



Quality Approaches of Higher Education System in India: Issues and Concerns

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Abstract

Before independence the education system that prevailed in India was very much conservative. Affinity towards bookish knowledge, impractical thinking and monotonous approach dominated the entire process. During post-independence period while Dr Radhakrishnan gave emphasis to higher education, qualitative improvement of research and quality of teachers, Dr L S Mudaliar (1952-53) considered education at Madhyamik level to be more important. Dr D S Kothari (1964-66) was the first educationist who desired to improve quality of education from pre-primary to research stage and told about the necessity of manpower planning. New education policy of 1986 was drafted with a very broad outlook especially keeping in view the educational requirements of 21st century and highlighted equality in education, qualitative changes at all levels, women empowerment, vocationalisation of education, technological application, establishment of schools, and colleges of excellence. Unfortunately recommendations of different commissions and provisions created in education policy could not be implemented due to lack of infrastructure and the stake holder initiative despite of inadequate funding. As a result, we cross the threshold to the 21st century with about 52% literates and leaving behind the unfinished agenda for universalization of primary education and demands for qualitative improvement of secondary and higher education. National system of education tried to render its service for socio-economic upliftment in the country however there is lacuna behind this launch. Prior to this the introduction of Right to Education likely to bring forth fragile quality of elementary and secondary education that possibly weakens later stage of education. One after another Indian system of education begets unpromising policy on the verge of mercy anthem rather than to be hard-hitting curriculum.

Key words: Quality Approaches, Higher Education, System, India, Issues, Concerns

Introduction

The higher education system in India has developed in a significant way, predominantly in the post independence period, and thus initiated to become one of the leading systems of its kind in the globe. Nonetheless, the system itself possesses crucial issues of concern to be improved, such as financial resource management comprising access, justice and weightage, infrastructure, reorientation of programmes by laying importance on future educational eminence that is much sought by school going youths, environment, health awareness, values and ethics and quality of higher education collectively with the appraisal of institutions and their endorsement. These issues are imperative for the society, for the society and country is attached and depending upon the quality of higher education. If our education system does not give qualitative life aspect at the close of the course then it is assumed that the whole system of higher education is not good system in as much as evaluation is on the basis of its product in education and job markets. Education is a powerful tool to erect a knowledge-based informative society of the 21st Century. The 21st century is the age of 'Quality Hunting' based on the provision made by Policy of education structured by the unique system from grass root level till higher stage of planning. Universalization of Primary education and adult education is the chief target in every state; hence there is an urgent call to deliberate upon the qualitative and the quantitative expansion of higher education.

Today the world economy is experiencing an unprecedented change. New developments in science and technology, media revaluation and internationalization of education and the ever expanding competitive environment are revolutionizing the education scene. A paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education nowadays, from 'national education' to 'global education', from 'one time education for a few' to 'life long education for all', from 'teacher-centric educations' to 'learner-centric education'. These changes make new demands and pose fresh challenges to the established education systems and practices in the country. Because of interdependence and integration of world economy in recent years, the Indian higher education system has a new role and a challenge to provide to the nation and the world at large, skilled human power at all levels, having breadth of knowledge and confidence to effectively confront the social and economic realities.

In the educational context, quality refers to the "achievement of desired learning at the level of mastery". Of the key terms used, "desired learning" refers to those learning needs that are relevant and functional in relation to the challenges. The term specifically refers to the areas of learning in the form of knowledge and understanding, application and problem-solving, creative thinking, practical and productive skills, attitudes and values. The level of "mastery" emphasizes that the "achievement" of desired learning should be at a high level of proficiency and having command over what is learned, so that the achievement does not remain unusable. Quality resides within the learner but influenced by a set of outside factors or prerequisites like curriculum, textbooks, teaching-learning process, the evaluation system, the institutional structure, etc. These outside factors or promoters are very important and play key role in introduction of qualitative changes. As such, the factors need to be restructured and modified to satisfy the requirements of 21st century.

Current Education Scenario

The latest Population growth in India made the rise of universities and colleges, both run by public sector and private sector is mushrooming offering the best of qualities among them all

providing different courses from simple arts to space research centres, seemingly leading to commercial purpose at the end of the day. The central universities body formed a body named University Grant Commission is concern about those fake universities and institutions. It grants permission for autonomous body of its own, while the state and deem universities can also have their own autonomous administration. Hence most of them are autonomous functions. A large number of universities and colleges have a centralized structure composed of affiliated colleges on one tier and the university departments on the other. The undergraduate courses like arts, commerce, and science have to undergo three years intensive academic duration. While post graduation courses usually last two years with an award to a Master's degree. Apart from formal education UGC gives privilege for obtaining diploma courses, distance education programme, short term training courses, B.Ed course for teachers, seminar, refresher course which is looked after by UGC academic staff college.

