

# INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*In higher educational institutions, the individuals are required to observe inequalities in terms of number of aspects. Some of the important aspects include, nationality, religion, background, and socio-economic status of the members, housing, academic courses and programs, technology, infrastructure, teaching-learning methods, instructional strategies, organization of seminars and workshops and so forth. These inequalities are primarily depicted due to the availability of resources and educational objectives. The inequalities in higher educational institutions are apparent, especially in terms of the above stated factors. But it is the job duty of the educationists to ensure that they do not impose any kinds of detrimental effects upon the functioning of the educational institutions and enabling the individuals to achieve academic goals. Therefore, it can be stated that prevalence of inequalities should have constructive outcomes. The students, especially from other nationalities and cultures should be provided with assistance to adjust to other cultures, norms and standards. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, significance of diversity and inequality in higher education, and factors which illustrate inequalities in higher educational institutions.*

**Keywords:** Diversity, Employment Opportunities, Higher Educational Institutions, Inequality, Skills

Higher education is regarded to be of utmost significance, not only in India, but throughout the world. In the present existence, individuals are aspiring to obtain higher educational qualifications. The individuals, belonging to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society, who are residing in rural communities aspire to migrate to urban areas to get enrolled in reputed higher educational institutions. Whereas, the individuals residing in urban communities, usually migrate to other cities or countries to pursue higher educational qualifications. The primary objective of attaining higher educational qualifications is to prepare the individuals to make an entry into the practical world. In other words, when they acquire higher educational qualifications, they are able to develop their skills and capabilities to attain well paid and good employment opportunities. The individuals normally pursue education to augment their skills and abilities, so they are able to sustain their living conditions satisfactorily. The students in higher educational institutions are more independent and need to realise their duties and responsibilities.

In higher educational institutions, there are differences, which depict inequalities. These are primarily related to teaching-learning methods, teaching-learning materials, infrastructure, instructional strategies, technologies, environmental conditions, enrolment of students, organization of workshops, seminars and conferences, organization of short-term courses, and formulation of policies, measures and guidelines. In different higher educational institutions, i.e. colleges and universities, the differences are depicted in their functioning and organization of tasks and activities. Furthermore, differences are depicted in the admission procedures and rules and regulations. In order to carry out job

duties in a well-organized manner, the members, who are employed in higher educational institutions are required to conduct research and analysis of various factors and bring about improvements in them. It is indispensable for the individuals to work in integration and co-ordination with each other to achieve personal and professional goals and enrich the system of education.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Systems of higher education constitute the diverse array of institutions that vary in academic orientation, selectivity, financial resources and reputation. This diversity is often perceived as the democratic force, providing higher education to the students, who differ from each other in terms of interests, abilities, gender, age, religion, caste, creed, ethnicity, nationality and socio-economic background. The inequalities among higher educational institutions are able to meet the needs and requirements of the public regarding the acquisition of higher education (Ayalon, Grodsky, Gamoran, & Yogev, 2008). In the present existence, the individuals, belonging to all categories and backgrounds aspire to obtain higher education. As they possess the viewpoint that higher education is essential to enable them to get engaged in reputed employment opportunities. In other words, they will be able to augment their skills and abilities and prepare themselves well. Just being a high school graduate would not enable them to hone their skills and abilities which are required to sustain one's living conditions in a well-organized manner.

One of the most enduring theoretical models purporting to provide explanation to social class related inequalities in higher education is structuralism. Within the structuralism paradigm, there are mainly two dominant traditions, Marxism and Functionalism. In Marxism, education is the system, which is dependent to a major extent within the capitalist societies. The role of education in reproducing class inequalities is observed as one of structural inevitability (Lynch, & O'riordan, 1998). There have been number of changes and developments brought about in the system of education. In modern societies, one of the major problems is the accessibility and quality of higher education for various population groups. When the individuals are able to acquire an efficient understanding of the academic concepts, they are able to attain success (Gegel, Lebedeva, & Frolova, 2015).

