



Transforming Higher Education in Andhra Pradesh: Access, Quality, Enrolment and Governance Challenges in 2026

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Abstract: This study evaluates higher education transformation in Andhra Pradesh (2026) across access, enrolment, quality, and governance using secondary policy and institutional data. The state shows strong participation, with a GER of 36.5%, higher than the national average, driven by welfare initiatives and rural expansion. Enrolment is concentrated mainly in private, affiliated colleges, resulting in a system that is more focused on professional teaching than on research. Gender participation is nearly balanced, but regional and digital disparities continue to limit equitable access. Academic outcomes are moderate, while research output and innovation remain weak owing to faculty and infrastructure shortages. Centralised examinations and affiliated structures constrain institutional autonomy. Recent reforms have promoted multidisciplinary learning, credit mobility, industry collaboration, and outcome-based education. The sector is moving from expansion to quality improvement, requiring greater autonomy, more substantial research support, and balanced development for long-term growth.

Keywords: Higher Education, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Access and Equity, Institutional Governance, Academic Quality, Research Productivity, National Education Policy (NEP)

Introduction: India has one of the world's largest higher education systems, but remains a developing educational market with significant untapped potential. As of 2025, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) stands at approximately 28.4%, below the global average of 36.7%, with more than 4.3 crore students studying across nearly 1,200 institutions. A significant concern is the growing number of students pursuing education abroad—around nine lakh students spent almost \$60 billion in 2023, far exceeding the government's annual higher-education budget. Despite this outflow, India remains the third-largest higher-education system

globally, after China and the United States. The country’s demographic advantage, with nearly half its population in the working-age group, positions it to contribute significantly to the projected global skilled labour shortage by 2030. The private sector plays a dominant role, operating 64% of institutions, enrolling 62% of students, and investing over 80% of the funds in professional education. The University Grants Commission coordinates the regulations and standards across the system. Recent reforms under the National Education Policy 2020, including the Academic Bank of Credits and the One Nation, One Subscription initiative, aim to enhance flexibility, research access, and international competitiveness in the coming years. The NITI Aayog report highlights significant inter-state disparities in education spending in India. Jammu & Kashmir leads in overall education expenditure, while Delhi records the lowest share. In higher education spending, Bihar ranks first, followed by Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur, whereas Telangana spends the least. Per capita expenditure on higher education is relatively higher in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, but lower in Rajasthan, Punjab, and Chhattisgarh. University density also varies widely, with the highest in Sikkim and the weakest in Bihar compared with the national average. Gender parity in enrolment is strong in states such as Kerala, Chhattisgarh, and Himachal Pradesh, with balanced participation observed in Chandigarh, Mizoram, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Education plays a central role in India’s socio-economic development, and the higher education sector is rapidly expanding to become the world’s largest. The private sector has emerged as a key driver, bearing much of the investment burden and enrolling most students. As of July 2025, India had 529 private universities and 145 deemed-to-be universities, with private institutions accounting for approximately four-fifths of professional course enrolments and nearly one-third of total higher education enrolments. These institutions offer diverse programs ranging from engineering and management to law and design. Government reforms have simplified regulations to encourage private participation while emphasising quality. Overall, the private sector is nearly twice the size of the public sector in terms of institutions and enrolments, contributing to a vast system of approximately 56,000 institutions, including around 1,404 universities.

Table 1.1. Category-wise Total number of Universities in India.

<i>S, NO</i>	<i>University Type</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>State Universities</i>	<i>508</i>	<i>36.19</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Deemed-to-be Universities</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>10.33</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Central Universities</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>4.05</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>Private Universities</i>	<i>529</i>	<i>37.68</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Institutes of national importance</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>11.75</i>
<i>Total</i>		<i>1404</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutes_of_National_Importance,

