AD EDUXIAN JOURNAL
A Quarterly Multidisciplinary Blind Peer Reviewed & Refereed Online International Journal
Google Scholar Indexing PIF: 1.048(I2OR), 3.125 (IIFS) & 3.8(SJIF)
Vol (3), Issue (3), July-September 2026 ISSN: 3048-7951

From Policy Provision to Educational Inclusion: Assessing the Implementation of Affirmative Support for Muslim Students in Indian Higher Education

Ikhlas Ahmad[1], Meenakshi Yadav[2], Vijay Anand[3], Alok Gardia[4]

DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23523722

Review: 14/09/2026 Acceptance: 15/09/2026 Publication:25/10/2026

Abstract

This article examines the implementation gap between affirmative educational policy and substantive inclusion of Muslim students in Indian higher education. Rather than treating scholarships and other targeted interventions as ends in themselves, the study asks whether policy support is translated into timely access, participation, persistence, and academic progression. The paper uses a descriptive-analytical design based on secondary evidence from government reports, policy documents, higher-education statistics, and peer-reviewed scholarship. Attention is given to the Sachar Committee findings, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), Ministry of Minority affairs chemes, and recent empirical work on affirmative action and Muslim participation. The review identifies a recurring implementation chain: policy recognition is relatively strong, but outreach, documentation, timely disbursement, institutional support, regional capacity, and outcome monitoring remain uneven. The article also argues that religious identity should not be treated as a homogeneous explanatory category. Socio-economic status, gender, region, prior school type, language, caste location within Muslim communities, and first-generation status interact to shape higher-education trajectories. The study contributes a policy-implementation perspective by shifting attention from the number of schemes announced to the quality of delivery and the outcomes achieved. It proposes a measurable inclusion framework covering access, affordability, participation, retention, completion, academic support, campus climate, and transition to employment. The article concludes that a more effective policy architecture requires integrated data systems, single-window scholarship support, bridge programs, institutional SEDG mechanisms, gender-sensitive outreach, transparent monitoring and periodic outcome evaluation.

Keywords: Muslim students, higher education, affirmative action, policy implementation, SEDGs, NEP 2020.

1. Introduction:

Higher education has become one of the principal routes through which individuals convert educational credentials into occupational mobility, social participation and greater economic security. Yet the expansion of India's higher-education system has not automatically produced equal participation across communities. The issue is particularly important for Muslims, who constitute India's largest religious minority and have historically experienced disadvantages in schooling, educational attainment and access to formal employment. The Sachar Committee Report brought these concerns into national policy debate by documenting gaps in literacy, school participation, higher education and public employment (Government of India, 2006). Subsequent research has continued to show that educational inequality among Muslims is shaped by the interaction of household resources, geography, gender, schooling quality, social location and access to institutional information (Basant & Shariff, 2010; Bisht, 2018; Hasan & Mehta, 2006).

[1] Research Scholar, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, India
[2] Research Scholar, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, India
[3] Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, India
[4] Professor, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, UP, India

The policy response has been substantial but fragmented. Central and state governments have used scholarships, fellowships, coaching, educational loans, minority institutions and broader affirmative-action provisions to improve participation. The Ministry of Minority Affairs has historically administered targeted scholarship programs for notified minority communities, while the UGC and higher-education institutions operate broader equity and inclusion mechanisms. NEP 2020 adds a new policy layer by identifying minorities and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups as requiring focused support and by calling for improved access, financial assistance, outreach, local-language and bilingual education, and institutional support (Ministry of Education, 2020). The UGC's 2024 SEDG guidelines similarly identify religious minorities, first-generation learners and vernacular-medium students among groups that may experience structural disadvantage (UGC, 2024). The central problem, therefore, is no longer simply whether government initiatives exist. The more analytically important question is what happens between policy design and the student's experience. A scholarship may exist on paper but still fail to reduce exclusion if eligible students do not know about it, cannot complete digital applications, face documentation difficulties, receive funds after the academic crisis has already occurred, or lack academic and institutional support after admission. In this sense, policy implementation is a chain rather than a single event. Weakness at any link can reduce the effect of an otherwise well-designed intervention. Recent scholarship strengthens the case for examining this implementation chain. Surana and Rai (2025), studying affirmative action for disadvantaged Muslim groups in Andhra Pradesh, find that quota-based intervention increased educational attainment among targeted groups, although the gains were not uniform by gender. Ahmad, Ayat, and Gardia (2026) similarly document continuing participation deficits in Muslim higher education using recent education datasets.

