

## **HIGHER EDUCATION IN HARYANA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Abstract**

The progress of any region is intrinsically linked to the strength of its education system, with higher education serving as a decisive driver of social mobility, economic prosperity, and human capital development. Haryana, one of India's rapidly advancing states, has made notable strides in expanding its higher education system since independence. The state today accommodates a diverse mix of central, state, and private universities, along with a wide network of affiliated colleges that collectively cater to disciplines spanning humanities, sciences, commerce, engineering, medicine, management, and vocational studies. This expansion has improved access to higher education for large sections of the population; however, quantitative growth alone has not guaranteed qualitative excellence. The higher education sector in Haryana continues to face persistent challenges that hinder its ability to fully contribute to the state's and the nation's developmental goals.

One of the foremost concerns is the issue of regional imbalance and inequity. While urbanized and industrially advanced districts such as Gurugram, Faridabad, and Panipat have witnessed considerable institutional growth, rural and socio-economically disadvantaged districts remain underserved. This uneven distribution of educational opportunities widens socio-economic disparities and limits the transformative role of higher education for marginalized groups. Faculty shortages, limited professional training, and outdated curricula are further constraints that weaken the academic experience and restrict innovation in pedagogy. Many graduates face difficulties in securing employment due to a lack of employability-oriented skills, highlighting the persistent mismatch between academic training and labour market requirements.

Equally pressing is the issue of limited research capacity and weak industry-academia linkages. Despite Haryana's proximity to the National Capital Region and its strong industrial

base in sectors such as automobiles, information technology, and agro-industries, universities and colleges often remain focused on teaching rather than research and innovation. Inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and weak institutional incentives contribute to low research productivity, thereby restricting the state's ability to contribute meaningfully to knowledge creation at the national and global levels.

Nevertheless, Haryana possesses unique opportunities to transform its higher education sector into a model of excellence. Its strategic location, coupled with access to global markets and industries, provides fertile ground for expanding partnerships between academia and industry. Policy reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, alongside state-level initiatives emphasizing skill development and entrepreneurship, further create opportunities for innovation-driven growth. Rising youth aspirations and technological integration in education also provide scope for blended and digital learning models, which can widen access and improve quality simultaneously. International collaborations, accreditation processes, and global benchmarking can additionally help Haryana's institutions enhance their competitiveness and reputation.

Realizing these opportunities will require targeted reforms emphasizing accountability, transparency, and institutional autonomy. Strengthening faculty recruitment and professional development, modernizing curricula with a focus on employability, and creating robust research ecosystems supported by funding and incubation centers are crucial steps. Simultaneously, building strong industry linkages and fostering interdisciplinary and vocational learning can bridge the gap between education and the job market.

This study critically examines the challenges confronting higher education in Haryana while identifying pathways for leveraging its opportunities. It argues that by addressing issues of quality, equity, and research, while capitalizing on its geographical and industrial advantages, Haryana can position its higher education system as a catalyst for sustainable development and nation-building.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Haryana, Quality and equity, Employability, Research and innovation, Industry–academia linkages, Sustainable development

## **Introduction**

Education has always been regarded as the backbone of progress, growth, and social

transformation. In the present knowledge-driven world, higher education is more than just a means of individual development—it is a critical determinant of a nation's competitiveness and economic advancement. Higher education directly contributes to economic growth through human capital formation, productivity enhancement, and technological innovation.<sup>1</sup> With its vast network of universities, colleges, and professional institutes, India has developed the third-largest higher education system globally, following the United States and China.<sup>2</sup> Since independence, the expansion of this sector has been impressive in terms of institutions and student enrolments. Yet, the system continues to grapple with persistent challenges such as uneven quality, employability gaps, insufficient research, and weak global recognition (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Joshi, 2019).

Within this broader national framework, the state of Haryana presents a unique scenario. Despite its relatively small size, Haryana has emerged as one of India's most dynamic states, marked by rapid agricultural, industrial, and urban growth. Its proximity to the National Capital Region (NCR) and its growing industrial hubs, particularly in Gurugram, Faridabad, and Manesar, have created a strong demand for a highly skilled workforce.<sup>3</sup> To respond to these needs, Haryana has witnessed significant expansion in higher education infrastructure, with the establishment of central universities, state universities, private institutions, and numerous colleges across different disciplines (Government of Haryana, 2022). This development reflects both government initiatives and rising educational aspirations among the state's youth. However, access to quality higher education in rural areas continues to lag behind urban regions, reflecting an uneven pattern of educational development within the state (Kumar, 2020).

