



Twenty five suggestions for improving the quality of Higher Education in India

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Abstract: There have been challenges to higher education in India in the past and the recent reforms which seem to be inadequate may provoke an elemental alteration in higher education. This alteration may not occur as a direct response to greater transparency and accountability, but rather because of the opportunity to reflect on the purpose of higher education, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and rising scientific research on how people learn. Individual development is nation's development and so, we need highly educated people who are skilled and who can drive our wealth forward. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can easily and quickly build up our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. In this article, an effort is made to present twenty five suggestions for improving the quality of higher education in India.

Keywords: Higher education, opportunity, transparency, accountability

Introduction

India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States of America. Unlike China, however, India has the benefit of English being the primary language of higher education and research. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth in higher education as compared to 20 per cent in China. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission (India), which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state. The chief institutes of higher education in India are universities and their constituent colleges. Most of the universities in India have affiliated colleges where undergraduate courses are being taught.

"According to the Department of Higher Education, Government of India, totally 16,885 colleges, including 1800 exclusive

women's colleges are functioning under these universities and institutions and there are 4.57 lakh teachers and 99.54 lakh students in various higher education institutes in India. Apart from these higher education institutes there are quite a few private institutes in India that offer a variety of professional courses. Distance learning is also a feature of the Indian higher education system. Some institutions of India, such as the Indian Institutes of technology (IITs), have been internationally much-admired for their standard of education. The IITs join up about 8000 students annually and the alumni have contributed to both the growth of the private sector and the public sectors of India. However, India has failed to produce world class universities like Harvard and Cambridge."¹

Knowledge is power. The more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. According to the University Grants Commission (UGC), "India needs



1500 more universities with adequate research facilities by the end of the year 2015 in order to compete in the global market. The country lacks the critical mass in higher education. Its gross enrolment ratio (GER) is a mere 11 per cent compared to China's 20 per cent, the USA's 83 per cent and South Korea's 91 per cent. This means that in comparison to India, China has double the number of students pursuing higher education. The Eleventh Five Year Plan envisages increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 15 per cent of the population in the age cohort group of 18-24 years by 2011-12.² This requires a substantial increase in the number of institutions and consequently would require an adequate number of teachers for imparting education. Failure to level out the faculty shortage would hamper the achievement of the targets for increase in GER set out by Government.

Present Scenario of Higher Education in India

Critical appraisals undertaken by the governmental committees and independent academicians have highlighted the crisis confronting the present higher education system: 'increasing educated unemployment; weakening of student motivation; increasing unrest and indiscipline on the campuses; frequent collapse of administration; deterioration of standards; and above all, the demoralizing effect of the irrelevance and purposelessness of most of what is being done.' While the politicians and policy makers have often spoken about the need for radical reconstruction of the system, what has been achieved in reality is only moderate reformism. At present, the world-class institutions in India are mainly limited. Most of the Indian

colleges and universities lack in high-end research facilities. Under-investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top quality instruction or engage in cutting-edge research. This gap has to be bridged if we want to speed up our path to progress. The University Grant Commission of India is not only the single grant giving agency in the country, but also responsible for coordinating, determining and maintaining the standards in institutions of higher education.

Twenty five suggestions for improving the quality of higher education in India

In order to improve the quality of higher education in India, here are 25 suggestions given to and expectations sought from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students:

1. Action Plan for Improving Excellence—Universities and colleges are supposed to realize the need for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions. Academic and administrative audit should be conducted once in three years in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-finance colleges must come forward for accreditation and fulfill the requirements of accreditation.
2. Choosing Pioneering Practices—The new technologies put forward vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. They offer opportunities for economic growth, improved health, better service delivery, improved learning and socio-cultural advances.



3. Contribution Towards a Learning Society—As we progress towards a learning society, every human endeavour SHALL require contributions from experts, and this will place the entire sector of higher education in pointed focus.

4. Cross Culture Programmes—After education, excursion to all the places in India and world as far as possible with the cooperation of government is necessary so that one can understand about people, culture, arts, literature, religions, technological developments and progress of human society in the world.

5. Encouragement to Teachers and Researchers—Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make professions more attractive for the younger generation.

6. 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 put into practice.

7. Fair Quality Assurance System—Colleges and Private institutes should set up Internal Quality Assurance Cell and must follow a minimum standard to give degrees. The quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction and it must have a basis in the legislation. There should be operational, financial and academic autonomy coupled with accountability.

8. High-tech Libraries—Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but most of them are in disarray. A library must be online and conducive for serious study. Indian universities should concentrate more on

providing quality education which is comparable to that of international standards.

9. Improving Industry and Academia Connections—Industry and Academia connections are essential to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements. Skill building is in fact very crucial to ensure employability.

