

Educational Privatization, Public Policy and Inclusive Growth in Telangana (2014–2025): Implications for SC/ST/Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

Since the formation of Telangana in 2014, the state has emerged as one of India's fastest-growing economies with a strong focus on inclusive development. However, the rapid expansion of private education has raised concerns about equity and social justice. This paper examines the intersection of educational privatization, public policy, and inclusive growth in Telangana from 2014 to 2025, with a particular focus on Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women. Drawing on data from UDISE+, AISHE, NFHS-5, the Socio-Economic Outlooks (SEO) 2023–2024, and secondary literature, the study evaluates trends in enrolment, dropout rates, digital access, and higher education participation. Using a sociological framework rooted in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Ambedkar's vision of social democracy, the paper argues that privatization has deepened stratification within the educational system, particularly affecting marginalized groups. Nevertheless, state policies, affirmative action, and entrepreneurship initiatives such as the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) have emerged as critical pathways for linking education to empowerment. The study concludes that Telangana's inclusive growth depends on strengthening public education, regulating private fees, bridging the digital divide, and integrating skill-based, entrepreneurial education aligned with DICCI's model of Dalit capitalism.

Keywords: Privatization, Education, Telangana, SC/ST, Women, DICCI, Inclusive Growth, Sociology of Education.

1. Introduction

Education plays a transformative role in social and economic mobility. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions equitable and quality education for all, emphasizing foundational literacy, flexibility, and public-private collaboration (Government of India, 2020). However, the increasing privatization of education has led to new forms of inequality, especially in states like Telangana, where private schools and colleges dominate enrolment. The privatization process, while expanding access for some, has also introduced barriers of affordability and cultural capital that exclude marginalized groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and women (Tilak, 2018; Kingdon, 2020). Telangana, formed in 2014, has witnessed a dual trajectory: economic dynamism and educational stratification. According to the Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook (SEO) 2024, the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) grew at 8.2 percent in 2023–24, and per capita income reached ₹3,12,398, nearly double the national average. Yet, disparities persist in literacy, dropout rates, and higher education participation among SCs, STs, and women (Government of Telangana, 2024). The challenge lies in aligning growth with inclusion through equitable education policy and regulation. Privatization in education refers to the shift from state-supported schooling to market-oriented provision, where private actors—ranging from corporate chains to budget schools—play an increasing role in service delivery (Jha & Parvati, 2019). Telangana mirrors this trend: in 2022–23, private unaided schools constituted 27.7% of total schools but enrolled 51% of students (Directorate of Economics and Statistics [DES], 2024). This concentration of enrolment in fee-charging institutions alters the social composition of schooling and affects access for low-income families. This study examines the social implications of educational privatization and policy interventions in Telangana from 2014 to 2025, focusing on marginalized communities. It also integrates the role of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) as an institutional bridge linking education, entrepreneurship, and empowerment.

2. Review of Literature

The sociology of education highlights how schools reproduce social hierarchies. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains how privileged families transmit linguistic and cultural assets that align with institutional norms, thereby securing educational advantages (Bourdieu, 1977). In the Indian context, this translates into caste- and class-based disparities in educational achievement (Deshpande, 2019).

Tilak (2018) argues that privatization of education in India reflects broader neoliberal shifts that commodify learning and weaken the redistributive function of the state. Kingdon (2020) observes that private schooling has expanded rapidly, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, but affordability remains the key determinant of access. Jha and Parvati (2019) emphasize that English-medium private schools often alienate first-generation learners from Dalit and tribal backgrounds, who face linguistic and cultural discontinuities. Empirical studies reveal persistent gaps despite policy initiatives. The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2022) reports a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 40.0 for Telangana in higher education, with SCs at 39.2 and STs at 38.0—below the state average. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2023) found that basic reading and arithmetic competencies among rural children declined post-pandemic, with learning gaps wider in government than private schools. NFHS-5 (2019–21) data show that only 60% of women (15–49) in Telangana have mobile phones, and just 47% among ST women, underscoring the digital divide.

