



Promoting Excellence in Higher Education

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Abstract:

Education plays a remarkable role in the economic development of any country. Higher education system, particularly universities, provides a strong base for a nation to prosper. In the wake of the transition from elitist to mass education, universities worldwide are under pressure to enhance access and equality, on one hand, and to maintain high standards of quality and excellence, on the other. The transformation of India into a knowledge society will depend, to a large extent, on its capacity to provide and sustain knowledge students and knowledge citizens.

India's higher education system is one of the largest systems of its kind, occupying third place in the world after China and also the fastest growing sector in the country. India is heading towards transforming itself into a knowledge society. With the increasing demand for quality higher education, it has become imminent that a consistent plan is to be laid for the growth and enhancement of quality higher education in India and thus, various processes are to be kept in convergence with one another. There are many problems facing higher education. They include financial constraints, lack of proper regulatory framework, politicizing of universities, increasing dropout rate, high cost of education, lack of equity, absence of competent and qualified faculty and so on. In this context, the present paper is an endeavor to study the existing practices, issues and challenges facing the higher education system.

Keywords: Higher Education System, Access, Quality, Equality, Excellence, Issues & Challenges,

1. Introduction

Education is the gateway from which the road to all round development of human beings begins and leads to a blissful state of sustained growth, peace and prosperity. Recent research has brought out that almost all the determinants of quality of life, by and large, are the outcome of education. Education, indeed, plays an important role in the life of an individual as also in

shaping the level and quality of society in a decisive manner. Education not only enhances man's knowledge, skills and competencies but also plays a transformational role in all these aspects. Owing largely to these reasons, education has long been regarded as a major driver of economic development. The process of the all-round development of a nation, thus requires that the process of education need to be changed with the



changing needs, aspirations and demands of the society.

Higher education plays a crucial role in modern times from many angles. To remain competitive and relevant in the present globalized and liberalized world, we need to improve productivity and adapt an innovative spirit. This in turn, calls for a well-trained work-force, high levels of productivity, optimal application of existing technologies, and innovation as a means to increase competitiveness and growth.

The 21st century is marked by a paradigm shift in education which has brought new, multifaceted challenges and opportunities for higher education. Higher education in India has witnessed an impressive growth over the years. The number of higher educational institutions (HEIs) has increased from about 30 universities and 695 colleges in 1950-51 to about 700 universities (as of 2012-13) and 36,000 colleges (as of 2014-15) as per a recent UGC report. Though statistics show a massive growth in the number of students' enrollment in colleges/universities in terms of GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) viz., 21.2 per cent in 2014-15, holistic view reveals that still only a meager of total population has access to higher education. India educates approximately 10 per cent of its young people in higher education compared with more than 50 per cent in major industrialized countries like US and Japan and 15 per cent in China.

Higher Education in India-Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) and Beyond

India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world, with 3 million students enrolled in more than 36,000 colleges in the country. It has witnessed particularly high growth in the

last decade, with enrollment of students increasing. Moreover, the Government intends to achieve enrollment of 35.9 million students in higher education institutions, with a GER of 25.2 percent, by the end of the Twelfth Five Year Plan period through the co-existence of multiple types of institutions including research-centric, teaching and vocation-focused ones. The private sector can be expected to play an instrumental role in the achievement of these outcomes through the creation of knowledge networks, research and innovation centers, corporate-backed institution, and support for faculty development (Jhingan, 2014).

With the objectives and proposals of the plan as the basis, the report mentions that the private sector has played an instrumental role in the growth of the sector. Private institutions now account for 64 percent of the total number of institutions and 59 percent of enrollment in the country, as compared to 43 percent and 33 percent, respectively, a decade ago. The Government has also given the required thrust to the sector in its Five Year Plans. During the Eleventh Plan period (2007-2012), India achieved a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 17.9 percent, up from 12.3 percent at the beginning of the plan period. India's higher education system faces challenges on three fronts:

Expansion

India's GER of 21 percent was much below the world average of 27 percent, as well as that of other emerging countries such as China(26%) and Brazil(36%) in 2010.