Income inequality is important, but when individuals aspire to acquire higher education, they do not let inequalities, particularly regarding income and financial position to become barriers within the course of achievement of academic goals. The differences in the status, background and categories of the individuals is primarily depicted in terms of the occupations that they are engaged in and income they generate. The economic research conducted on educational inequality is quite uncertain and the differences in the educational attainment are considered as important determinants of aggregate wage inequality (Oppedisano, & Turati, 2011). Access to appropriate education is one of the vital factors in alleviating the conditions of poverty and backwardness (Inequality and Higher Education, 2012). Therefore, when marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society are acquiring higher education, they have the major objective of alleviating the conditions of poverty and backwardness.

## **FACTORS WHICH ILLUSTRATE INEQUALITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

The major factors, which illustrate inequalities in higher educational institutions have been stated as follows:

### **Background of the Students**

In higher educational institutions, students belong to different backgrounds and categories. They are different from each other in terms of various aspects. These include, caste, creed, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age and socio-economic background. In higher educational institutions, the students are not required to wear uniforms. The attire, which they wear normally is based upon their culture and religion. For instance, Muslim women are required to cover their heads and put a veil over their face. When they attend educational institutions, then also they are required to dress in accordance to their religion. Similarly, there are inequalities regarding cultures, values, norms, and food habits. When the students migrate to other cities or countries, they are required to get accustomed to the cultures and norms.

When they are required to rigidly follow their customs, they ensure that they do not make use of certain things. In some cases, they experience language barriers, but are required to familiarise themselves with the language. As to carry out various tasks and functions and to achieve personal and professional objectives, it is necessary for the individuals to form effective communication terms with others. In some cases, especially, when the individuals are migrating to other cities or countries to pursue higher education, they are not familiarise with the language. Therefore, to acquire familiarity with the language, they usually are required to take classes. For instance, in international countries, such as, United States of America, the individuals are required to be familiar with English language. Therefore, to enhance their English language skills, they attend short-term courses, either in their own country or international country. As development of English language skills would help them to eliminate inequalities, and enable them to pursue academic goals in an appropriate manner.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

The differences in the socio-economic status of the individuals is apparent. Within higher educational institutions, the individuals employed are different from each other in terms of socio-economic status. This applies, not only to the students, but also other members of the educational institutions. The socio-economic status of the individuals is regarded to be of utmost significance in determining the attainment of educational qualifications and enrolment in higher educational institutions. The occupations and employment opportunities of the individuals are regarded to be the major factors in determining socio-economic status. When the individuals belong to wealthy families, then normally, they do not develop much concern in terms of financial resources, as their parents assist them. But when the individuals, belong to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society, they have to formulate measures to generate income, which is required to meet their expenses. By formulating own measures to generate income, the individuals are alleviating the pressure on their parents, particularly in terms of financial resources.

When the individuals are engaged in reputed employment opportunities, then they are able to get their children enrolled in good and reputed educational institutions. Whereas, when the individuals are engaged in minority occupations, then they experience problems in getting their children enrolled in reputed educational institutions. Having high socio-economic status enables the individuals to meet the daily expenses. On the other hand, when the socio-economic status of the individuals is not high, they are required to get engaged in part-time or full-time employment opportunities to meet their educational expenses. Getting engaged in employment opportunities also assists in the acquisition of work experience. Work experience is regarded to be of utmost significance and prepares the individuals to get engaged in reputed employment opportunities.

### **Housing Accommodation**

The inequalities among the individuals are also depicted in terms of housing accommodation. In some cases, the students as well as the other staff and faculty members are fortunate enough to have their own homes and live with their families. They are able to pursue their personal and professional goals by living in their own homes and do not have to be concerned about taking care of other concerns and issues involved in housing accommodation. When students are living with their parents, then parents normally encourage them to render their wholehearted contribution towards the achievement of academic goals. Whereas, when individuals are employed in educational institutions and live either in their natal or marital homes, then too they receive support and assistance in terms of implementing efficacious job performance.

