



HIGHER EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES: AN EVALUATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

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ABSTRACT India is one of the most populous countries in world which practices democracy by following the principle of social welfare. Therefore, the country has a large department to implement the policies related to the welfare of the society. Side by side India has also a Ministry of Human resource Development which formulates policies on education at different phases and looks after the implementation aspect also. But the responsibility of education, as per Indian constitution is to be shared both by Central and State governments. As a result, all the governments in the states can also undertake education plans, policies and programmes as per their necessity. Assam is state where the lifestyle of maximum people depends on agriculture. Around 25% people are still illiterate according to the latest census. In such kind of state, Government of Assam implemented one luxurious policy that is Free Higher Education Policy in the year 2016. In this background present paper is taken as an attempt to analyse the good and bad effects of this Policy in higher education sector of Assam.

KEYWORDS : Education, Policy, Free, Government, Evaluation, Assam

Introduction and Significance of the Study

Assam is marked as one of the socio-economically poor states of India. Common people of Assam are still deprived of getting quality food, health facilities, quality education, etc. etc.. Though quality is a vague term, now everybody is familiar with this concept which is related to the life satisfaction aspect of people. People of this region are miles to go to compete with the advanced states of the country or with the other developed countries' people. Different political parties formed government at different times after independence in the state; they announced lots of policies for the up lift-men of people. But in spite of all those efforts taken by government, literacy rate, health status, quality life style, all are below the national level index. Very recently just four years back in 2016, Free Education Policy for needy students at University level was introduced by Assam State Government. But in real life situation it is observed that the benefits are taken not only by needy children but also by all sections' children who are from higher income groups' with business family background.

Again the national level GDP in higher education was expected to be 6%. But this time, it has reached to 4.6% level only. Therefore, in the present paper, an attempt has been taken to analyse this Free Higher Education Policy of State Government of Assam and what needs to be done for its better implementation on the basis of field level experience of the investigator. Accordingly, the present problem has been stated as – *“Higher Education and Government Policies: An Evaluation with Special Reference to Assam”*

Objectives of the Paper:

Present paper is based on the objectives-

- (i) To know the various policies on Higher Education
- (ii) To evaluate the Free Higher Education Policy of Government of Assam

Review of Related Literature:

Review of related literature during the last few years on Higher Education Policies of India is shown in the following table:-

Table No.1 showing the review of related literature

S.No.	Focus of the Work	Reference
1.	Higher education in India: Growth, concerns and change agenda	Aggarwal, P (2007)
2	Highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India	Sheikh, Y. A. (2017).
3	Goals and governance of higher education in India	Carnoy, M.(2013)
4	A Demand Value based higher education system in India: A comparative study	Bhatia, K., (2011).

5	Employment, employability and higher education in India: The missing links	Khare, M. (2014). [19]
6	Higher Education A critical appraisal of higher education and economic development in India	Sethi, S. (2012).

Research Approach

Present paper is analytical as well as descriptive in nature. On the basis of field level experience through observation, an attempt is undertaken to analyse this Free Higher Education Policy of State Government of Assam and what needs to be done for its better implementation is the main objective of this paper. So, analytical method has been used here.

Meaning of a policy

A policy or policies are the integral part and parcel of development process in case of almost all the countries across the globe. India is one of the countries which have been working on a number of education policies since long. A policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and to achieve rational outcomes. In brief, it is a statement of intent, and is implemented as a procedure or protocol.

Who are the people to make education policies in India?

Apart from the Human Resource Development Minister of India, all states are free to initiate more education policies. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) is the highest advisory body to advise both the Central and State Governments in any kind of policy formulation.

Recent Higher Education Policies in India:

In India's Higher Education system, 2016 was a breath-taking year with the introduction of a number of new policies which are -

1. Digital payment campaign of Union Minister

In the wake of demonetization, Union HRD Minister, Prakash Javadekar launched a cashless payment drive across the centrally aided institutions and proclaimed the benefits of digital payment in the wake of demonetization. So of, in Assam also the effect of announcement of this campaign has been seen in the subsequent years

2. Examination mandatory for Class 5 and 8 to ensure Quality in Higher Education

In order to ensure quality in higher education, The Human Resource Ministry has decided to revise the old policy that promoted all the students from Class 5 and 8. Now, under the new policy, it will be mandatory for all students of classes 5 and 8 to clear the examination so as to get into next class. As per the RTE (Right to Education) Act, on April 1, 2010, this policy was enforced with the motive of providing education to each and every child between the age of 6 and 14.