Excellence



Faculty shortage- there is 40 - 35 percent shortage of faculty in state and central universities, respectively. Accredited institutions-62 percent of universities and 90 percent of colleges were average or below average in 2010, on the basis of their NAAC accreditation. Low citation impact – India's relative citation impact is half the world average.

Equity

There is wide disparity in the GER of higher education across states and the Gross Attendance Ratio(GAR) in urban and rural areas, and gender-and community-wise Inter-state disparity – 47.9 percent in Delhi vs. 9 percent in Assam.Urban-rural divide – 30 percent in urban areas vs. 11.1 percent in rural areas. Differences across communities-14.8 percent for OBCs,11.6 percent for SCs, 7.7 percent for STs and 9.6 percent for Muslims. Gender disparity – 15.2 percent for females vs 19 percent for males.

Research methodology

The study covers the higher education system in India and is exploratory in nature. It is primarily based on the secondary data collected from books, published articles in journals, websites, and government reports.

Issues and challenges in higher education in India

India seems to have indeed entered a golden age for higher education. The country has emerged to be a global magnet for aspiring learners, and a role model for high-quality affordable educational systems. Today,

- India is the single largest provider of global talent, with one in four graduates in the world

being a product of the Indian system.

- India is in the fourth cycle of its research excellence framework competing with the global best with at least a 100 of Indian universities.
- India's massive open online courses, started by several elite research universities, collectively enroll 60 percent of the world's entire student population.
- Indian higher education institutions are governed by the highest standards of ethics and accountability with every single one of them being peer-reviewed and accredited.

As India strives to compete in a globalised economy in areas that require highly trained professionals, the quality of higher education becomes increasingly important. So far, India's large, educated population base and its reservoir of at least moderately well trained university graduates have aided the country in moving ahead, but the competition is fierce; from China in particular. Other countries are also upgrading higher education with the aim of building world class universities. Even the small top tier of higher education faces serious problems. Many IIT graduates, well trained in technology, have chosen not to contribute their skills to the burgeoning technology sector in India, perhaps half leave the country immediately upon graduation to pursue advanced studies abroad, and most do not return. A stunning 86 per cent of Indian students in the fields of science and technology who obtain degrees in the United States do not return home immediately following their graduation. A body of



dedicated and able teachers works at the IITs and IIMs, but the lure of jobs abroad and in the private sector makes it increasingly difficult to lure the best and brightest to the academic profession. The present system of higher education does not serve the purpose for which it has started. In general education itself has become so profitable business that quality is lost in the increase of quantity of professional institutions with quota system and politicization adding fuel to the fire of spoil system, thereby increasing unemployment of graduates without quick relief to mitigate their sufferings in the job market of the country. As India marches rapidly towards an ambitious agenda of economic and social advancement, one of the greatest challenges it faces is to provide extensive access to quality higher education opportunities. Most observers agree that Indian higher education, the significant and impressive developments of the past few decade notwithstanding, faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Recognizing this dual challenge, the former Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, severely criticized in a recent speech the serious qualitative deficiencies in Indian higher education while at the same time announcing plans for a major expansion of the system. Reflecting on the findings of a confidential report by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, which is affiliated to the University Grants Commission (UGC), he expressed his concern over the fact that two thirds (68%) of the country's universities and 90 percent of its colleges are "of middling or poor quality" and that well over half of the faculty in India's colleges do not have the appropriate degree qualifications. Knowledge is the base for overall growth

and if the nation has to be competitive and to be at par with the globalization pace, we will have to respond to the market forces. It has very narrow range of course options that are offered and education is a seller's market, where is no scope of incentive to provide quality education. There is clearly a lack of educated educators and teaching is not an attractive profession. It's a last choice in terms of career. Number of Ph.D.s produced each year is very low and those required by academia is far higher. In fact, at many institutions fresh graduates are employed to teach, leading to poor quality of classroom instruction. Most of the education institutions especially in Maharashtra and in South India are owned by politicians. This education system which is highly regulated by the government has been set up to benefit politicians.

