	49	NA	45	36
1990-91	71	58	NA	49	46
2000-01	78	69	63	62	58
2005-06	87	81	73	72	62
2006-07	88	82	73	74	62
2007-08	91	84	77	76	63
2008-09	92	86	79	77	65
2009-10	92	88	82	80	67
2010-11	92	89	82	79	78

Level & Year	Primary Level	Upper-primary Level	Secondary Level	Senior Secondary	Higher Education
2011-12	93	93	84	81	80
2012-13	94	95	89	87	81
2013-14	93	95	89	89	85
2014-15	93	95	91	90	85"

Enrolment in Higher Education through Regular & Distance Mode - 2014-15

Table 2. Showing Enrolment in Higher Education during the Year 2014-15 through Regular & Distance Mode.

Mode	Male	Female	Total	%Female
Regular	16431441	13968473	30399914	45.95%
Distance	2057178	1754545	3811723	46.03%
Total	18488619	15723018	34211637	45.96%"

(MoSPI) [13]

- (1) The literacy rate is 67.16% which certainly is below the national average of 74.04%. According to this Census, there is a notable disparity in male literacy of 76.75% which is significantly higher than the female literacy of 56.43% [9].
- (2) The general literacy rate of 89.30 percent among Kashmiri migrants is extremely high. At 81.16 percent, the male literacy rate is somewhat higher than the female literacy rate [7].
- (3) The migration of about 55,000 households to Jammu and other regions of the nation, primarily consisting of Kashmiri Pandits (Hindu). Of these migrating families, 34,105 have found refuge in the Jammu division, while 21,199 are residing outside of J&K State [7].
- (4) Thus, the addition of these 34,105 Kashmiri Pandit families, with a literacy rate of 89.30% has led to a sudden increase in the literacy rate of Jammu District.
- (5) The region's retention rates for girls in secondary and higher secondary education have declined to 57.1% and 34.7%, respectively, despite advancements in the educational sector [12].

3. Methodology

This study draws upon secondary data sources including government reports, NSSO surveys, and scholarly articles.. In order to adequately represent the urban and rural households of the society, the purposive random sampling technique was used. Interviews and a standardized questionnaire

were additionally employed to gather data. The secondary data was used to further support a comparative study of employability and access metrics in J&K's rural and urban districts.

4. Key Findings

J & K has a significantly lower number of universities compared to larger states like Rajasthan and UP.

The female GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in higher education is 27.2%, slightly lower than the 27.9% national average. J & K have higher access to higher education than the nation [8].

Under RUSA, several colleges have been upgraded and granted autonomy, but we can't see any considerable impact in remote regions.

Educational infrastructure is lacking in districts like Kishtwar, Gurez, and Poonch. Poor digital access, gender disparity, and a significant employability gap are key concerns.

While J & K spend the highest percentage of their GDP on education and demonstrate a commitment to education with significant budgetary allocation and increasing Universities, they face challenges in addressing the quality of Education and improving literacy rates, particularly among rural females. It requires a targeted intervention and continued focus on these areas [10].

"It is crucial for higher education institutions in India to prioritize the implementation of effective assessment and feedback practices. By doing so, the genuine concerns can be addressed and challenges highlighted by students regarding the quality, timeliness, and level of detail of feedback. Furthermore, aligning feedback with students' expectations and providing clear explanations of assessment criteria can enhance the usefulness of feedback and promote student engagement in the learning process" [14, 15].

5. Recommendations

Recommendations include infrastructure development, digital inclusion, curriculum modernization, and improved career services to bridge the education-employability gap. In

this context, the involvement of local governments, non-governmental organisations, and voluntary groups is crucial. All these bodies will have to collaborate together, and public public-private partnership needs to be encouraged to build a sustainable educational infrastructure.

As far as digital inclusion is concerned, broadband connectivity has to be strengthened, and digital literacy training needs to be provided to the students. This can bridge the education-employability divide. In order to enhance their employability, vocational courses and IT training may be provided to the students. These programs can be embedded in the undergraduate programs for better employability.

In order to reduce the disparity between males and females as well as between urban and rural areas, women's and village empowerment are also critically needed. The government shouldn't do it alone; local governments, non-governmental organisations, and voluntary groups should also be involved.

6. Conclusion

Tackling educational and employability disparities in remote Jammu and Kashmir is critical for sustainable peace and development. Despite efforts from schemes like RUSA and online platforms like SWAYAM, their impact in remote areas is minimal due to low connectivity issues and digital illiteracy. NGOs have also initiated career guidance workshops and mobile labs, but are limited in reach.

A collaborative approach involving all stakeholders is required to unlock the region's potential. Although the state's literacy rate has increased since independence, there are still significant differences in literacy rates between males and females as well as between urban and rural areas.

Abbreviations

RUSA	Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SWAYAM	Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds
NGO	Non- governmental Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KGBVs	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
ASER	Annual Status of Educational Report
GER	Gross Enrollment Ratio
PRATHAM	Pratham Is a Word that Means "First" or the "Foremost". It Is the Name of a Non-profit Organization in India which Primarily Focuses on Education for Children and Youth
UT	Union Territory
UGC	University Grants Commission

Author Contributions

Bilal Rafiq Shah is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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