Sponsor courses

The UGC provides scholarships for deserving students pursuing in specialized studies like MBBS, Engineering and also doctoral studies for those students coming from financially unsound background. Special scheme is also made available for ST/SC students and the meritorious ones. The ICSSR provides scholarship schemes for overseas students for various professional courses.

Medium of Instruction

In Indian universities the medium of instruction is English, apart from that Indian languages are being used in respective subjects which means regional languages become second medium of instruction. The recognized languages are National Languages can be accompanied English language. Foreign languages like French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Portuguese, and Arabic are learned in Central Universities.

Distance Education

The Indian universities started Correspondence education mode in the year 1962 subsequently the first Open University was established at Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh in 1982 and in 1985, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established at Delhi. Later, many Open universities have been set up in the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. Adult education is affiliated in distance mode of education which is very appreciative from larger part of society for the main determination of open universities is eradication of illiteracy and joblessness.

Recent Developments in Indian Higher Education

Higher education has received a lot of attention in India over the past few years. There are four reasons for this recent focus. First, country's weak higher education system is being blamed for skill shortages in several sectors of economy. Second, reservation quotas in higher education institutions, particularly the more reputed ones that provide access to high status and best-paid jobs became a highly divisive issue, central to the policy of inclusive growth and distributive justice, and hence politically very important. Third, in the backdrop of the first two developments, it began to be argued that the country would not be able to sustain its growth momentum and maintain competitiveness unless problems with higher education are fixed. Last demand for higher education continues to outpace the supply due to growing population of young people, gains in school education, the growing middle class and their rising aspirations. This would, however, require revamping the higher education sector. Hence many steps have been taken to augment supply, improve quality and fix many of the problems faced by higher

education. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) that was set up to examine the higher education sector made several useful and important recommendations.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Although there has been a massive expansion of higher education during the last decades in India, the quality of education has been a crying concern as reflected in the reports of various committees appointed from time to time by UGC. The curriculums are outdated, the courses are irrelevant, and the quality of teaching is below average to poor. On an average, every year some five million people join the ranks of employment seekers. An extremely disquieting feature of this disturbing phenomenon is that a large proportion of these belong to the educated class who are unemployable. This concern was expressed in the GOI document, Challenge of Education - The policy perspectives, 1985. It states that the whole process of higher education is warped and disoriented, and has become dysfunctional producing, largely unemployable young men and women. Our education should make our graduates useful, employable and entrepreneurs.

This is the most serious issue that concerns us. Our higher education in the new millennium must have quality, which should embrace its various functions and activities, i.e. the quality of courses, the quality of curriculum, the quality of teaching and the quality of research. This assumes great importance in view of WTO and GATT and non-reversible process of globalization. Our courses have not only to be relevant to the needs of the society, trade, and industry but should also make the graduates either employable or self-entrepreneurs.

Sustaining Quality

Quality has both absolute and relative connotations. Quality dimensions seem to have two implications, i.e. functionality of the output and meeting the basic standards. Hence, the quality of a higher education system may be seen from the point of view of norms and standards, which may evolve depending on the need of the hour. In the 21st century, it is crucial to identify the relative norms for different components of a higher education system. The alternative dynamics for teacher preparation and the sustaining quality in teacher input like Curriculum design and development; Curricular practices via emerging principles of pedagogy; Evaluation of learners' performance and progress via curriculum evaluation and Quality management practices become crucial. The quality of these components may also differ from institution to institution. Therefore, sharing of the experiences among institutions on quality issues may generate ideas for evolving norms and strategies for their quality assurance of management processes, curricular inputs and practices and the evaluation system as well. Of late, various developments have been witnessed relating to quality assurance mainly through the intervention of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, like networking of the open learning system with traditional Universities, interdisciplinary interactions at intra-institutional and inter-institutional levels, networking of institutions globally, data based management of higher education, changing the orientation of institutions by incorporating self financing in their financial management, assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and creation of different statutory and regulatory bodies at the national level. Some of the main recommendations are given below.