Despite this expansion, several concerns persist. Shortages of well-qualified teachers, lack of advanced infrastructure in certain districts, and uneven academic standards affect institutional performance. A considerable number of students still prefer to migrate to metropolitan areas or other states for better educational opportunities, indicating limitations in the capacity of Haryana's institutions to meet global expectations. NITI Aayog (2021) has also highlighted the state's modest research output, weak industry-academia linkages, and relatively low global rankings of its universities compared to other Indian states. These concerns mirror the wider debates on Indian higher education, where scholars such as Agarwal (2009) stress that expansion without corresponding improvements in quality, innovation, and internationalization risks undermining the sector's long-term contribution to development.

On the other hand, Haryana possesses immense potential to raise the quality and relevance of its higher education system. The state's geographical advantage, industrial economy, and growing private sector investments in education place it in a strong position to emerge as a regional hub of knowledge and innovation. Policy measures focused on skill development, digital transformation of classrooms, and research collaborations provide promising avenues for progress (UGC, 2022). Expanding vocational and technical courses alongside traditional academic programs is also essential to align student learning with emerging job market demands (World Bank, 2019). As Aithal and Aithal (2020) emphasize, outcome-based education, entrepreneurship training, and technology integration can significantly enhance employability and competitiveness in states like Haryana.

Thus, the future of higher education in Haryana depends not only on expanding access but also on improving quality, accountability, research culture, and industry readiness. A stronger emphasis on inclusive growth, especially in rural areas, will ensure balanced access to educational opportunities. The present study, therefore, seeks to examine the existing state of higher education in Haryana by focusing on both its challenges and opportunities. It underlines key issues that require immediate attention from policymakers while also identifying pathways that can enable Haryana's institutions to enhance academic excellence, strengthen research, and contribute effectively to the state's and nation's overall development.

## **Methodology**

The present study employs a descriptive and analytical approach, relying primarily on secondary data sources to explore the challenges and opportunities in Haryana's higher education sector. Information was systematically collected from government reports, policy documents, statistical surveys, and scholarly articles relevant to the region's educational landscape. Data from reputable sources such as the Department of Higher Education Haryana, UGC, and the All India Survey on Higher Education were analysed to identify key trends, institutional developments, and policy interventions. Qualitative content analysis and basic quantitative assessment were undertaken to provide a comprehensive and objective overview, while ensuring academic rigor and integrity throughout the research process.<sup>4</sup>

## **Growth of Higher Education Sector in Haryana**

Haryana's higher education sector has witnessed remarkable growth and transformation over

the past few decades, reflecting the broader national trend toward expanding access and diversification of educational opportunities. As of 2025, Haryana is home to approximately 61 universities, including central universities, state universities, deemed universities, and private universities, offering a wide range of academic, technical, and professional programs to students across the state. This expansion in institutional numbers is complemented by a significant increase in the number of colleges, with over 1,600 colleges currently operating under various affiliations, encompassing disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, engineering, management, medical sciences, and vocational studies. These figures highlight the state's commitment to widening participation in higher education and catering to the growing aspirations of its youth population.<sup>5</sup>

A key indicator of the expansion and accessibility of higher education is the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which measures the percentage of the eligible age group enrolled in higher education. Haryana's GER stood at 29.2 percent in 2018–19, surpassing the national average of 26.3 percent. This reflects a steady improvement in enrollment, supported by government initiatives aimed at increasing educational infrastructure and incentivizing student participation, especially among marginalized and rural populations. Expansion has been bolstered by efforts from both the public and private sectors, with private universities and colleges accounting for a sizeable proportion of newly established institutions. This synergy between the government and private entities has helped Haryana keep pace with increasing demand and create a more diversified educational environment.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these impressive quantitative gains, Haryana's higher education system faces several qualitative challenges. Recent reports have identified that the state lags behind some neighbouring states in parameters such as faculty strength, research output, and international recognition of its institutions. The shortage of qualified teachers and research facilities has impacted the academic quality at various levels, causing concern over the employability of graduates and the capacity of institutions to engage in cutting-edge research. Furthermore, there is a notable disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of infrastructure, student enrollment, and access to specialized courses—a gap that needs to be addressed to ensure equitable development of education across the state.

In response to these challenges, Haryana's government has launched targeted policies and programs focused on promoting innovation, research culture, vocational training, and industry-

academia collaboration. Integration of digital technologies into academic delivery, expansion of skill development centers, and encouragement of entrepreneurial ventures within campuses are examples of such initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education. Moreover, Haryana’s strategic location adjacent to the National Capital Region (NCR) presents unique opportunities for educational institutions to collaborate with industry hubs, fostering an environment conducive to applied research and employment-oriented learning.