3. No varsity can deny admission to student till final degree is issued

Delhi High Court marked a decision that provisional certificate issued by a varsity works valid till a degree is issued, so no university can deny admission if a student cannot submit his previous degree.

4. Male students can now file sexual harassment complaints

As per new UGC regulation, male students can now file sexual harassment cases against men, women and transgender. The UGC (Prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment of women employees and students in higher educational institutions) regulations notified in May says that sexual harassment is gender neutral and institutions should take action on complaints of employees and students of all sexes.

5. Gender education compulsory at graduation level

In all over India, Telangana has become the first state to make gender education compulsory at the graduate level. The state has introduced a bilingual textbook, *Towards a World of Equals* in all engineering colleges affiliated to the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU-Hyderabad) which is a significant step for the country people.

6. Students are not allowed to pursue two regular degrees together

UGC declared, "It had sought the comments of statutory councils but the responses so far do not endorse the idea of allowing students to pursue two degrees simultaneously." According to the declaration signed by UGC Secretary, Jaspal S Sandhu, "The Universities shall conduct their programmes in accordance with the First Degree and Master Degree Regulations, 2003 prescribed by the UGC and also follow the norms and parameters prescribed by the Statutory Council concerned, wherever relevant."

7. Free higher education for the poor: Assam government breaks ground

Initially in the year 2016, Assam government announced free higher secondary, three-year degree and polytechnic diploma courses for students who can't afford them. But later, after the successful completion of degree course, the students whose parents' annual income is less than 100000/-rupees they will get free admission into Post Graduation Programme in all the Government funded universities. State government announced free admission for poor students at even at post graduation level also. Since 2019, the basic condition to avail free higher education is that the parent's annual income should not be more than 2,00,000/- (Two lakhs of rupees) and the income certificate should be produced at the time of admission which is to be certified by the Circle Officer of the concerned area of the student.

8. Aadhaar card mandatory for Board exams 2017

Haryana Board of School Education (HBSE) made Aadhaar card compulsory for giving board examination. It was came in to force as mandatory in 2017 by the Board.

9. Assam government announces education facilities for students with disabilities

In Assam, it was declared that Specially-Able students will soon be relieved from paying their college and school fees, as the state government has announced a scheme of free education to these students from Class 9 till the university level. It will include government-run institutes of higher education including professional colleges of engineering, medical, and polytechnic.

10. Online facility begins for medical college applications

Union health ministry on Monday, March 21 launched an online procedure of receiving application from medical colleges desirous to start post-graduation courses or increase seats in existing ones.

11. Sanskrit, Indian languages to get a boost under New Education Policy

Sanskrit was given a place in the New Education Policy-- "The policy of the Indian government is that there should be development of all Indian languages. Sometimes I feel, that more than the British, we have anglicized our country in the last 50-60 years" said by the Education Minister, **Prakash Javadekar**.

Among all these above cited eleven policies, in this paper the Free Higher Education Policy of Assam has been tried to analyze for the evaluation of its effect.

About the Free Higher Education Policy in Assam:

After successful completion of Higher Secondary courses, students who cannot take admission in the graduation course or after completion of degree courses, who are not taking admission in Post graduation courses due to financial constraints, for those the then

Education minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma in 2016 announced free admission policy. The main condition of this policy is that the annual family income of that particular children's parents must be **below 1,00,000/- (One Lakh Rupees)**. In this Wavers' Scheme, needy students are to submit the proof copy of their parents' income collecting certificate either from Circle Officer or from Mauzadar. Here starts the drama of corruption. Complain raises frequently about the validity of the certificates given by concerned authority regarding the parents' family income. Very recently in the year 2019, the limit of family income has been increased to 2,00,000.00/- (Two Lakh rupees) annually to avail the benefit of this free higher education policy.