Recent literature (Majumdar, 2021; Mehrotra, 2022) highlights that privatization increases stratification and limits educational mobility for marginalized communities. Studies also point to gendered dimensions—women's educational achievements are constrained by early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and limited access to higher education and digital resources (UNESCO, 2023).

From a policy perspective, Telangana has implemented inclusive programs such as Kalyana Lakshmi, Aasara, Dalit Bandhu, and expansion of residential schools (Gurukulams) for SC, ST, BC, and minority students. However, the private sector's dominance in schooling has introduced affordability pressures, necessitating stronger regulation (The Hindu, 2024).

The literature thus converges on three themes: (1) privatization amplifies inequality through differential access; (2) state intervention remains critical for equity; and (3) entrepreneurship and skills development, as promoted by DICCI and related programs, are essential to translate education into empowerment.

3. Empirical Analysis: Educational Trends in Telangana (2014–2025)

3.1 School Enrolment and Privatization

Telangana's school system comprises 40,656 institutions (UDISE+, 2023–24). Private unaided schools, though only about one-fourth of the total, enrol more than half the students—33.38 lakh out of 62.31 lakh (DES, 2024). This reveals a structural shift toward privatized provision.

Residential schools managed by welfare departments serve approximately 4.49 lakh students—significant for SC/ST inclusion but comparatively

small in scale (Government of Telangana, 2024). These include 268 Social Welfare Residential Schools, 216 Tribal Welfare institutions, 281 BC Welfare schools, and 200 Minority Welfare institutions. Their pass rates are among the highest in the state (SSC \approx 88%, Intermediate \approx 91%), showing the potential of targeted public investment.

3.2 Literacy and Gender Gaps

Census 2011 established the baseline: overall literacy in Telangana was 66.46% (male 74.95%, female 57.92%). By 2024, the SEO reports literacy above 72%, with male literacy at 79% and female literacy at 65%. SC literacy has risen from 52.5% (2011) to an estimated 66% (2024), and ST literacy from 49.5% to 63%, reflecting steady but uneven progress (SEO 2024). Female literacy improvement is notable but still trails urban averages, especially in tribal districts like Adilabad and Bhadrakali Kothagudem.

3.3 Dropout and Retention

UDISE+ 2023–24 data show primary and upper-primary retention near 95%, but secondary dropout stands at 13.2% (boys 14.0%, girls 12.3%), and higher-secondary dropout at 8.1%. SC and ST students are overrepresented among dropouts due to financial stress and early marriage (UDISE+, 2024). Media reports and district reviews attribute many secondary dropouts to rising private school fees and insufficient state reimbursements.

3.3 Higher Education Access

Telangana's higher education GER improved to 40.0 in 2021–22, exceeding the national average (AISHE, 2022). However, disparities remain: SC GER 39.2 and ST GER 38.0, compared to 44.1 for general category students. Around 70% of higher education institutions in Telangana are privately managed, and affordability is a major constraint for marginalized students. Post-matric scholarships and overseas study schemes have supported nearly 8.3 lakh students across SC/ST/BC/Minority categories in 2023–24, with disbursements exceeding ₹9,550 crore (SEO, 2024).

3.5 Digital Divide and Gender

NFHS-5 data show that only 60% of women aged 15–49 own a mobile phone, with 66% of users able to read text messages; among ST women, ownership drops to 47%. This limits access to digital learning, online

classes, and ed-tech resources. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these divides, reinforcing private school advantages where technology was more integrated (ASER, 2023).

4. Discussion: Privatization, Policy, and Social Inclusion

4.1 Sociology of Education and Inequality

From a sociological lens, privatization reinforces social hierarchies by translating economic capital into educational advantage. Bourdieu (1977) explains how schools legitimize social inequality through differential access to cultural capital. In Telangana, English-medium private schools symbolize modernity and mobility but often alienate first-generation learners from SC/ST backgrounds. Language barriers, fee structures, and social exclusion perpetuate educational disadvantage (Jha&Parvati, 2019). Tilak (2018) and Kingdon (2020) argue that privatization shifts education from a right to a commodity, where access is determined by ability to pay. This is visible in Telangana's urban centers, where private schools charge fees exceeding ₹50,000 annually, making them inaccessible to lower-income Dalit and tribal families. Consequently, education reproduces rather than reduces inequality, confirming Bourdieu's thesis.