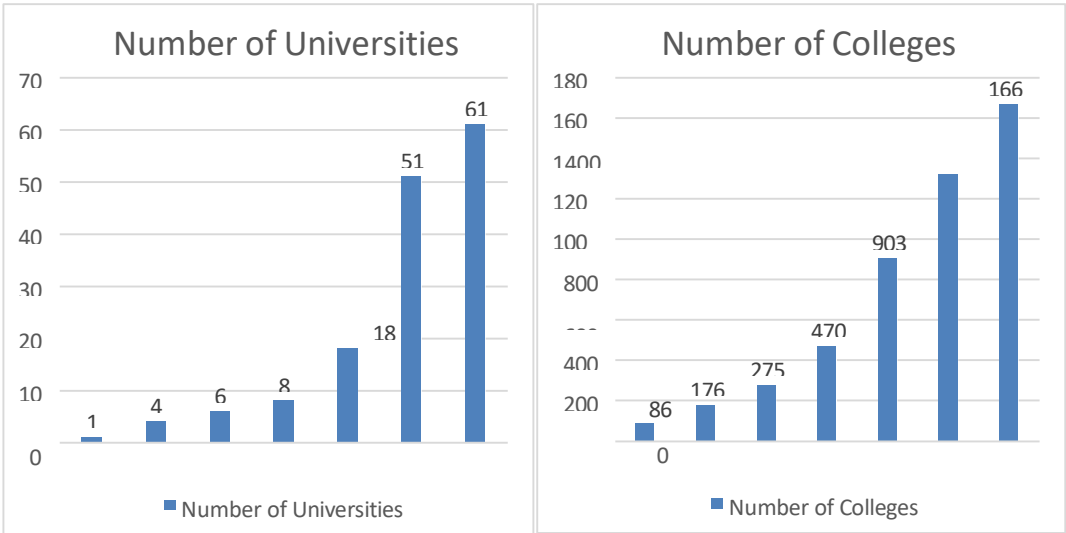
Data compiled from the Directorate of Higher Education, Haryana, as well as recognized educational surveys and portals, provide a comprehensive picture of the state’s educational landscape. These sources confirm substantial increases in enrolments, the establishment of new institutions, and incremental improvement in access indicators, while simultaneously underscoring the areas in need of sustained policy attention and resource allocation. The duality of growth opportunities and lingering challenges signifies a critical phase for Haryana, where strategic investment in quality, governance, and inclusivity can transform the higher education sector into a robust pillar of the state’s socio-economic development.

**The growth of universities and Colleges in Haryana from 1970 to 2025**

Chart 1.1

Chart 1.2

Source: (State Statistical Abstract of Haryana 2012-13, Directorate of Higher Education Haryana)<sup>7</sup>



**Growth of Universities and Colleges in Haryana (1970–2025)**

Haryana has demonstrated remarkable progress in its higher education landscape since its

formation in 1966. In 1970–71, the state had only a single university and around 86 colleges. By 2012–13, this expanded to 29 universities and 903 colleges, an increase of 29 times in universities and about 11 times in colleges over four decades. This trend has continued, and as of 2025, Haryana boasts at least 61 functional universities spanning central, state, deemed, and private institutions catering to diverse academic and professional fields. The number of colleges has also grown substantially, with official figures ranging from 1,000 to over 1,600 colleges, incorporating government, government-aided, and self-financed institutions. The state's urban districts, like Gurugram, have witnessed a particularly strong surge in both government and private colleges due to industrial growth and proximity to the National Capital Region, while progress in rural districts like Nuh has been more modest, reflecting persisting socio-economic barriers and infrastructural gaps. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Haryana has also improved—from 19.5% in 2001 to 27.8% in 2012, consistently above the national average in subsequent years. However, inter-district disparities remain; for example, Rohtak (18.6%) and Mehandragarh (17.2%) historically recorded higher GERs, while regions like Mewat (now Nuh, at 1.7%) lagged far behind. 8

### Challenges in Higher Education in Haryana

Despite impressive numerical growth, Haryana's higher education sector is beset by a range of

persistent challenges:

- **Enrolment and Equity:** While state-level GER is relatively high, sharp disparities exist between districts, genders, and socio-economic groups. Rural areas, women, and minorities often have lower access to higher education opportunities.
- **Quality and Accreditation:** Many colleges in Haryana struggle to meet quality benchmarks. Outdated syllabi, lack of research orientation, and low NAAC accreditation coverage remain ongoing concerns.
- **Faculty Shortages:** There is a significant shortfall in qualified teaching staff. Over 50% of professor posts in government colleges were reported vacant; this causes increased workloads for existing faculty and impacts student learning quality. 9
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** While leading districts enjoy modern facilities and regular upgrades, many colleges—especially in rural areas—continue to lack adequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and even essentials such as electricity and water supply.