Status of Students admitted under Fee Waiver Scheme in KBVSASU:

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University, popularly known as KBVSASU is a state university situated in Nalbari district of Assam. This is the only Sanskrit university of Assam which was established in the year 2011 by Assam Legislative Act, 2011. In this newly established university also students are admitted in different courses under the Fee Waiver Scheme as per Government order. The students' status under this scheme in the last three years is shown in the following table:

Table No.2

Table No.2 showing the total number and percentage of students admitted under Fee Waiver Scheme (Data of six Departments)

Year	Total Admitted in Number	Admitted Under Scheme in Number	Percentage
2017	340	135	40%
2018	282	91	32.3%
2019	300	171	59.66%

(Source: Official data of University)

So, the data cited above reveals that more than half of the total students that is almost 60% admitted under the scheme last year and Government of a poor state like Assam, is taking the financial responsibility of these students which is not an easy task. It definitely needs serious rethinking or re-conceptualization of the scheme.

What needs to be changed in the Higher Education of Assam?

- (i) First of all, the higher educational institutions whether it may be a college or a university should emphasize on admitting the quality inputs. More than 50% of students who are pursuing their Post graduation courses in different universities and colleges of Assam (The figure may be exception in case of the oldest four five universities), actually they are not fit for those specialized courses. Those students neither know English nor Assamese perfectly as a medium of instruction. Therefore, Government should take initiative to monitor the quality of higher education in those institutions by minimizing undue importance on free higher education to all. Because, this 50% poor quality inputs are unnecessarily spending their time, efforts and Government money in the name of higher education. Rather they should be geared up in some kind of 'hands on activity' by generating skill.
- (ii) Free higher education to average and below average I.Q type of students should be stopped. There exists a question of quality if the product is found at free of cost in the market. Students of such category should be sent to vocational courses and their expenditure should be met by the Government.
- (iii) Wastage in higher education is observed in the universities of Assam and one of the main causes of wastage is Free Higher education. Easy access of education without cost easily may minimize the will power of students. Parents also do not give importance much more if any child stops to attend institution. Because parents don't pay for the child's education. So, it leads to wastage of Government cost.
- (iv) Free higher education should be given to **meritorious** students only who belong to Below Poverty Line family, who actually cannot access higher education in financial ground. Merit standard should be fixed by the Authority of concerned Higher Educational Institution. It may be different locality to locality, year to year and also course wise. 75% cut off mark may be for the BPL students of City area Universities and sometimes 65% may be the cut off mark for the rural areas institutions. Again merit standard may be different in case of 1st Degree course to Post Graduate degree course. It will be better if admission test is conducted for all

students who wish to enter to higher education by the concerned higher educational institutions.

- (v) Vocationalisation at the First Degree level is must for access to higher education. Average meritorious Students from BPL family are in need to earn at early. So, it will be good enough if they are well equipped acquire skills with job-oriented or vocational degree courses rather than providing general courses. In conformity with the National Policy on Education, 1986, a scheme to provide career orientation through education at the first degree level was launched in 1994-95. Under the scheme, a university / college could introduce one to three vocational courses in 35 identified subjects. As a result, a 52number of job oriented programs lasting for approximately 6 months to one year have been introduced in the colleges/ universities (University Grants Commission, 2008). But these courses are not opted so much by the general students since they need to be popularized by Govt. instead of offering free PG courses in traditional subjects.
- (vi) At the Three Year Degree course, Plantation by students admitted under waver's scheme is becoming a drama in almost all the colleges. In most of the colleges 10 to 12 number or in some cases it may be 15 number of students (submit) show evidence of one single tree planted by all of them individually in the college campus since plantation is compulsory for them according to Govt. rule.
- (vii) In order to minimize the level of corruption also from the society, free higher education should be stopped. To make the fees free, middle class and upper class people starts to manipulate the income certificates given by the Circle Officer or Mauzadar though it cannot be generalized.
- (viii) At the increase of GDP, free education is totally disturbing the effort. At the same time, it is also hindering on undertaking necessary steps for planning on human resource development approach and rate of return approach of educational management.
- (ix) This policy is against the Man Power Planning approach and Rate of Return Approach necessary for educational planning. Too much support of social demand for education is deteriorating the quality of higher education. At the increase of the number of students, the classrooms of formal educational institutes are becoming overcrowded.

CONCLUSION:

The framing of successful policies requires reliable data, and on multiple aspects. We are faced with a situation where we not only do not have reliable data, but also have had no review of higher education for the last 50 years, the last one having been the D.S. Kothari Commission in 1965. Far-reaching changes have taken place in higher education in the last 50 years. So, we desperately need a review not only in state higher education sector but also in all over the nation's scenario.

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