1.2. Higher education in Andhra Pradesh's Progress Strong Foundations Over the years, Andhra Pradesh has consciously expanded access to higher education by building a broad, inclusive network of universities and colleges across the State. This has ensured that higher education is no longer confined to urban elites but is accessible to students from rural areas and first-generation learner families. Some key indicators reflect this progress clearly: the gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 36.5, significantly higher than the national average of 28.4; the Gender Parity Index is 0.93, indicating near-equal participation of women in higher education; and there are substantial scholarship, fee reimbursement, and welfare mechanisms supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These numbers are not mere statistics; they represent aspirations, social mobility, and intergenerational change. From Access to Outcomes: Although access has improved, the next phase of reform must focus on quality, relevance, and outcomes. Universities must align their curricula with industry, technology, and emerging global trends. Strengthening research, innovation, and startup ecosystems on campuses. Promote interdisciplinary learning, as envisioned in the NEP 2020. We prepare students not just for jobs, but for leadership in a rapidly changing world. As Minister for IT HRD, I firmly believe that higher education must become the backbone of Andhra Pradesh's knowledge economy, supporting sectors such as deep tech, AI, semiconductors, life sciences, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. The Role of Vice-Chancellors is not just academic administrators; they are institution builders and change leaders. This conference was a platform to discuss institutional challenges honestly and collaboratively, including governance reforms, faculty development, digital transformation, research funding, and global partnerships.

2.1. Objective: To critically examine the current status and systemic challenges of higher education in Andhra Pradesh (2026) by analysing four core dimensions—access, quality, enrolment, and governance—and to develop evidence-based policy recommendations that enhance inclusiveness, academic standards, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable sectoral growth.

2.2. Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative systematic review design that relies exclusively on existing literature rather than primary field data. It examines the condition and challenges of higher education in Andhra Pradesh (2026) through analysis of empirical studies, policy documents, accreditation reports, and statistical datasets. The review draws secondary information from scholarly databases and official institutional repositories, including research journals, national surveys, accreditation reports, and government policy documents. A structured search protocol using predefined keywords is applied to systematically retrieve relevant studies published between 2010 and 2026, with emphasis on recent research. Only peer-reviewed and policy-supported publications related to higher education issues are included, while opinion articles, news sources, and duplicate records are excluded. This filtering process ensures the reliability, relevance, and academic validity of the evidence used in the analysis.

3.1. Access to Higher Education in Andhra Pradesh: Andhra Pradesh has expanded higher education access through fee reimbursement schemes, scholarships for economically weaker and first-generation learners, and the development of rural college networks alongside strengthened public universities. The state allocated nearly ₹2,000 crore in 2025–26 for infrastructure, rural equity measures, and digital classrooms, improving geographical reach and enrolment capacity. Despite this progress, significant inequalities persist owing to weak rural infrastructure, faculty shortages, and limited digital connectivity. The concentration of research facilities in urban areas further widens regional disparities in terms of opportunities. As a result, the state has achieved enrolment growth but not equitable participation, reflecting quantitative expansion without corresponding social equity in educational access.

3.2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), representing the share of the 18–23 age group participating in higher education, indicates that Andhra Pradesh has entered a phase of expanded participation. With a GER of 36.5 per cent compared to the national average of about 28–29 per cent, the state demonstrates relatively stronger access and institutional reach than others. The gender distribution is also fairly balanced, with male GER at 37.7 per cent and female GER at 35.2 per cent. The slight difference between the two reflects growing female participation, supported by welfare incentives, fee-reimbursement programs, and rising aspirations for social mobility. A comparison of Gross Enrolment Ratio across central states shows that Andhra Pradesh (36.5%) performs above the national average but remains below leading states such as Tamil Nadu (47.0%), Kerala (41.3%), and Telangana (40.0%), while being comparable to Karnataka (36.2%) and slightly higher than Maharashtra (35.3%). In contrast, northern states, such as Uttar Pradesh (24.1%) and Bihar (17.1%), record substantially lower participation, highlighting a clear southern regional advantage in higher education access. The state's enrolment growth is primarily driven by institutional expansion rather than demographic change, supported by more than 2,600 colleges and 47 universities. Approximately 82.5% of students are enrolled in private institutions, with nearly 97% operating under an affiliated college system and an intense concentration in engineering, nursing, and other professional programs. This pattern reflects a market-led mass higher education model rather than a research-oriented public university system.