- **Research and Innovation:** Haryana's higher education system is primarily focused on teaching rather than research. Limited funding, inadequate facilities, and weak industry-institute linkages constrain research output and innovation capacity.
- **Governance and Funding:** Recent reports highlight stagnation in university rankings and density of institutions. Funding as a share of GSDP remains lower in Haryana compared to some neighbours, and attempts to reform the financial model have met with mixed results.
- **Regional Imbalances:** The contrast between urban and rural districts remains stark. Gurugram, for instance, saw an 80% increase in government colleges and proliferation of private institutes, while Nuh's slower growth underscores persistent structural and socio-economic barriers to quality education.

### Opportunities in Higher Education

Haryana, with its rapidly growing youth population and strategic location adjacent to the National Capital Region, presents significant opportunities for the expansion and enhancement of its higher education sector. The state currently houses over 60 universities and more than 1,600 colleges, a substantial increase over the last few decades, yet the demand for quality higher education continues to rise with increasing enrollment rates. This burgeoning demand offers enormous potential for both public and private investment, making higher education a promising sector for economic and social development in Haryana. Emerging technologies and digital learning tools provide the state with avenues to address existing challenges relating to access, quality, and employability. By adopting innovative teaching methodologies and expanding online and blended learning platforms, Haryana can significantly enhance its educational delivery and outreach.

Moreover, Haryana stands to benefit from strategic collaborations at both national and international levels, particularly in areas such as quality assurance, curriculum development, and credit recognition. Developing unified qualification frameworks and improving accreditation processes can elevate institutional standards and foster greater mobility for students and professionals. Importantly, promoting equity in higher education remains a priority, as it is crucial for reducing socio-economic disparities within the state. Ensuring equal access to quality education for all communities, including marginalized and rural populations, can unlock hidden talents and contribute to more inclusive growth.

The focus on improving graduate employability has opened opportunities for stronger industry, academia linkages, entrepreneurial education, and vocational training tailored to Haryana's evolving economy. Engagement with global partners can facilitate knowledge exchange, enhance research capabilities, and expose students to international best practices. Platforms such as conferences, exchange programs, and joint ventures will further strengthen Haryana's position in the global education arena. Harnessing these opportunities through targeted policy support and investment will enable Haryana's higher education sector to play a pivotal role in the state's socio-economic transformation and innovation landscape.

### **Suggestions for Improving the Higher Education System in Haryana**

To elevate Haryana's higher education system and make it more competitive at the national and global levels, it is essential to adopt innovative and transformative approaches across all tiers of education, from primary to higher education. The quality and reputation of universities and colleges in Haryana must be strengthened through continuous curriculum updates, faculty development, and enhanced academic standards. Developing robust infrastructure—including modern classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and digital learning facilities—is critical to attract and retain students across diverse regions of the state.

The Haryana government should actively promote collaborations between local higher education institutions and leading international universities to facilitate academic exchange, joint research programs, and faculty training. Additionally, establishing strong linkages between Haryana's universities and national research laboratories and centers will foster a culture of quality research and innovation, enhancing the state's contribution to knowledge creation.

There is a pressing need to focus on skill development and employability by designing graduate programs that equip students with in-depth knowledge and practical competencies, aligning education with industry requirements to reduce unemployment and underemployment challenges. Moreover, depoliticizing educational institutions, both public and private, is vital to ensuring academic freedom, merit-based governance, and preventing undue influence or favouritism that undermines institutional integrity.

Haryana's higher education system should also embrace a multidisciplinary approach to curriculum design, encouraging students to acquire knowledge beyond their core subjects,

fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Such comprehensive reforms will position Haryana's higher education sector as a driving force for socio-economic progress and innovation in the region.

## Conclusion

Education is a vital process that shapes the body, mind, and character, fostering the holistic development of individuals by harmonizing intellectual, emotional, and moral growth. In Haryana, higher education has expanded considerably over the past decades, mirroring India's overall rapid growth in this sector. However, despite increases in the number of universities and colleges, equitable access to quality higher education remains a challenge, especially for marginalized and rural populations within the state. Haryana, as one of India's economically dynamic states with an ambitious growth trajectory, must ensure that its expanding educational infrastructure translates into inclusive and meaningful opportunities for all segments of society.

While Haryana benefits from its strategic location and growing industrial base, a significant portion of its youth still face barriers in accessing higher education and employability-oriented programs. Overcoming these challenges is critical to fully harness the state's rich human resource potential and to enable all citizens to contribute effectively to Haryana's socio-economic development. The state must focus on expanding institutional capacity while simultaneously improving the quality and relevance of education through sustained investments in infrastructure, faculty development, research, and industry collaboration.

To sustain Haryana's growth momentum, urgent attention is needed on financial resource allocation, enhancing access and equity, raising academic standards, and making education more responsive to changing economic needs. Only by addressing these issues comprehensively can Haryana transform its higher education system into a robust platform that empowers its youth, fosters innovation, and supports the state's journey toward inclusive prosperity.

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