There have been cases of students as well as faculty and staff members, who do not have their own homes and live in rented accommodation. When the individuals are employed in well-paid jobs, then they do not experience any problems and are able to take care of all expenses. On the other hand, when students migrate from primarily rural communities to seek admission in higher educational institutions, then they need to put into practice certain strategies to support themselves financially. Research studies have indicated that parents are unable to support their children, particularly, when they belong to poverty stricken, deprived and marginalized sections of the society. In such cases, they are required to either get engaged in employment opportunities or obtain scholarships and fellowships from the educational institutions on the basis of their merit and academic outcomes.

### **Academic Programs**

The differences are depicted in terms of academic programs. In some higher educational institutions, i.e. universities, there are differences in the implementation of academic programs. Some departments have masters, and doctoral programs, whereas, in some university departments, there are implementation of short-term courses as well, apart from masters and doctoral programs. When implementing masters, and doctoral programs and short-term courses, there are number of other aspects as well, which need to be taken into consideration. These include, duration, timings of classes, scholarships and financial assistance or fees, course materials, curriculum and instructional systems, resource persons or appointment of supervisors and number of students to be enrolled in the programs or courses. These aspects are usually different in various colleges and universities.

When the formulation of academic programs takes place in various universities, then the major objective of these programs is to ensure that students benefit from them. They should prove to be effectual and meaningful to the students in enhancing their educational qualifications and skills. When the students get enrolled in these programs and courses, they have the major objective of augmenting their knowledge and skills, so they can make use of them in achieving their goals and objectives. For instance, when students are pursuing doctoral programs, they also pursue a course called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and research methodology, as they are required to make use of this knowledge in their thesis.

### **Technology**

In the present existence, usage of technology is regarded to be of utmost significance in the implementation of tasks and functions. When the individuals are making use of technologies, it is vital for them to ensure that they are maintained well. In colleges and universities, in various departments, including technical, clerical and financial, individuals are making use of various technologies in the implementation of their job duties. The staff and faculty members and students are also making extensive usage of technologies in the implementation of academic tasks and activities. The various technologies that are used in offices and colleges and universities are, computers, lap-tops, printers, scanners, tablets, I pad, and mobile phones. The individuals are able to carry out their job duties through the usage of technologies in a less time consuming, manageable and efficient manner. It is vital for them to enhance their skills and abilities regarding usage of technologies.

Inequalities have been observed in university departments with regards to availability of technologies. In some universities, in some departments, there are availability of computers, scanners and printers. The students, particularly from that department are provided with rights to make use of computers and other technologies. Whereas, in some departments, there is not any availability of computer centres. Hence, in such cases, students are required to either make use of computers in the libraries or make visits to computer centres or have their own lap-tops. The other aspect in which inequality is observed includes possession of technologies by the individuals. Research has indicated that students, belonging to well-to-do families may possess multiple technologies, such as, lap-tops, mobile phones, I pads etc. Whereas, when the individuals are not financially strong, they normally possess lap-tops and mobile phones.

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is regarded as one of the vital factors that render a significant contribution in bringing about developments in the system of education. The infrastructure within higher educational institutions comprise of number of aspects. These include, computer centres, library facilities, classrooms, tools, equipment, teaching-learning materials, playgrounds, laboratories, buildings and so forth. This is apparent that in all educational institutions, the infrastructural facilities cannot be the same, and there will be differences. For instance, in terms of playgrounds, buildings, classrooms, laboratories, libraries and computer centres, there will be differences in the size, number of machines, tools, equipment and other materials. The size and the availability of facilities, materials and equipment

in these areas usually determine, how many individuals can be accommodated and work at the same time. For instance, when computer centres will have more computers, then more number of students and other individuals can work at the same time. Whereas, in case of lesser number of computers, lesser number of individuals can work.