1. Curriculum Planning and Management should be studied in the perspective of knowledge management.
2. Integrated approach by involving experts from different fields with major focus on sharing of experiences in a holistic framework and having dialogues at different levels such as: at core committee level and at subcommittee level. Multidisciplinary curriculum must be developed with

a view to cater to the needs and fulfillment of expectations of learners, teachers- parents, employers and society in general.

3. Indigenous knowledge system must be kept in mind while adopting scientific and technological developments as core components of University curriculum. Context specificity and global developments must be visualized with a holistic perspective.

Assessment and Accreditation

The fact of the matter is that the Indian elite and middle classes have not cared for making education, what to say of higher education, accessible to the other sections of society. It is ironic that the beneficiaries of privileged access to institutions of higher learning are ever ready to persuade others to believe that the Indian education system has expanded beyond reasonable limits. The fact of the matter is that the system needs to be expanded to a much greater scale to serve the needs of the Indian youth. Many institutions of higher education in the country are excellent in the sense that their infrastructure, resources, faculty, programmes of teaching and research are almost as good as the best in the advanced countries. The issue of accessibility to quality higher education needs to be addressed in the light of the vast economic and social disparities, cultural and linguistic diversities, and extremely uneven opportunities of learning at the school level together with the aspirations and capacities of the potential students. Therefore, the question of access to higher education needs to be addressed at the local, regional, national and international levels from transdisciplinary, inter-disciplinary and discipline-specific perspectives. The issue of accessibility of quality higher education arises in the context of the transition in the country from elitist to mass education in the post-independence period. The issue has significant implications in the sense that it demands a redefinition of the aims of higher education. The major recommendations are:

1. Setting up of NAAC has sent the right and positive signals for generating and promoting awareness of the urgent need of quality up-gradation of Colleges and Universities. The need is to identify effective ways and strategies to expedite the completion of assessment and accreditation by NAAC within a stipulated time frame.
2. WTO has brought far reaching implications for institutions of higher education. Assessment and accreditation bodies like NAAC should take into account these implications while reviewing the quality parameters. The NAAC could also inform the institutions as to where they stand in terms of the standards of excellence from a global perspective.
3. Quality of higher education can also be improved by inducting quality oriented objectivity in merit promotions of teaching faculty. Specification of weightages for teaching, research publications/ supervision would help in making this transparent and credible.

Evaluation and Assessment Systems

During the last 50 years, higher education in India has made great strides leading to the Indian higher education system becoming one of the largest systems in the World. Unfortunately, it is the Indian experience that this expansion in quantity has overshadowed the quality of higher education. Lately, a chorus of criticism is heard from various well-meaning quarters about the deteriorating quality of higher education. It is well known that one of the important components of higher education is the manner in which students' academic performance is evaluated. A concerted debate has been going on to determine the best system of assessment to be followed by the Universities in the twenty first century. A great degree of diversity has been observed in terms of assessment and grading of the students in the University system at present. It is desirable that a certain optimum degree of standardization in the examination system and in the

assessment of students is put in place before grades are awarded to them. Some of the major recommendations are:

1. The Semester System should be preferred to the annual system in teaching and evaluation at the Indian Universities.
2. Continuous Internal Assessment should be given the attention it merits in the students' academic programmes at the Universities.
3. Pre-and Post-processes of examinations should be made transparent i.e. the pattern of papers, evaluation methodology, disciplinary rules etc. should be properly documented and communicated to students well in advance.
4. In the continuous evaluation based on objective-type questions, measuring the higher mental ability of students should be adopted and ICT may be effectively used to set and evaluate such papers.

Research

The quality of teaching in higher education goes along with quality of research. One of the reasons for poor quality of education in India is that we are lagging far behind in terms of research. Unfortunately, Indian education system lacks good researchers and opportunities. Therefore a two-pronged strategy is required to improve the quality of research. The budgetary allocations for research need to be substantially increased and research careers should become more attractive than teaching. At the same time, research must be socially and economically more relevant which calls for a greater interface between universities, research institutions and various sectors of society like industry, agriculture, infrastructure etc.

Conclusion

With the advent of the 21st century, the centre of focus of our nation's development is on placing a premium on knowledge and richness of human capital. It is an inevitable conclusion that the future belongs to those countries which are able to release the infinite potential locked up in their people. Only quality driven institutions of learning can serve as the ideal vehicle to pursue and realize such a grand opportunity for global leadership.

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