These findings suggest that targeted interventions can matter, but their effects depend on policy design, institutional context and the characteristics of the beneficiaries. This article therefore reframes the discussion from 'schemes for Muslims' to 'implementation of educational inclusion'. It asks how far existing measures address the full pathway from aspiration and entry to persistence and progression. It also considers the implications of NEP 2020's broader equity framework and the emerging Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) agenda. The latter is relevant not because Muslim education should be separated from Indian education, but because inclusion requires institutions to recognize linguistic, cultural and knowledge diversity without compromising academic standards. The paper makes four contributions. First, it consolidates major policy interventions relevant to Muslim participation in higher education. Second, it maps the principal implementation barriers across administrative, economic, informational, geographic, institutional and pedagogical dimensions. Third, it synthesizes the literature in a structured review table to identify what is established and where evidence remains thin. Fourth, it proposes an outcome-oriented policy framework that can be tested through future empirical research. The emphasis throughout is on evidence and policy mechanisms rather than on assumptions about Muslim students as a homogeneous group.

2. Research Questions

The study addresses two research questions:

RQ1. How adequately do government affirmative and inclusion-oriented initiatives address the access, affordability, participation and progression needs of Muslim students in Indian higher education?

RQ2. What implementation barriers limit the effectiveness of these initiatives, and what policy and institutional reforms could improve measurable educational outcomes for Muslim students?

3. Objectives of the Study

The study has four objectives:

A. To map major government initiatives and policy mechanisms relevant to Muslim students' participation in higher education.
B. To examine the implementation barriers affecting awareness, application, disbursement, participation, retention and progression.
C. To synthesize empirical and policy literature on Muslim educational disadvantage and affirmative action in India.
D. To develop an evidence-informed framework for strengthening implementation, monitoring and institutional support.

4. Theoretical Framework

The article combines social justice, capability and policy-implementation perspectives. A social-justice approach distinguishes between distributive, procedural and cognitional dimensions of equity. Distributive justice asks whether resources such as scholarships and seats reach disadvantaged learners. Procedural justice asks whether access to those resources is governed by transparent, navigable and non-discriminatory procedures. Cognitional or epistemic justice asks whether institutional practices respect learners' linguistic, cultural and knowledge backgrounds (Fraser, 2008; Young, 1990). The capability approach adds an important distinction between formal opportunity and substantive freedom. Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) emphasize that resources do not automatically become capabilities. A scholarship is a resource; the ability to remain enrolled, complete a degree and use the qualification productively is a capability outcome. The same amount of financial assistance can have different effects for students depending on household income, travel distance, digital access, gender norms, prior schooling and institutional quality. Policy implementation theory further suggests that the effects of a programme depend on street-level administration, institutional capacity and the interpretation of policy rules in practice (Lipsky, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). This is particularly relevant to scholarships and support schemes because students interact not only with ministries but also with universities, banks, verification authorities, portal systems and local officials.

The conceptual model used here can be expressed as: policy intent → awareness and eligibility → application and verification → timely financial/institutional support → academic participation → retention and completion → transition to employment or further study.

Cross-cutting factors such as gender, income, location, language, disability, digital access and first-generation status influence every stage. The model therefore avoids a narrow input-output interpretation and treats inclusion as a cumulative process.

5. Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design based on secondary data and documentary analysis. The evidence base consists of, official government and UGC documents; higher education statistics and budget documents; peer-reviewed research and scholarly books; and, recent empirical and policy studies available through recognized academic platforms. The attached source manuscript was used as the starting policy map, while current official and scholarly sources were checked to update and strengthen the argument. The analysis

follows, policy documents were reviewed to identify the stated objectives, target groups and implementation mechanisms of relevant interventions. The literature was organized thematically around educational status, affirmative action, financial support, institutional barriers, gender, regional inequality and policy implementation. The evidence was synthesized into an implementation matrix that distinguishes policy availability from effective delivery. The paper avoids treating Muslim students as a uniform population. Where evidence is available, attention is given to differences associated with gender, socio-economic position, geography, school background, and backward-class status.

6. Review of Related Literature:

Higher education is essential for social mobility, economic security, and equal opportunities. However, its expansion in India has not eliminated educational inequalities experienced by Muslim students. The Sachar Committee Report (Government of India, 2006) highlighted persistent disadvantages in educational attainment and public employment. Government initiatives, including scholarships, fellowships, coaching programs, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, aim to improve access and inclusion. Nevertheless, the availability of these measures does not guarantee their effective implementation. Limited awareness, digital difficulties, documentation requirements, delayed financial assistance, gender-related constraints, and inadequate institutional support may prevent eligible students from fully benefiting. Existing research highlights educational disadvantages among Muslims, but evidence examining the complete journey from policy eligibility to enrolment, retention, graduation, and employment remains limited. Therefore, this study examines government initiatives supporting Muslim students in Indian higher education, identifies implementation barriers, and proposes measures to strengthen educational inclusion. Using secondary sources and documentary analysis, it develops an outcome-oriented framework emphasizing access, affordability, participation, retention, completion, and progression. The study seeks to bridge the gap between policy commitments and students' educational experiences.