In some of the higher educational institutions, the infrastructural facilities are required to be developed. When the members as well as the students are unable to carry out their tasks and activities in a well-organised manner, then there will be need to bring about improvements in the infrastructural facilities. Inequalities in terms of infrastructure in higher educational institutions are apparent. But it is vital to ensure that they should be developed in such a manner that members of the educational institutions are able to carry out their task and activities in a well-organized manner. Improvements in infrastructural facilities generates pleasure and contentment among the individuals and they are able to work well towards the achievement of goals and objectives. To bring about improvements in the infrastructural facilities, it is vital for the individuals to make use of resources in an appropriate manner. Research has indicated that in educational institutions, where infrastructural facilities are not well-developed are primarily due to scarcity of financial resources. Therefore, for educational institutions to enrich the overall system of education and achieve the desired goals, it is necessary to focus upon management of finances.

### **Education of the Parents**

Education of the parents plays an important role in making provision of education to their children. When the parents are well educated and possess masters or doctoral degrees or when they are engaged in reputed jobs in fields, such as, engineering, medical, education, law, management, administration and so forth, then they encourage their children too to either get engaged in same professions or they make give autonomy to their children to make their own decisions regarding their careers. On the other hand, when parents are not educated nor possess the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, then too they recognize the significance of education and encourage their children towards acquisition of education. The significance of education is acknowledged on a comprehensive scale. In rural communities, normally individuals are engaged in agriculture and farming practices and either possess low educational skills or no educational skills at all. There have been establishment of adult education centres and training centres in rural communities, which may make provision of academic skills and help them to generate better livelihoods opportunities.

The individuals, belonging to all categories and backgrounds have recognized the significance of education. They have generated adequate awareness in terms of the factors that how their lives will be enriched, when they will acquire education. The individuals, belonging to poverty stricken, deprived and marginalized sections of the society, usually are engaged in minority jobs and may or may not possess the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy. But they possess this viewpoint that they need to make provision of good quality education to their children. When the children develop interest and enthusiasm towards studies and acquisition of education, then they may migrate to other cities as well to pursue higher education. On the other hand, when the parents are well-educated, then

they usually provide good quality education to their children and even send them to international countries.

### **Organization of Workshops and Seminars**

Organization of workshops and seminars are regarded as an integral part of higher education. In colleges and universities, inequalities are depicted in the organization of workshops and seminars. The main objective of organization of workshops and seminars is to generate awareness among the individuals regarding various topics and concepts. In the university departments, when research is conducted by the heads as well as other members, such as, assistant professors on a particular topic, then they may organise a seminar or workshop. In the organization of seminars and workshops, normally individuals are invited from other educational institutions and organizations as well. These include, heads, professors, directors, researchers and so forth. These individuals give presentations, lectures and speeches on various topics, which may be worthwhile and meaningful to the members of the educational institutions. Whereas, in some cases, particularly when alumina are invited, then heads and professors may give speeches and presentations.

Inequalities are depicted in different educational institutions regarding the organization of workshops and seminars. In some colleges and universities, they are organized on frequent basis, such as once a month or once in three months. Whereas, in others, they may be organized once a year. The individuals need to plan resources in an adequate manner. These include, financial resources and human resources. In some cases, students also get engaged in extra-curricular and creative activities, such as, dance, playing of musical instruments and singing. Another factor in which inequality is depicted is, duration. In some cases, workshops and seminars are one or two days. Whereas, in other cases, they may be from one to two weeks. Therefore, it can be stated that inequalities are usually depicted in terms of timings, duration, subjects and concepts, financial resources and human resources. But when the individuals work diligently and conscientiously towards the organization of seminars and workshops, they need to ensure that they prove to be advantageous towards enrichment of the overall system of education.

