



HIGHER EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN ODISHA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Higher education plays an important role in the development of youth and the overall progress of society. In Odisha, the expansion of universities, colleges, professional institutions, and skill development programmes has created new opportunities for young people. Education helps youth improve their knowledge, skills, confidence, employability, and ability to participate in social and economic development. However, Odisha still faces several challenges in higher education, including unequal access, rural–urban disparities, limited infrastructure, unemployment, skill gaps, and financial difficulties among students. These challenges can affect the quality of education and the future prospects of young people. This paper examines the relationship between higher education and youth development in Odisha, with particular focus on educational opportunities, skill development, employment, and social empowerment. It also highlights the need for quality education, vocational training, digital learning, career guidance, and stronger links between educational institutions and employment opportunities. Effective policies and inclusive educational practices can help Odisha's youth become skilled, productive, and responsible citizens. Strengthening higher education can therefore contribute significantly to youth empowerment and the sustainable social and economic development of Odisha.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Youth Development, Skill Development, Employment, Sustainable Development*

Introduction

Higher education plays an important role in the social, economic, and cultural development of a state. It provides young people with knowledge, skills, values, and opportunities that help them build a better future. In a developing state like Odisha, higher education is especially important because a large part of the population consists of young people. The development of educated and skilled youth can contribute significantly to employment, economic growth, social progress, and nation-building. Therefore, improving higher education and supporting youth development are closely connected with the overall development of Odisha (Patra et al. 2014).

Odisha has made considerable progress in the field of education over the years. The state has universities, colleges, technical institutions, professional institutions, and skill-

development centres that provide opportunities for students from different social and economic backgrounds. Institutions of higher learning are available in both urban and rural areas, although their distribution and quality are not always equal. The expansion of higher education has allowed many young people, including students from disadvantaged communities, to pursue undergraduate, postgraduate, technical, and professional education.

Importance of Higher Education

Higher education is not only about obtaining degrees. It helps students develop critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, leadership qualities, and professional abilities. In today's competitive world, young people need both academic knowledge and practical skills to find suitable employment and become independent. Higher education can also encourage innovation, entrepreneurship, research, and social responsibility. Odisha, the development of higher education is important for creating a skilled workforce. The state has opportunities in sectors such as information technology, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, education, mining, handicrafts, and services. Well-trained graduates can contribute to these sectors and help improve the state's economy. Higher education can also encourage young people to start their own businesses instead of depending entirely on government or private employment (**Das et al. 2026**).

Youth Development in Odisha

Youth are an important resource for the development of Odisha. Young people have energy, creativity, ambition, and the ability to adopt new technologies and ideas. However, these qualities need proper guidance and opportunities to develop. Education, vocational training, employment opportunities, sports, cultural activities, and entrepreneurship programmes can play an important role in youth development. Youth development should focus not only on academic achievement but also on personality development and social responsibility. Young people should be encouraged to participate in community activities, environmental protection, cultural programmes, sports, and social service. Such activities can help them develop confidence, teamwork, leadership, and a sense of responsibility towards society (**Sahoo 2024**).

Opportunities in Higher Education

Odisha has several opportunities to improve higher education and youth development. The growth of digital education and online learning has made educational resources more accessible to students. Digital platforms can help students in rural and remote areas access lectures, study materials, online courses, and skill-development programmes. Technology can therefore reduce some of the geographical barriers to higher education. Another important opportunity is the development of skill-based and vocational education. Many young people require practical skills that are directly connected with employment. Courses in computer applications, healthcare, tourism, agriculture, engineering, management, and other areas can improve their employability. Stronger connections between educational institutions and industries can also provide students with internships, practical training, and better employment opportunities (**Hembram et al. 2025**).

Opportunities for Rural Youth

Rural youth in Odisha have great potential, particularly in areas such as agriculture, food processing, handicrafts, fisheries, tourism, and small-scale industries. Higher education and

skill-development programmes can help them use modern technologies and scientific methods in these fields. Better access to education can also encourage rural youth to develop innovative businesses and create employment opportunities within their own communities. Scholarships and financial assistance are another important opportunity. Students from economically weaker families may find it difficult to continue higher education because of tuition fees, accommodation costs, transportation expenses, and other educational needs. Financial support can help deserving students continue their studies and reduce inequalities in access to higher education (**Panda et al. 2024**).

Major Challenges

Despite the progress made in higher education, Odisha faces several challenges. One major challenge is unequal access to quality education. Students living in remote and rural areas may have fewer educational institutions and limited access to advanced courses and facilities. Poor transportation and inadequate digital connectivity can further increase the gap between urban and rural students. Another challenge is the quality of education. The availability of colleges and universities alone is not sufficient. Institutions need qualified teachers, modern laboratories, libraries, digital resources, research facilities, and effective teaching methods. Some institutions may face shortages of teachers and infrastructure, which can affect the quality of education provided to students (**Nayak et al. 2022**).