Table 1. Selected literature on Muslim educational inclusion and affirmative action

Author/Source	Focus	Main contribution	Relevance to present study	Evidence gap
Government of India (2006)	Muslim socio-economic and educational status	Established major participation and attainment deficits	Provides baseline for policy need	Old baseline; limited outcome tracking after 2006
Basant & Shariff (2010)	Muslim socio-economic conditions	Links education with broader social and economic disadvantage	Supports multidimensional analysis	Does not evaluate current scheme delivery
Hasan & Mehta (2006)	Educational inequality across social/religious groups	Shows persistent group differences in attainment	Supports structural interpretation	Pre-NEP evidence
Desai & Kulkarni (2008)	Affirmative action and educational inequality	Muslim gains differed from groups covered by reservation	Highlights policy coverage gap	Primarily historical survey data
Bisht (2018)	Challenges in Muslim education	Identifies economic, institutional and access barriers	Maps implementation constraints	Mostly descriptive secondary analysis

Bagde et al. (2016)	Affirmative action in higher education	Targeted quotas increased college attendance	Provides evidence that affirmative policy can work	Focuses on caste/gender rather than religion
Basant & Sen (2020)	OBC quota in higher education	Effects vary by region and policy history	Shows importance of institutional context	Not Muslim-specific
Alam (2023)	Reservation policy for Muslims	Examines legal and policy debates around Muslim representation	Clarifies limits of religion-based reservation	Normative and policy-focused
Surana & Rai (2025)	Affirmative action for disadvantaged Muslims	Finds positive educational-attainment effects, with gender differences	Direct evidence on Muslim affirmative action	State-specific context
Ahmad et al. (2026)	Muslim enrolment in higher education	Documents continuing participation deficit using recent datasets	Provides contemporary participation context	Limited causal evaluation of schemes
Ministry of Education (2020)	NEP 2020 equity and inclusion	Recognizes minorities/SEDGs and barriers to higher education	Policy framework for inclusion	Implementation varies by institution
UGC (2024)	SEDG implementation in HEIs	Mandates SEDG Cells, outreach, bridge courses and grievance support	Provides institutional mechanism	Outcome effectiveness requires evaluation

Government Initiatives and Policy Architecture

India's policy architecture for Muslim students operates through a combination of minority-targeted schemes and universal or category-neutral inclusion mechanisms. This distinction matters. Muslims are a notified religious minority, but the Constitution does not create a blanket religion-based reservation category in higher education. Instead, targeted support has generally taken the form of scholarships, fellowships, coaching, educational assistance and minority-institution provisions, while backward-class Muslims may receive benefits where their social group is included in the relevant OBC framework (Alam, 2023).

The scholarship architecture has historically included Pre-Matric, Post-Matric and Merit-cum-Means support under the Ministry of Minority Affairs. The Merit-cum-Means scheme specifically supports minority students in professional and technical undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Official scheme documents show that selection combines state/community allocations, institutional categories, academic merit and income criteria, while renewal is linked to academic performance (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2025). Such design illustrates both the potential and complexity of affirmative support: the programme attempts to combine need and merit, but the application and verification chain can become difficult for students with limited administrative capacity.

The Ministry's 2024-25 output-outcome framework set targets for scholarship coverage and explicitly included indicators for girls and renewal. This is a positive movement toward performance-oriented budgeting because it shifts attention from expenditure alone to coverage and continuity (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2024). At the same time, budget documents show substantial variation between budget estimates, revised estimates and actual expenditure across schemes. Such variation should not automatically be interpreted as policy failure because expenditure may be affected by demand, scheme restructuring and administrative changes; nevertheless, persistent gaps deserve systematic evaluation. Fellowships and coaching have also formed part of the policy ecosystem. The Maulana Azad National Fellowship was designed to support minority research scholars, while Free Coaching and Allied support sought to improve preparation for competitive examinations. Some programs have been discontinued, merged or changed over time. This policy volatility creates a continuity problem for students planning multi-year educational pathways. A fellowship for doctoral study, for example, is not merely a financial transfer; it shapes whether a student can enter and remain in research.