10. Increasing the Quantity of Universities—"We need more universities because we are more in number and present number of universities is too less. On 13th June, 2005 Government of India constituted a high level advisory body known as National Knowledge Commission (NKC) to advise the PM about the state of education in India and measures needed to reform this sector. It was headed by Sam Pitroda and submitted its report in November 2007. NKC has recommended setting up of 1500 universities by 2015 so that gross enrollment ratio increases to 15 percent. It has also called for establishing an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to monitor the quality of overall higher education in India."³

11. Individuality—Parental guidance is necessary but it should not interfere with the creativity or individuality of the students. Also, despite the outdated education system, some are achieving wonderful things in Sports, Music, Dance, Painting, Science and Technology in the world. This is only due to the encouragement of the parents and some dedicated teachers in the educational institutions.

12. International Cooperation—Universities in India have been a primary agent for the advancement and transmission of knowledge through



traditional functions such as research, innovation, teaching, human resource development, and continuing education. International cooperation is gaining importance as yet another function.

13. Keeping Pace with the Information Age—The world has almost entered 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 as well as to those who need continuing education. Hence, one should keep pace with the changing trends.

14. Mobilization of Resources—Effective measures will have to be adopted to mobilize resources for higher education. There is also a need to relate the fee structure to the student's capacity to pay for the cost so that, students at lower economic levels can be given highly subsidized and fully subsidized education.

15. Need for a New vision—India realizes that humanity stands today at the head of a new age of a large synthesis of knowledge, and that the East and the West have to work together in bringing about concerted action for widespread upliftment, and lasting peace and unity. In this new age, we need a new vision.

16. Personality Development—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.

17. Privatization of Higher Education— In any nation education is the basic necessity for the socio-economic development of the individuals and the society. So, improved standard of

education as first priority should be offered to the majority by the government authorities with sincere political will. Also, privatization of higher education is absolutely necessary in a vast country like India as government alone is helpless to do so.

18. Providing Need-based Job-oriented Courses—All-round development of personality is the purpose of education. But the present day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels in the field one is interested. So, combination of arts subjects and computer science and science and humanities or literature should be introduced so that such courses could be useful for the students to do jobs after recruitment in some companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to higher education.

19. Public Private Partnership—“PPP is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. Governments can ensure PPP through an appropriate policy. University Grants Commission and Ministry of HRD should play a major role in developing a purposeful interface between the Universities, Industries and National Research Laboratories (NRLs) as a step towards PPP.”⁴

20. Quality Development—Quality depends on its all functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipments, services to the community and the academic environment. It also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimensions: exchange of knowledge,



interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances, namely- Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Mumbai & University of Delhi.

21. Status of Academic Research Studies—"If we see the number of researchers engaged in Research and Development activities as compared to other countries we find that we have merely 119 researchers, whereas Japan has 5287 and US has 4484 researchers per million of population. Even in absolute terms, number of researchers in India is much smaller compared to US, China, Japan, Russia, and Germany. Numbers of doctoral degrees awarded in all subjects are 16, 602 out of which 6774 are in Arts and 5408 in science and rest in others (professional subjects). India has a little over 6000 doctorates in Science and engineering, compared to 9000 in China and 25000 in US. It increased rapidly from a little over 1000 in 1990 to over 9000 in recent years in China. In comparison, there has been a modest increase in India. National Science Foundation (NSF) - Science and Engineering Indicators (2002) shows that in the US, about 4% of the science and engineering graduates finish their doctorates. This figure is about 7% for Europe. In India this is not even 0.4%. Data on doctorates particularly in science, engineering and medicine suggests that only a few institutions have real research focus. In engineering there were merely 650 doctorates awarded in 2001-02. Of these 80 percent were from just 20-top universities. In science, 65 percent of the doctorates awarded were from the top-30 universities."⁵ Much

responsibility should be shouldered to improve the things.

22. Stipends to Research Fellows—The number of PhDs from Indian Universities should increase with proper standards. This should be seen in the context of extremely low fraction of PhDs in India in relation to M.Sc. /B.Tech. as compared to what it is in USA, UK, Germany, Japan etc. Meritorious doctoral students should be recognized through teaching assistantships with stipends over and above the research fellowships. Identifying talented, meritorious students and encouraging them through recognition is very important to attract students into research and teaching.

23. Student-Centred 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-centred education and employment of dynamic methods of education will require from teachers new attitudes and new skills.

24. Teaching Based on the Learning Styles of the Students—Things have changed a lot. There are many scientifically proven psychometric tests available to know the learning styles of an individual. Hence, the teachers are expected to impart knowledge to the students based on their dominant learning styles so that the student will involve in the learning process to the maximum.

25. World Class Education—Indian government is expected to give priority to the development of Standard in education. India should aspire for the international standard in education. Many national universities like in the USA, UK, Australia, etc. allow studies in



higher education for foreign students in their countries and through correspondence courses as well. In the same way in India, Universities of world class education can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal it should adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.

Conclusion

After independence, there has been remarkable increase in institutions of higher learning in all disciplines. But with the quantitative expansion it has been able to attend to the core issue of quality. Mere twenty five suggestions will not yield complete results. Learning and improvement are continuous aspects of life. According to Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr.Manmohan Singh, "The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building."⁶ We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world. The thrust of public policy for higher education in India has to be to address these challenges. However, one university alone cannot bring about much difference. Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students must shoulder the responsibility to their best.

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