### **Initiation of Short-term Courses**

In higher educational institutions in urban areas, there are students from rural communities. When the students migrate to urban areas to pursue higher education, Bachelors, masters or doctoral programs, then in some cases, they also possess the desire to augment their skills and abilities in terms of other areas as well. These include, personality development, English language skills, research methodology, counselling and guidance, travel and tourism and so forth. Research has indicated that in some cases, individuals, primarily belonging to marginalized communities and economically weaker sections of the society are not fluent in English language and need to bring about improvements in their personality. Therefore, they get enrolled in short-term courses. The short-term courses are pursued by the individuals, on the basis of their interests.

Inequalities are depicted in the initiation of short-term courses. In some departments, there may not be any short-term courses and just masters and doctoral programs. Whereas, in others, there may

be short-term courses. When the heads of the departments, along with other members of the departments, plan short-term courses, then they have the major objective of ensuring that students as well as the department is able to benefit from the initiation of these courses. For instance, short-term course on research methodology, has proven to be beneficial to the students, pursuing masters and doctoral programs. It has been observed that when students are working on their research thesis, they are required to pursue this course. As it makes provision of adequate knowledge to them in terms of methods of data collection, organization of data, analysis and so forth.

### **Research and Writing**

Research and writing is regarded as an integral part of job duties of the individuals, employed in higher educational institutions as well as students, who are pursuing masters and doctoral programs. Inequalities are depicted in higher educational institutions in terms of research projects, papers published, articles published and so forth. The primary objective of research and writing is to promote well-being of not only the system of education and the members, but also the community. In some cases, students and researchers do not possess keen interest and enthusiasm in terms of research and writing. They simply concentrate on their coursework and thesis. But they are encouraged by their professors and supervisors to get engaged in research and writing. Research papers and articles are mostly sent to journals for publication purposes or uploaded on the internet. In this manner, the individuals are making an attempt to generate awareness among the community members, via their papers and articles.

Some of the individuals, professors, researchers and students may get engaged in research and writing on a regular basis. They may write one paper every month, whereas, in some cases, they are engaged in these activities to a lesser extent. Hence, inequalities are primarily depicted regarding the extent in which research and writing is conducted. There are inequalities in all universities and departments in terms of numbers of publications. In some cases, apart from writing research papers and articles, professors are usually engaged in writing books. In some cases, they write number of books, which may be around 15 or 20, whereas, in other cases, they may write just one or two books. Hence, inequalities are normally observed in terms of the extent to which research and writing has been conducted. These are in the form of articles, research papers, research projects and books.

### **CONCLUSION**

In India, the system of higher education is the third largest in the world. In the present existence, improvements have taken place in the system of higher education that, individuals from other countries are also getting enrolled in higher educational institutions in India. Within the system of higher education, there are number of factors which illustrate inequalities. These are, background of the students, socio-economic status, housing accommodation, academic programs, technology, infrastructure, education of the parents, organization of workshops and seminars, initiation of short-term courses and research and writing. The inequalities in terms of these aspects are apparent. As it is difficult for the members of the educational institutions to promote equality in terms of these factors. But when the individuals are putting into operation various tasks and activities, it is vital for them to



ensure that they work towards them with diligence, conscientiousness and resourcefulness and they prove to be beneficial to the members of the educational institutions as well as the community.

In colleges and universities, it is vital to ensure that infrastructure, technologies, tools, equipment, library facilities, laboratories and other amenities should be made available in such a manner that they should promote an amiable and pleasant learning environment and enable the individuals to carry out their job duties in an appropriate manner. Through the provision of these facilities, they are not only able to carry out their job duties in a well-organised manner, but also are able to inculcate the feelings of job satisfaction. On the other hand, this leads to an increase in the retention rate among students and motivate them towards studies. To make provision of adequate facilities, it is vital for the members of the educational institutions to ensure that they invest adequate amount of resources in promoting the up-gradation of infrastructure, technologies, teaching-learning materials, facilities and amenities. It is one of the major objectives of higher educational institutions to create an amiable and pleasant environment that may facilitate in the attainment of personal and professional goals.

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