The policy architecture also extends beyond minority-specific schemes. NEP 2020 directs governments and HEIs to improve financial assistance, outreach, local-language and bilingual education, access in underserved areas, and student support. The UGC's SEDG guidelines require HEIs to establish SEDG Cells and explicitly connect these cells with scholarships, bridge courses, outreach, and grievance redressal (UGC, 2024). This creates an opportunity to integrate minority-targeted support with mainstream institutional equity structures rather than treating Muslim students as an isolated policy category. The central policy lesson is therefore one of convergence. A scholarship ministry, a university's student-support office, the UGC, state governments and digital application systems can each perform their assigned function and yet produce a weak overall outcome if their functions are not coordinated. Effective affirmative policy requires a connected institutional pathway.

Table 2. Major interventions and implementation implications

Intervention	Primary purpose	Higher-education relevance	Typical implementation risk	Recommended indicator
Post-Matric Scholarship	Reduce financial barriers	Supports students from senior secondary through higher levels	Delayed payment/documentation	Payment timeliness; renewal rate
Merit-cum-Means Scholarship	Support professional/technical study	Targets costly UG/PG professional courses	Limited coverage; verification delays	Eligible-to-awarded ratio
Fellowship support	Enables advanced research	Supports postgraduate/research progression	Policy discontinuity	Completion and research progression
Free Coaching & Allied support	Improve competitive-exam preparation	Supports transition to public/professional careers	Uneven institutional quality	Completion and exam outcomes
Nai Udaan / comparable support	Support candidates after preliminary success	Bridges exam stages	Scheme continuity and awareness	Mains qualification rate

UGC SEDG Cells	Institutionalize inclusion	Coordinates support within HEIs	Nominal/under-resourced cells	Cases resolved; outreach coverage
Bridge courses	Reduce academic transition barriers	Supports first-generation/vernacular entrants	Weak academic integration	First-year retention and credits earned

8. Implementation Challenges

The effectiveness of educational support programs depends not only on their availability but also on how easily students can access and benefit from them. Muslim students in higher education may encounter several interconnected barriers.

a. **Awareness and Information Barriers.** Limited information about scholarships, eligibility requirements, and application procedures can prevent eligible students, particularly first-generation learners, from accessing government assistance. NEP 2020 and the UGC's SEDG framework emphasize awareness and institutional outreach.
b. **Digital and Documentation Barriers.** Online applications may simplify administration, but difficulties with internet access, digital literacy, bank details, income certificates, and verification can create obstacles. Assisted application services are therefore essential.
c. **Administrative Delays.** Late scholarship payments can disrupt fee submission, hostel arrangements, and access to learning materials. Better coordination among government departments, banks, and universities is needed to ensure timely assistance.
d. Financial Constraints. Scholarships may not cover the total cost of higher education, including accommodation, transport, food, books, and internet access. These additional expenses **can** place considerable pressure on low-income households.
e. **Regional and Institutional Inequalities.** Unequal access to colleges and differences in institutional quality can affect educational opportunities. As Basant and Sen (2020) indicate in the context of OBC reservation, policy outcomes may vary across regions and institutional settings.
f. **Gender-Related Barriers.** Muslim women may face challenges associated with mobility, safety, family responsibilities, and social expectations. Surana and Rai (2025) highlight gender differences in the educational effects of affirmative action. Scholarships should therefore be complemented by safe transport, hostel facilities, mentoring, and appropriate institutional support.
g. **Language and Academic Transitions.** Students from regional-language or religious-school backgrounds may need additional support in adjusting to university-level academic practices and English-medium instruction. Bridge courses and academic mentoring can ease this transition.
h. **Campus Inclusion and Belonging.** Discrimination, stereotyping, or social isolation may affect students' confidence and participation. Functional grievance mechanisms, mentoring, and inclusive campus practices are important.
i. **Inadequate Outcome Monitoring.** Recording applications and scholarship disbursements is insufficient. Institutions should also monitor retention, degree completion, and progression while protecting student privacy.
j. **Policy Discontinuity.** Changes or discontinuation of schemes can create uncertainty. Clear transition arrangements are necessary to protect students already receiving support.

9. Empirical and Policy Evidence: Key Trends

The evidence assembled for this review points to three broad trends. First, Muslim participation in higher education has improved over the long term, but the improvement has not eliminated the participation gap. The most recent government overview reports that total higher-education enrolment in India reached about 4.46 crore in 2022-23, demonstrating the scale of system expansion (Ministry of Education, 2025). Second, the policy effect is stronger when affirmative measures alter actual constraints rather than simply announcing eligibility. The Andhra Pradesh evidence reported by Surana and Rai (2025) is important because it uses a quasi-experimental design and finds increased educational attainment among targeted Muslim groups. Comparative evidence from caste-based programs likewise shows that affirmative admissions can raise participation without necessarily reducing academic success (Bagde et al., 2016). These findings support the proposition that affirmative policy can be effective when it changes incentives and access. Third, administrative performance matters. Ministry budget and outcome documents show that the government increasingly articulates measurable coverage targets, including targets for girls and renewal. The policy direction is therefore moving toward monitoring, but the research literature still lacks enough independent evaluations connecting scheme participation to retention, completion and employment. The following implementation matrix synthesizes the evidence into a practical assessment framework.