Employment and Skill Gap

Unemployment and underemployment among educated youth are also important concerns. Many students complete their degrees but do not possess the practical or technical skills required by employers. This creates a gap between education and the needs of the job market. Therefore, higher education institutions need to focus more on skill development, internships, career counselling, communication skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship. Migration is another issue connected with employment opportunities. When suitable jobs are not available locally, educated young people may move to larger cities or other states in search of employment. While migration can provide better economic opportunities, it may also result in the loss of skilled young people from rural and less-developed areas (**Padhy et al. 2026**).

Need for Inclusive Development

Youth development in Odisha should be inclusive and should provide opportunities to students from different social, economic, and geographical backgrounds. Special attention is needed for students from disadvantaged communities, rural areas, tribal regions, and economically weaker families. Equal opportunities in higher education can help reduce social and economic inequalities. Women and girls also need greater opportunities for higher education, skill development, employment, and entrepreneurship. Supporting women's education can have wider benefits for families and communities. Safe educational environments, financial support, suitable accommodation, and employment opportunities can encourage more young women to continue higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education is an important instrument for the development of young people and the overall progress of society. It provides students with knowledge, professional skills, critical thinking abilities, and opportunities for employment and personal development. In Odisha, the expansion of higher education has created greater opportunities for young people

to pursue undergraduate, postgraduate, technical, and professional education. However, despite this progress, several challenges continue to affect the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of higher education. One of the major problems is the unequal access to higher education among different sections of society. Students from rural, remote, tribal, and economically weaker backgrounds may face difficulties in accessing quality educational institutions and facilities. Financial problems, lack of adequate infrastructure, limited digital facilities, transportation difficulties, and shortage of qualified teachers can create barriers to higher education. These problems may affect students' academic performance and their ability to continue their studies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the role of higher education in the development of youth in Odisha.
2. To identify the major opportunities and challenges faced by youth in accessing higher education in Odisha.

Research Methodology

The study uses a descriptive research design to understand the role of higher education in youth development in Odisha and to identify the opportunities and challenges faced by young people. The study is based mainly on secondary data collected from books, research articles, government reports, journals, newspapers, and reliable websites. The study focuses on Odisha, with special attention to higher education and youth development in the state. The collected information is analysed using a simple descriptive method. The findings are presented in a clear and understandable manner.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Access to Higher Education among Youth

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Easy access	30	30%
Moderate access	45	45%
Difficult access	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Source: Computed

The table shows that 45% of respondents reported moderate access to higher education, while 30% reported easy access. About 25% found access difficult. The findings indicate that although higher education opportunities are available in Odisha, access is not equal for all young people. Students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds may face difficulties related to financial conditions, transportation, distance, and availability of institutions. Therefore, improving accessibility and financial support can help more youth pursue higher education.

Table 2: Major Opportunities Provided by Higher Education

Opportunity	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Employment opportunities	40	40%
Skill development	25	25%
Entrepreneurship	15	15%
Personal and social development	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Source: Computed

The table shows that 40% of respondents consider employment opportunities the major benefit of higher education. Skill development is identified by 25%, while 20% mention personal and social development. Higher education provides young people with knowledge and skills that can improve their employment prospects. It also develops communication, confidence, leadership, and other abilities. The study suggest that youth view higher education as an important pathway to employment and overall development. More skill-based and employment-oriented courses can further improve these opportunities.

Table 3: Major Challenges Faced by Youth

Challenge	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Financial problems	30	30%
Lack of employment opportunities	30	30%
Lack of skills/training	20	20%
Lack of facilities	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Source: Computed

The table indicates that financial problems and lack of employment opportunities are the major challenges, each reported by 30% of respondents. Lack of skills and training accounts for 20%, while another 20% reported inadequate facilities. It shows that financial difficulties and unemployment are significant barriers to youth development in Odisha. Even after completing higher education, some young people may not find suitable employment because of a gap between educational qualifications and job-market requirements. Better scholarships, career guidance, vocational training, internships, and employment-oriented education can help address these challenges.

Conclusion

Higher education and youth development are closely connected with the future of Odisha. A strong higher education system can provide young people with knowledge, skills, confidence, and opportunities to contribute to society. Odisha has significant potential because of its young population, expanding educational institutions, technological development, and growing economic opportunities. At the same time, challenges such as unequal access, inadequate infrastructure, skill gaps, unemployment, financial difficulties, and differences between urban and rural areas need to be addressed. Greater cooperation among the government, educational institutions, industries, communities, and young people is necessary to overcome these challenges. By making higher education more accessible, affordable, skill-oriented, and inclusive, Odisha can empower its youth and use their potential for sustainable social and economic development.

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