

Issues and Challenges of 21st century and Effectiveness of Fee Waiver Scheme in Higher Education of Assam

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Abstract

In Assam, most of the youth is bound to be neglected towards access to higher education for which the enrollment ratio of the state of Assam is very low as compared to the other states of North - East India. Besides that, it is also clearly stated at the enrolment ratio of higher education that female literacy rate is lower than the male literacy rate. It is because most of the conservative believe that endorsement in woman to ensure education would result in distortion of their cultural practices vested in their female child. Fee waiver scheme is the only way through which it could eradicate such issues and challenges of higher education. The present study has been focused to address the various issues and challenges of 21st century and it is further intended to know to which extent it has been salutary to our society. From the study, it is thus obvious to note that most of the economic pressure of the parents would be minimized and constantly it could help in elevating socio-economic growth of the country.

Keywords: *Fee Waiver Scheme, Higher Education, 21st Century, Issues and challenges, effectiveness of Fee Waiver scheme.*

I. Introduction

Education serves a key role in building an individual's career. Through the level of education, people can gain self-esteem, self-compassion and dignity in the society. It does not help only for self development but rather it also enhances both in socially and economic growth of the country in every perspective manner. Higher Education entails acquiring of higher position in terms of level of education concerning to knowledge, skills and achievement. It is worth to be mentioning that, higher education offers immature young people a safe place to gain their maturity level along with the intellectual development. However, higher education is highly imperative to bring massive changes in the economical sector of the country. The inflation of

college tuition fee has been compounded with readily available subsidies i.e. loans which allowed institutions to increase their tuition fee at striking rates over the past decade. But, today we have reached at such a stage where our government has implied the law of free higher education. Considering the fact, fee waiver scheme has been introduced by our state government. Fee waiver is a scheme in which students are exempted from tuition fee. Since fee waiver scheme was introduced during the academic session of 2016-17, it has been revamped for the continuing academic session. This scheme was launched for benefiting the economically disadvantaged sections of students for getting free admission through tuition fee waiver in higher education. The main objective of this scheme is to waive admission fees for both Under Graduation level and Post Graduation level whose parent's annual income is less than Rs.2 lakh per annum. Such adequate steps have been taken by the state government to increase the enrollment ratio of the students in higher education as well as to reduce the drop-out rates after the higher secondary level of education.

II. Objectives of the study

- (i) To address the issues and challenges of 21st in higher education of Assam.
- (ii) To explore the effectiveness of fee waiver scheme in higher education of Assam.

III. Delimitation of the study

- (i) The study is limited to the higher education of Assam only
- (ii) Secondary sources of data is used.

IV. Methodology

Descriptive method was adopted for the study. This research is based on secondary sources of data and observation method. This paper is theoretically analytical in nature. Here, the data are being collected from government reports, journals, books, official websites, etc. As the study was based on personal observation, it is also exploratory in nature.

V. Results and Discussions

Objective No. 1. To address the issues and challenges of 21st century in higher education of Assam.

In Assam, higher education had to face challenges from various issues. The main issues and challenges of higher education in Assam are:

- **Students access to higher education:** According to the report of All India Higher Education Survey, it has been shown that the gross enrolment ratio of Assam during the past 7 years was much lower than current report. Here, if we look at the enrollment scenario of Assam, it is obvious that Assam has the least percentage % of enrolment ratio as compared to the other states of North-East India apart from Nagaland. So, from this point of view, it is observed that most of the students who belongs to low socio-economic background of the family, they tend to drop out from the ongoing educational process due to financial constraints for which they are unable to sustain higher education furthermore in their life.

Figure 1.1. Representing the gross enrolment ratio during the past 8 years in higher education of North-East India

Year	Arunachal	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura
2010-11	26.9	13.4	35.9	17.5	21.6	21.5	13.6
2011-12	21.3	14.7	30.2	17.4	19	15.8	12.4
2012-13	19	13.8	29.9	19.2	22.2	14.7	14.1
2013-14	26.1	15.8	37.7	19.3	23.2	15.4	15.4
2014-15	28.3	14.8	35.9	20.5	23.3	15.6	16.8
2015-16	28.7	15.4	34.2	20.8	24.1	14.9	16.9
2016-17	28.9	17.2	35	23.5	24.5	16.6	19.1
2017-18	29.7	18.2	31.8	24.7	22.9	17.8	21.2

Data Source: All India Higher Education Survey 2010-2018.

- **Disparity of gender equality:** According to 2011 census report, the literacy rate of Assam was estimated as 72.19% (77.85% male and 67.27% female). In this survey report, it was shown that the female literacy rate was much lower than the male literacy

rate. It is due responsibilities for the social customs, belief and traditions that is prevalent in our society. Moreover, there is also lack of proper guidance, lack of awareness, family discouragement due to which most of the woman tend to lose self- confidence for acquiring higher education. Such factors are to be considered accountable for creating gender disparity into our society.