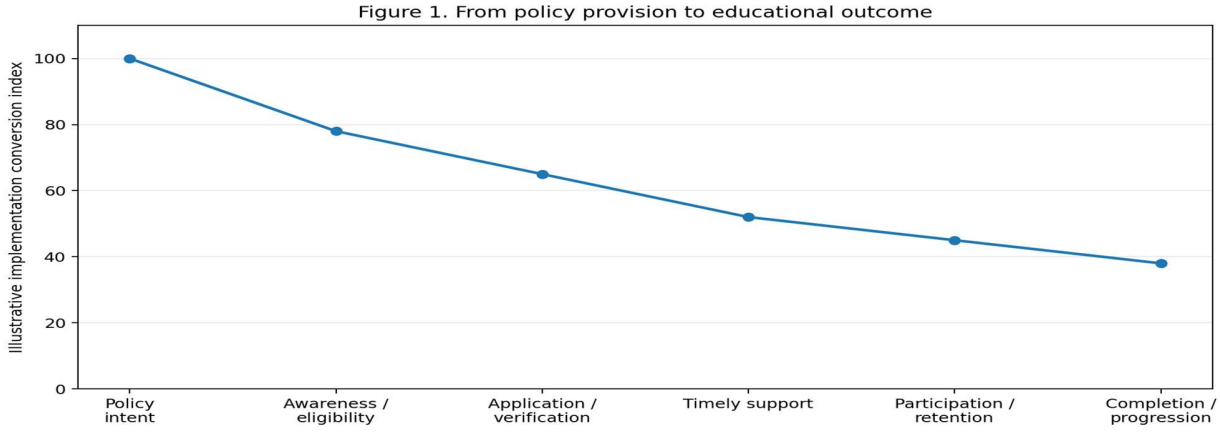


Figure 1. Conceptual illustration of attrition across the policy-to-outcome pathway. Values are illustrative, not observed national estimates.

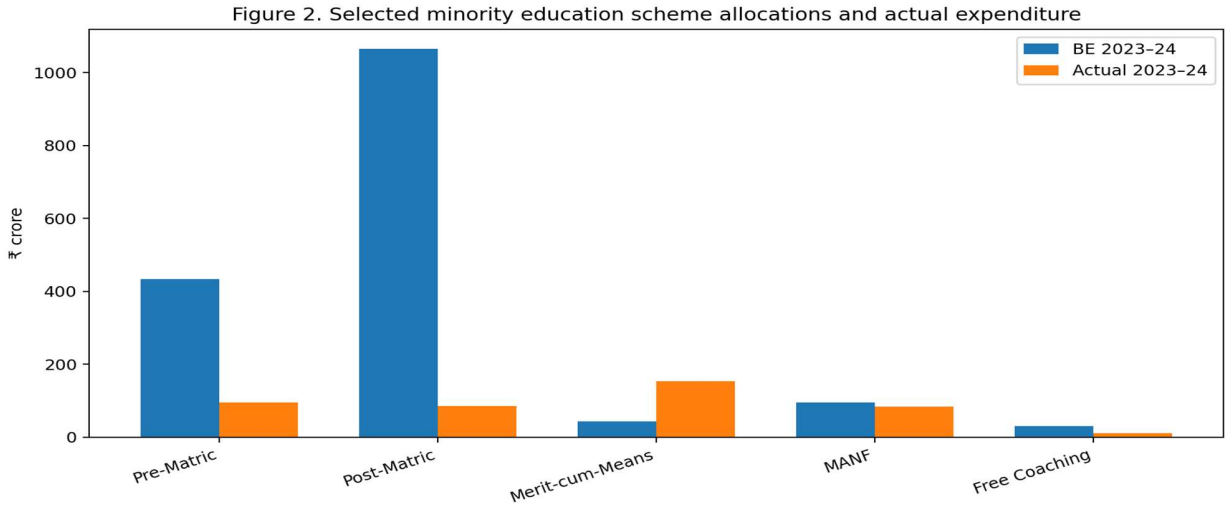


Figure 2. Selected minority education scheme budget estimates and actual expenditure, 2023–24. Source: Ministry of Minority Affairs budget statement; figures are reproduced from official reported values.