After independence, the role of the state in planning out a development path and also in building higher education institutions was guided by mutuality of purpose. Most observers of higher education in India feel that performance of higher education institutions has been less than satisfactory in terms of access, equity and quality. Now there is an urgent need to work for the development of the educational sector to meet the need of the emerging opportunities, increasing younger generation population and challenges of the 21st century.

Challenges of present higher educational System

While there is a need for an expansion of the higher education sector, resource constraint, both at the Centre and the State levels, poses a challenge to ensure quality education in the institutions. The government after pursuing neo-liberal policies for the last 20 years is keen to



open the higher education sector to the private providers, either through public-private participation or foreign direct investment in higher education. The society is divided. While one section is opposed to commodification of education, the other section thinks that involving the private sector is the only way out. How would the higher education sector evolve in response to these challenges is a crucial issue for us to understand and anticipate. How is the sector contemplating changes to engage with the world? If India is to be a global economic powerhouse it is essential to nurture this higher education sector.

4. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

These are some suggestions and expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students for improving quality of higher education

- **Merit-based student financing:** This should ensure admissions to meritorious students independent of financial background.
- **Internationalization of education:** This would entail aligning different aspects of education to international standards.
- **Enabling a research environment:** This would involve creating adequate means of research funding and practical application of research.
- **High quality faculty:** The need of the hour is to create a conducive environment and provide incentives to attract and retain high quality faculty. It can be ensured by making Institutional and Programme Accreditation Mandatory, Promoting

Quality Faculty and Continuous Faculty Development Programmes, and Evaluation of Teachers by Students & Peer Assessment.

- **Improved technology for education delivery:** The world is entering into an Information Age and developments in communication, information and technology will open up new and cost-effective approaches for providing the reach of higher education to the youth.

leveraging technology for enhancing the teaching-learning experience will ensure better outcomes. The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. It offers opportunities for economic growth, improved learning and socio-cultural advances.

- **Employability:** making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool.

India's higher education system can be expected to be better aligned to industry and global practices, and be more transparent and inclusive by the end of twelfth plan period, provided the government is able to create an enabling regulatory environment and put in place robust implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms.

- **A structural Orientation** to establish schools in Specific Knowledge Domains, to Facilitate Holistic Academic Reforms in all universities.
- **Networking of Universities** and Colleges through Setting up a National Educational Resource Portal, Strengthening the E-



Initiatives. Expanding E-Resource availability.

- **Structural and Systemic Reforms for Good Governance.**
- **Promotion of Autonomous Colleges.**
- **Student-Centered Education and Dynamic Methods-** Methods of higher education also have to be appropriate to the needs of learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. Student-centered education and employment of dynamic methods of education will require from teachers new attitudes and new skills.
- **Examination Reforms-** Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning should be implemented.
- **Personality Development-** Finally, education should be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunities for the educated people are naturally ample in scope.

5. CONCLUSION

India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education in India. Arising from the established regulations by external opportunities, university administrators should put in place internal compliance mechanisms that govern the internal conduct among the players. The National Council of Higher Education, the

Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education should conduct regular checks to ascertain that universities adhere to their committed standards of performance.

Unemployability is a recent discourse which has emerged in the last one decade. It echoes in various policy discussion and debate. Earlier universities were engaged only in construction of specialized knowledge. There is a constant demand to introduce skill development through technical and professional courses in order to tackle the problem of unemployability.

There is constant demand that universities should introduce industry relevant curriculum and industries should have more representation in university system. Universities responsibility is to provide labour force with higher cognition level so that they can easily be trained in any production processes

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