

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION; HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: STATUS AND PROSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Quality in higher education is always burning topic for discussion in many ways concerns to Academicians, Educationists and Students from many years. Quality practices and quality thinking are essential for all. In India, it seems to be a case of one step forward and two steps back. While the government has introduced various bills in the Parliament, each of these seems to be stuck at various levels. Bills, such as National Commission for Higher Education and Research, National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions, and Foreign Educational Institutions, if passed can bring much needed structural changes. There is an urgent need to debate these bills and ensure that they are passed. Most importantly, a change in mind-set is required. Perhaps, time has come to remove the stigma associated with profits in the education sector so that legitimate private enterprises can have access to capital and set up world-class institutions that the country needs so badly. A lot of debate has taken place on 'affiliation', 'accountability', 'autonomy', and so on. Everyone seems to agree that a radical overhaul of the higher education system is much needed. Time has now come to walk the talk. Or else India's youth will be left behind in the global race. A sound higher education sector plays an important role in economic growth and development of a nation.

All levels of education, from primary to higher education, are overseen by the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education and Literacy. The Indian government has also heavily subsidized the education, although there is an initiative to make the higher education partially self-financing. The Higher Education in India aims at providing education to specialize in a field and includes many technical schools, colleges, and universities. In the context of current demographic structure of India where most of the population is below the age of 25 years, the role of higher education is critical. In this paper author try to gather information about quality in higher education; higher education in India: status and prospective.

Keywords: *Quality, Higher Education, Making India, Status and Prospective*



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Introduction:

Education is an essential for the growth and prosperity of both a nation and society. Apart from primary and secondary education, higher education is the main instrument for development and transformation. Higher education has the omnipotent role of preparing

future leaders for different spheres of life-social, economic, political, cultural, scientific and technological. According to UNESCO Report on Education in the 21st century, Higher Education is the mandate to bridge the knowledge gap between countries and communities, enriching dialogues between people culture; international linking and net-working of ideas, research and technologies. Thus, Higher education provides the competencies that are required in different spheres of human activity, ranging from administration to agriculture, business, industry, health and communication and extending to the arts and culture (Power, 2002, p.74). In India, the growth of Indian higher educational system has undergone a remarkable transition from an elite system, having deep colonial roots, to an egalitarian system striving to meet the aspirations of a vibrant democracy (Power, 1997). Today, the growth of the Indian Higher Education System is a result of the nation's policy, adopted immediately after independence, to promote education amongst the masses. Despite that, India is a big country consisting of more than 50% of rural population, still struggling to provide better higher education facilities in rural areas. Most of the higher educational institutions are urban cantered. For all the progress made, even 68 years after India's independence, higher education faces challenges in the critical areas of Access, Equity and Quality.

Status of Higher Education System in India:

Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since Independence. The number of Universities has increased 34 times from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014. The sector boasts of 45 Central Universities of which 40 are under the purview of Ministry of Human Resource Development, 318 State Universities, 185 State Private universities, 129 Deemed to be Universities, 51 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) under MHRD (IITs - 16, NITs - 30 and IISERs - 5) and four Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase of 74 times with just 500 in 1950 growing to 37,204, as on 31st March, 2013. The quantum growth in the Higher Education sector is spear-headed by Universities, which are the highest seats of learning. In India, "University" means a University established or incorporated by or under a Central Act, a Provincial Act or a State Act and includes any such institution as may, in consultation with the University concerned, be recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in accordance with the regulations made in this regard under the UGC Act, 1956. Every year, millions of students from within the country and abroad, enter these

portals mainly for their graduate, post graduate studies while millions leave these portals for the world outside. Higher Education is the shared responsibility of both the Centre and the States. The coordination and determination of standards in Universities & Colleges is entrusted to the UGC and other statutory regulatory bodies. The Central Government provides grants to the UGC and establishes Central Universities/Institutions of National Importance in the country. The Central Government is also responsible for declaring an educational institution as "Deemed-to-be University" on the recommendations of the UGC. At present, the main categories of University/University-level Institutions are: Central Universities, State Universities, Deemed-to-be Universities and University-level institutions. These are described as follows:

- a) **Central University:** A university established or incorporated by a Central Act.
- b) **State University:** A university established or incorporated by a Provincial Act or by a State Act.
- c) **Private University:** A university established through a State/Central Act by a sponsoring body viz. A Society registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, or any other corresponding law for the time being in force in a State or a Public Trust or a Company registered under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.
- d) **Deemed-to-be University:** An Institution Deemed to be University, commonly known as Deemed University, refers to a high-performing institution, which has been so declared by Central Government under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956.
- e) **Institution of National Importance:** An Institution established by Act of Parliament and declared as Institution of National Importance.
- f) **Institution under State Legislature Act:** An Institution established or incorporated by a State Legislature Act.