10. Proposed Implementation Framework

The article proposes an eight-dimension Muslim Higher Education Inclusion Framework (MHEIF). It is not intended as a new scheme; rather, it is a monitoring framework that can be applied to existing policies.

a. Access: measure applications, admissions, geographic reach, and representation relative to eligible populations.
b. Affordability: measure scholarship adequacy, timeliness, and the share of educational costs covered.
c. Information: measure awareness and the proportion of eligible students receiving assisted application support.
d. Participation: monitor attendance, credit accumulation, and academic engagement.
e. Retention: measure year-to-year continuation and reasons for dropout.
f. Completion: measure on-time and delayed completion by gender, region and institution type.
g. Progression: track employment, further study, competitive-exam participation and research progression.
h. Inclusion and belonging: monitor grievances, mentoring access, campus climate and student perceptions through ethically designed instruments.

This framework improves policy evaluation in two ways. First, it separates process indicators from outcome indicators. Second, it recognizes that different forms of disadvantage can accumulate. A student may receive a scholarship and remain vulnerable if the institution is distant, the course is expensive, the teaching language changes abruptly, or academic support is absent. The framework should be accompanied by a single window architecture in which students can discover relevant schemes, check eligibility, submit applications, receive status updates, and obtain institutional help. Such a system is consistent with the NEP 2020 principle of coordinated information and simplified access for disadvantaged groups. Importantly, single-window access should not mean centralized exclusion: assisted offline and campus-based support must remain available.

Table 3. Proposed implementation and outcome monitoring matrix

Implementation stage	Core question	Suggested indicator	Responsible level
Awareness	Do eligible students know the opportunity?	% eligible students reached	Ministry + HEI
Application	Can students complete the process?	Application completion rate	HEI/portal
Verification	How long does processing take?	Median processing days	HEI + state
Disbursement	Does support arrive before academic deadlines?	Median days from approval to payment	Ministry/bank
Participation	Are beneficiaries academically engaged?	Attendance/credit accumulation	HEI
Retention	Do students continue?	Year-to-year continuation rate	HEI
Completion	Do students finish?	On-time completion rate	HEI/UGC

Progression	What happens after graduation?	Employment/further-study rate	HEI/alumni
Belonging	Do students experience an inclusive environment?	Student-reported belonging/grievance resolution	HEI SEDG Cell

11. Discussion

The evidence suggests that the central challenge is not the absence of policy intent but the conversion of policy intent into reliable student-level outcomes. India's affirmative-action experience demonstrates that targeted intervention can change educational behavior and attainment. However, Muslim students occupy a distinctive policy position. Religion itself is not a substitute for socio-economic classification, and Muslim communities contain considerable internal diversity. Effective policy therefore requires a layered approach in which minority identity can trigger outreach and support while household income, gender, educational background, backward-class status and location shape the intensity and type of intervention. This has implications for the interpretation of 'affirmative action'. A narrow definition equates affirmative action with reservation. A broader educational-policy definition includes scholarships, fellowships, outreach, bridge programs, institutional mentoring and targeted capacity building. The broader definition is more appropriate for Muslim higher education because many government interventions for Muslims have operated through these mechanisms rather than a universal religion-based reservation system.

The implementation literature also suggests that administrative design can be as important as financial allocation. If a student has to navigate multiple portals, certificates and institutional approvals, the effective value of a scholarship falls. This is a classic implementation problem: the formal benefit is present, but transaction costs prevent equal utilization. From a capability perspective, the policy must therefore be judged by the student's actual ability to convert support into educational progression. Gender requires particular attention. The finding by Surana and Rai (2025) that the educational-attainment effect was significant for targeted men but not women indicates that policy can interact differently with gendered constraints. A uniform scholarship may not overcome mobility or care constraints. The solution is not necessarily a separate Muslim-women policy for every intervention, but rather gender-sensitive delivery: residential support, safe transport, flexible academic arrangements, mentoring and family-level information.

The IKS question should likewise be framed with care. NEP 2020 and current Ministry initiatives place increasing emphasis on Indian knowledge traditions, multilingualism and local contexts. This can support inclusion if implemented as intellectual pluralism. It can become exclusionary if 'Indian knowledge' is defined too nar/rowly. For Muslim students, an inclusive knowledge approach can recognize Urdu and other Indian languages, histories of Indo-Islamic intellectual exchange, contributions to mathematics, medicine, architecture, literature, philosophy and social thought, and the lived knowledge of diverse communities. The objective should be academic integration rather than cultural tokenism. The article identifies a data problem. Without religion- and gender-disaggregated information on applications, awards, retention, completion and employment, policy evaluation remains incomplete. Better data should not mean indiscriminate collection of sensitive personal information. It should mean clearly justified indicators, privacy safeguards, transparent definitions and ethical governance. The aim is to make public programs accountable while protecting students' dignity.