- **Lack of skill formation among youth:** The current crop of students who are just been graduated tend to lack skills that are needed for the common work place. Consequently, there has been a tremendous growth rate of un-employment rate in Assam. So, if any skills development courses would be given right from their initial level of education it would have prepared the upcoming generation to earn their livelihood in a constructive way by promoting self employment, working on innovations and pursuing what one's passionate about.
- **Outdated Curriculum:** Curriculum is severe as the guide of a teacher in handling many students. In our present educational system, most of courses are still based on old contents which do not meet the pace with the latest trend. Certainly, a curriculum needs to be evaluated periodically and adjusted to reflect the changing times. Moreover, information and experiences should be added, expunged and rectify for reflecting the trending needs of the 21st century.
- **Implementation of ICT:** Today, Information and Communication Technology is being so pervasive in 21st century that it has been considered as desideratum for the learning environment. But, if we look at the present scenario of Assam, it is in awful condition w.r.t. implementation of ICT. In most of the colleges and Universities of Assam, there is still inadequate provision of ICT facilities. Most of the institutions in rural areas of Assam do not have digital library with multiple access to documents, visual materials, university journals, national and international journals, etc. in which such educational institutions are unable to fulfill the needs of the students.
- **Lack of extensive research in higher education:** Assam has very few educational institutions which provide M.phil or Ph.D. courses. Further, the number of students who opt for research studies are also less in number as majority are inclined towards corporate jobs or government jobs. Moreover, the research scholars also do not get any scope of fellowship from the state universities and even those who are receiving fellowship they

do not get it at an adequate time which has incurred them to undertake research in an extensive way.

Objective No.2. To explore the Effectiveness of fee waiver scheme in higher education of Assam.

To which extent, fee waiver will be beneficial through the aspects of higher education? We may assume in this way as follows:

- **Social development:** According to 2011 census report, around 85.90 percent of Assam's population resides in rural areas, holding the real potential for a transformation. It is usually believed that a real transformation is highly to be associated with infrastructural development, but the fact is that it is only higher education that holds the key to make a social change and more developed. Fee waiver is one of such way through which it can contribute to make a societal change throughout increasing the literacy rate which will ultimately leads to consequences on discovering new ideas and thoughts towards the society.
- **Eradication of gender disparity in higher education:** Assam has least female literacy rate as compared to the male literacy rate. It is a fact that, woman education is not given much priority in our patriarchal society since woman is meant to get married in certain conditions. So, most of the parents do not opt to pay out for the expenses of higher education for a female child. Hence, fee waiver is to be believed to eradicate such issues and challenges w.r.t. to women for raising the female literacy rate as well.
- **Benefit for persons with disability:** The state government has proposed that higher education should waive off fee for persons with disabilities. The higher education is quite essential for aggrandizing among the persons with disability as it is being denied by most of the parents of disabled due to unbearable cost of living as it becomes really difficult for such parents to facilitate their children with various assistive devices i.e. required for study, mobility, accommodation and various other expenses too. So, fee waiver is the only way through which persons with disabilities could be highly benefited.
- **Human resource development:** Higher education is very much essential for the growth of human resources because the fundamental thing for growth of an individual or nation is based on the educational level of the majority of the people that holds in a country.

Therefore, all necessary steps needs to be taken such as fee waiver to educate people of the country for intellectual development which will further enhance to accelerate economic growth and technological development of the country.

- **Financial pressure of parents** : Most of the parents whose annual income is low falls a prey to undergo stress, fed-up and in despair trying to cope with the cost of education. So, there is no far better than fee waiver scheme for providing free access to higher education which will eventually relieve the annual financial pressure of the parents.

VI. Suggestions

- Emphasis should be given on life skill education.
- Curriculum should be updated constantly in higher education.
- The government should endeavour to provide ICT facilities such as projectors, internet services and also to transform the traditional libraries into Digital Libraries in every higher educational institution.
- In rural areas there should be centre of home science and agricultural courses or training in each and every higher educational institution especially for executing the exigent demands of the rural society.
- State Universities should take an initiative steps in providing scholarships to all the research scholars and likely to waive away the tuition fee for the admission of research courses.
- The last but not the least, higher educational institutions must take an initiative steps to establish cells for preparing the learners for various competitive exams like UPSC, APSC and IFS. Moreover, there should also be career counseling cell for providing any information related to career.

VII. Conclusion

It is thus evident from the study that fee waiver was introduced to enfold majority number of people in the mean time throughout the country to spread higher education because most of the students do get the opportunity to acquire higher education even if they desire to achieve it. So, fee waiver is the only way through which higher education can be spread over to a great extent. Alongside, with the intention of increasing the enrollment ratio of the students, it has to observe meticulously on quality development excessively of higher education. In a nutshell, if this scheme focuses on both sides of quantity and quality then we can expect better productivity and bring more successful results with access to higher education which will directly contribute to the individual development as well as social and economic development as a whole.

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