3.3. Quality of Higher Education: Institutional performance in Andhra Pradesh indicates moderate teaching outcomes but weak research competitiveness within the higher education system. National ranking trends show limited representation, with Andhra University around the top-50 range and only a few institutions appearing in the top-100, while none enter the top-10 or major research categories. The state contributes only about 2.47% of India's research publications, reflecting low research productivity and declining citation impact despite reasonable publication numbers. Structural factors play a significant role, as the system comprises about 47 universities and more than 2,600 colleges, nearly 97% of which operate under an affiliated model and about 82.5% of which are private. This structure promotes standardised, exam-oriented teaching and restricts innovation, mentoring, and research culture. Although student enrolment has grown significantly, faculty shortages, weak laboratories, and centralised evaluation patterns limit academic outcomes. Overall,

the state demonstrates strong access and moderate teaching quality but weak research, innovation, and global competitiveness. The higher education system, therefore, functions mainly as a degree-granting teaching network rather than a knowledge-producing ecosystem, indicating a massification–quality gap that requires greater research investment, faculty development, and institutional autonomy.

3.4. Emerging Reforms: Andhra Pradesh is shifting from an expansion-oriented higher education policy toward structural transformation aligned with the National Education Policy framework. Reforms include the Academic Bank of Credits, four-year undergraduate programmes, Professors of Practice, and Centres of Excellence, along with multidisciplinary curricula introducing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum studies. The LEAP model promotes outcome-based education through competency-based pedagogy, digital learning tools, bridge courses, and personalised assessment to improve learning outcomes and employability. Universities are also strengthening industry linkage through internships, innovation platforms, and startup ecosystems, aiming to convert institutions from teaching centres into productivity-oriented knowledge hubs. Faculty development programmes and performance-linked governance seek to improve accountability and teaching effectiveness. Digital ecosystems, learning analytics, and e-content platforms further support standardised and skill-focused education. Overall, the reforms indicate a transition toward a technology-driven, research-linked higher education system, although implementation depth varies across institutions.

3.5. Governance Challenges: Higher education governance in Andhra Pradesh is shifting from bureaucratic administration toward outcome-based management aligned with national reform frameworks, emphasising autonomy, accountability, employability, and research performance. However, the transition remains incomplete due to a dual-control structure in which the government manages finance and approvals, the state higher education council coordinates academics, and universities only implement policies, limiting absolute institutional autonomy. A significant constraint is the staffing crisis, with nearly 8,000 teaching vacancies and over 3,220 posts pending recruitment, which forces reliance on contract faculty and weakens quality outcomes. The dominance of private institutions—around 82.5% of colleges enrolling nearly 79.5% of students—adds regulatory complexity, uneven monitoring, and fee disputes. Although institutions are evaluated on rankings, research output, and employability, centralised finance, infrastructure gaps, and welfare-driven enrolment hinder performance. Centralised admission systems ensure uniformity but restrict innovation and institutional differentiation. Consequently, universities are controlled administratively yet assessed as autonomous bodies, creating a policy–implementation gap.

3.6. Policy Leadership: Higher education reforms in Andhra Pradesh emphasise stronger policy leadership through accountability, institutional autonomy, and global collaboration. However, structural governance issues persist, including centralised decision-making that slows reforms, overlapping regulations that increase the compliance burden, political appointments that weaken academic leadership, and funding delays that cause project stagnation. The evolving governance model seeks to address these problems by promoting vice-chancellor-led administration, industry–academic partnerships, performance-linked funding, and cluster

university structures. The sector's development can be understood in three phases: access expansion (2005–2018), focusing on participation; massification (2018–2024), marked by GER growth; and a quality transition phase (2024–2035) targeting research and employability. As enrolment has grown faster than institutional capacity, the policy challenge has shifted from increasing admissions to improving learning outcomes and graduate productivity.

4. Conclusion: Higher education in Andhra Pradesh has progressed significantly in terms of access and enrolment, achieving a GER above the national average and expanding opportunities for rural and first-generation learners. However, this quantitative growth has not been matched by equivalent improvements in quality, research productivity, and institutional autonomy. The system continues to operate primarily as a teaching-oriented, affiliated college network, with faculty shortages, infrastructure gaps, and uneven regional development. Recent reforms aligned with national policy aim to shift the focus toward employability, multidisciplinary learning, and innovation, yet governance constraints and regulatory complexity slow effective implementation. The state is therefore in a transition from massification to quality enhancement, where outcomes matter more than participation. Sustainable progress requires strengthening research ecosystems, empowering institutions with genuine autonomy, and aligning funding with performance capacity. Only by integrating access with academic excellence can higher education support long-term growth of the knowledge economy and societal development.

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