12. Policy Recommendations

a. Establish a single-window scholarship and support system. Integrate information, eligibility checks, application assistance, verification status and grievance escalation across relevant programs.
b. Guarantee assisted application support. Every participating HEI should provide an accessible help desk, including offline and multilingual support for students who cannot navigate digital systems independently.
c. Introduce bridge and transition programs. Universities should provide academic orientation in language, writing, mathematics, digital skills and disciplinary conventions, especially for first-generation and vernacular-medium entrants.
d. Strengthen gender-sensitive support. Expand hostel access, safe transport, mentoring and flexible support for women where mobility and household constraints affect continuation.
e. Shift monitoring from expenditure to outcomes. In addition to budget utilization, publish indicators on applications, approvals, payment timeliness, retention, completion and progression.
f. Use institutional SEDG Cells as implementation hubs. Cells should coordinate scholarships, bridge courses, outreach, mentoring and grievance redressal instead of functioning as nominal administrative units.
g. Improve regional targeting. Funding should account for institutional supply, travel distance, local participation rates and district-level disadvantage rather than relying only on uniform allocations.
h. Protect policy continuity. Students already receiving multi-year support should have clear transition arrangements when schemes are merged, revised or discontinued.
i. Encourage independent evaluation. Government should commission longitudinal and quasi-experimental evaluations of major interventions, with public access to anonymized results.
j. Develop an inclusive knowledge framework. IKS-related initiatives should recognize India's plural intellectual histories and languages, including Muslim contributions, while remaining evidence-based and academically rigorous.
k. Build stronger university-community partnerships. Outreach can involve alumni, schools, community organizations and educational networks, provided that participation remains voluntary and non-stigmatizing.
l. Create a national dashboard with safeguards. The dashboard should show aggregate implementation indicators without exposing individual student identities. Indicators should be disaggregated where statistically and ethically appropriate.

13. Limitations and Future Research

This study relies on secondary sources and cannot establish the causal impact of individual schemes. Limited religion-specific data and the absence of stakeholder interviews further constrain the findings. Future research should combine administrative records, surveys, and interviews to examine policy outcomes longitudinally and compare states, with particular attention to gender, socio-economic status, language, and educational background.

14. Conclusion

Muslim participation in Indian higher education should be assessed not by the number of government schemes available, but by whether students can access, complete, and benefit from their education. India has introduced several measures to support minority and disadvantaged learners; implementation gaps continue to limit their reach and effectiveness. Key challenges include low awareness, digital barriers, delayed financial aid, regional inequalities, gender-related barriers, and insufficient academic support. Evidence suggests that

affirmative interventions can improve educational opportunities, but their benefits may vary across social and institutional contexts. A more effective approach requires integrating scholarships with outreach, application assistance, bridge courses, mentoring, grievance redressal, and systematic outcome monitoring. The Indian Knowledge Systems framework may also encourage inclusion when it recognizes India's diverse linguistic and intellectual traditions. Future policies should prioritize affordability, participation, retention, completion, and progression. Ultimately, educational inclusion depends on translating policy commitments into meaningful opportunities that enable Muslim students to achieve their academic and professional aspirations.

References

Ahmad, A., Ahmad, A., & others. (2026). Gender parity in higher education among Indian Muslims: A regression-based study. Towards Excellence, 18(1).

Ahmad, I., Ayat, M. Z., & Gardia, A. (2026). Policy shifts, post-pandemic shock, and the minority participation deficit: An empirical analysis of Muslim student enrolment in Indian higher education. AD EDUXIAN Journal, 3(2), 594–606. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21361718

Ahmad, I., Khatoon, R., Ayat, M. Z., & Gardia, A. (2026). Social inclusion and equity in India: An analysis of the National Education Policy 2020 with special reference to higher education in Uttar Pradesh. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research, 12(3), 362–369. https://doi.org/10.66856/ijhssr.2026.12.3.12317

Alam, S. (2023). Debating with the reservation policy for Muslims in higher education. Contemporary Voice of Dalit. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X231169635

Bagde, S., Epple, D., & Taylor, L. (2016). Does affirmative action work? Caste, gender, college quality, and academic success in India. American Economic Review, 106(6), 1495–1521. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20140783

Basant, R., & Sen, G. (2020). Quota-based affirmative action in higher education: Impact on other backward classes in India. The Journal of Development Studies, 56(2), 336–360. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1573987

Basant, R., & Shariff, A. (Eds.). (2010). Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and policy perspectives. Oxford University Press.