4.2 Gendered Dimensions

While Telangana has made progress in female education—girls' enrolment parity index at 1.04 (UDISE+, 2024)—secondary dropout among girls remains high in rural and tribal regions. Socio-cultural factors intersect with economic constraints to restrict higher education transition. Programs like Kalyana Lakshmi and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have improved attendance, but sustained retention requires affordable and safe educational environments.

4.3 NEP 2020 and Policy Reform

The National Education Policy (2020) envisions a “light but tight” regulatory framework for private institutions, emphasizing equity, transparency, and quality assurance. In Telangana, however, regulatory enforcement remains limited. The High Court's interventions in fee regulation (The Hindu, 2024) underscore the tension between market autonomy and social responsibility. To ensure inclusivity, NEP's provisions must translate into proactive state monitoring and targeted subsidies for marginalized learners.

4.3 From Education to Entrepreneurship: The DICCI Model in Telangana

Educational attainment alone does not guarantee empowerment unless linked to livelihood opportunities. The Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI), founded by Dr. Milind Kamble, advances Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision of economic self-reliance through entrepreneurship. DICCI's Telangana Chapter has collaborated with the state government under the T-PRIDE and Dalit Bandhu schemes, offering capital subsidies (up to 45% for SC/ST entrepreneurs) and mentorship programs for first-generation business owners (DICCI, 2024). By connecting educated SC/ST youth to finance, procurement, and market linkages, DICCI bridges the gap between education and economic agency. This model reframes education not merely as credential attainment but as a pathway to job creation. Initiatives like BlueFin Solutions LLP and Stand-Up India partnerships demonstrate how educated Dalit entrepreneurs transform state support into sustainable enterprises (Kamble, 2022). Thus, education becomes a means of structural transformation, consistent with Ambedkarite socio-economic justice.

4.4 Inclusive Growth and the Way Forward

Telangana's growth narrative is inclusive in intent but uneven in outcomes. While schemes like Dalit Bandhu, Kalyana Lakshmi, and T-PRIDE have improved SC/ST welfare, privatization in education risks deepening inequality if unchecked. Bridging public-private divides requires integrating equity goals into educational and industrial policies.

5. Policy Implications and Conclusion

To achieve genuine inclusive growth, Telangana must align educational expansion with equity-oriented regulation and skill-based empowerment. The following policy imperatives emerge from this study:

1. Strengthen Public Education: Expand and modernize Gurukulam and Model Schools to provide quality alternatives to private institutions, particularly in rural and tribal areas.
2. Regulate Private Fees: Institutionalize transparent district-level fee committees and enforce NEP's "light but tight" principles.
3. Bridge the Digital Divide: Provide subsidized devices and connectivity for SC/ST and rural women, integrating digital literacy into curricula.
4. Improve Retention and Transition: Offer conditional cash transfers or performance-linked scholarships at secondary and higher-secondary levels to reduce dropout.

5. Link Education with Entrepreneurship: Partner with DICCI and industry to create pathways from education to enterprise—through Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs), incubation centers, and public procurement quotas.
6. Gender Mainstreaming: Invest in women's hostels, safety infrastructure, and mentorship to sustain higher education participation.

Conclusion: Telangana's experience illustrates both the promise and peril of educational privatization. While it has expanded options and innovation, it also reproduces social inequities unless counterbalanced by inclusive policy design. Integrating DICCI's entrepreneurial ecosystem within educational policy can transform education into a vehicle for empowerment, fulfilling Ambedkar's vision of making Dalits and Adivasis "job-givers, not job-seekers." The future of inclusive growth in Telangana thus rests on harmonizing privatization with public purpose—where education is not a privilege but a shared right enabling dignity, mobility, and social justice.

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