Bisht, M. (2018). Understanding the challenges of minority communities in India: A study of educational status of Muslims. Journal of Exclusion Studies, 8(1), 12–27. https://doi.org/10.5958/2231-4555.2018.00002.5

Borooah, V. K. (2010). Social identity and educational attainment: The role of caste and religion in India. Journal of Development Studies, 46(5), 868–886.

Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability. (2023). Funds slashed, under-utilised: Why the budget must focus on scholarship schemes for minority students. CBGA.

Desai, S., & Kulkarni, V. (2008). Changing educational inequalities in India in the context of affirmative action. Demography, 45(2), 245–270. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0001

Desai, S., Dubey, A., Vanneman, R., & Banerji, R. (2010). Schooling and achievement in rural India. In K. Newman & S. Thorat (Eds.), Blocked by caste: Economic discrimination in modern India. Oxford University Press.

Fraser, N. (2008). Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world. Columbia University Press.

Government of India. (1950). Constitution of India. Legislative Department.

Government of India. (1992). National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. Legislative Department.

Government of India. (2006). Social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India: A report. Prime Minister's High Level Committee.

Government of India. (2011). Census of India 2011: Religion data. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner.

Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education.

Government of India. (2022). Scholarship schemes for minority communities: Backgrounder. Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Government of India. (2023). Status of minority educational institutions: Rajya Sabha answer and annexure. Ministry of Education.

Government of India. (2024). Annual report 2023–24. Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Government of India. (2024). Statement showing budget estimates, revised estimates and actual expenditure, 2023–24 and budget estimates 2024–25. Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Government of India. (2025). Annual report 2024–25. Ministry of Education.

Government of India. (2025). Output-outcome framework, Demand No. 70: Ministry of Minority Affairs. Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Hasan, M., & Mehta, S. K. (2006). Towards educational equity: Schooling and educational attainment among religious groups in India. Economic and Political Weekly, 41(9), 813–817.

Hasan, Z., & Menon, R. (2004). Unequal citizens: Gender, caste and class in India's new millennium. Oxford University Press.

Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P., & Jeffery, R. (2008). Degrees without freedom? Education, masculinities, and the paradox of educated young men in north India. Stanford University Press.

Jodhka, S. S., & Newman, K. S. (2007). In the name of globalisation: Meritocracy, productivity and the hidden language of caste. Economic and Political Weekly, 42(41), 4125–4132.

Lipsky, M. (1980). Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services. Russell Sage Foundation.

Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India.

Ministry of Education. (2024). Guidelines to provide equitable opportunity for the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in the HEIs. University Grants Commission.

Ministry of Education. (2025). All India Survey on Higher Education 2022–23: Key indicators and annual report. Government of India.

Ministry of Minority Affairs. (2019). Nai Udaan: Scheme guidelines. Government of India.

Ministry of Minority Affairs. (2022). Scholarship schemes for minority communities: Backgrounder. Press Information Bureau.

Ministry of Minority Affairs. (2024). Annual report 2023–24. Government of India.

Ministry of Minority Affairs. (2025). Scheme of Merit-cum-Means based scholarship for students. Government of India.

Nambissan, G. B. (2006). A review of educational exclusion and inclusion in India. Social Change, 36(3), 1–25.

National Sample Survey Office. (2014). Key indicators of social consumption in India: Education. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

National Sample Survey Office. (2019). Household social consumption on education in India. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). Creating capabilities: The human development approach. Harvard University Press.

Pressman, J. L., & Wildavsky, A. (1984). Implementation (3rd ed.). University of California Press.

Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford University Press.

Surana, M., & Rai, R. (2025). Affirmative action and educational attainment of disadvantaged religious minorities: Evidence from India. Economic Inquiry, 63(4), 1367–1385. https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.70005

Thorat, S., & Newman, K. S. (Eds.). (2010). Blocked by caste: Economic discrimination in modern India. Oxford University Press.

UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education—All means all. UNESCO.

University Grants Commission. (2024). Guidelines for coaching schemes for SC/ST/OBC (non-creamy layer) and minority students. UGC.

University Grants Commission. (2024). Guidelines for institutional development plans for higher education institutions. UGC.

University Grants Commission. (2024). Guidelines to provide equitable opportunity for the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in the HEIs. UGC.

World Bank. (2018). Learning to realize education's promise. World Bank.

Young, I. M. (1990). Justice and the politics of difference. Princeton University Press.