Government has Limitations:

The government cannot provide all the solutions to India's higher education challenges. India's public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 0.6% (Ernst & Young-FICCI 2009), which is less than what other nations such as United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and China spend on a per-student basis. Most of the public expenditure on higher education is used up on salaries and maintenance of existing institutions. Majority of central government's spending on higher education is allocated to the University Grants Commission (UGC) (around 40%), which in turn assists colleges, mainly

in the form of grants for their maintenance and development. Very little is spent on curriculum, research and technology. Only a few institutions, such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), stand as beacons of excellence amidst a sea of mediocrity. Entrance to these institutions is characterized by a mad rush leading to extreme stress among the aspirants. According to Tilak (1997), the recent trends in financing of higher education in India are indeed disturbing. Quite a few important proposals are being made in this context by national governments and international organizations. International experience will be of considerable importance in formulating new policies.

Increasing Privatization of Higher Education in India:

Over last two decades, a rapidly growing Indian economy hassled to a huge demand for an educated and skilled labour force. To meet the manpower needs of a dynamic economy, not surprisingly, private enterprises have cropped up to complement public educational institutions, plagued as they are by capacity constraints. In fact, over the past few decades, it has been the private sector that has really driven capacity creation in Indian higher education. Private presence in higher education got a fillip starting the mid-1980s, coinciding with the reducing investment by Government of India (G o I) and the states. In 2001, when private unaided institutes made up 42.6% of all higher education institutes, 32.8% of Indian students studied there. By 2016, the share of private institutes went up to 73.2% and their student share went up to 51.5%. Privatization of higher education is especially noticeable in higher education professional courses such as Teaching profession courses, engineering and Master of Business Administration (MBA), where majority of the institutions offering such programmes have been established by the private sector. So much so, the share of private institutes in the field of pharmacy and engineering is more than 90%. These statistics show that private education players are the norm rather than exception and that privatization of higher education is now an irreversible trend in India. Critics who argue that education is a social good and should remain exclusively in the hands of the government will find it hard to disagree that given the scale and complexity of Indian higher education challenges, the government on its own cannot single-handedly tackle all the issues. This is not to say that privatization is the panacea to all of India's higher education problems. In fact, this phenomenon has brought about its own set of issues and challenges. Yet, the fact that India has a burgeoning youth population that sees education as a ticket to prosperity, coupled with

declining education spending by the government, translates into a great demand for private higher education.

Prospective for Higher Education in India:

With prominent business firms taking the interest in higher education and a steady stream of investors backing educational start-ups, a strategic approach will lead to collaboration between education and entrepreneurship. Enhancing employability of graduates, private institutions licensing with international organizations can improve the quality of programs they offer. Links to the industry, research skills, a wide range of transferable skills, and vocational skills provide potential interest to investors to engage with the Indian education market.

a) Collaboration with foreign institutions and use of the digital medium in the classroom, such as video lectures, foretell huge possibilities for online and blended learning, instructional design, teacher development, management and support systems. Government and institutions in India are creating more opportunities in higher education for streamlined learning to enhance preparedness for the entry of fresh graduates in the market.

b) A strong integration of knowledge with co-curricular initiatives to support better learning and teaching is essential to improve standards of higher educational institutions. Today's demanding and diverse environment requires both students and teachers to be adept at multi-tasking and possess the knowledge to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems. Co-curricular activities, such as workshops, seminars, industrial training, internships, etc. provide a multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted approach to learning and teaching. Such initiatives are a fruitful opportunity in the context of higher education.

The demand for higher education and educational reforms in India will provide a multitude of challenges and opportunities in the higher education sector to international institutions and educational businesses. With rapidly widening middle class, this transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change. For higher education in India, excellence, equity, and expansion are three keys which constitute a challenge as well opportunity for the higher education system.

Suggestions for Improving the System of Higher Education in India:

There are some suggestions and Expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students for improving quality of higher education.

a) 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. Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils, and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops. Methods of distance education will have to be employed on a vast scale.

b) Examination Reforms- Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning must be implemented.

c) International Cooperation- Universities in India have been a primary conduit 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. With the increased development of transport and communication, the global village is witnessing a growing emphasis on international cooperation and action to find satisfactory solutions to problems that have global dimensions and higher education is one of them.

d) To increase 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 enrolment ratio increases to 15%. It has also called for establishing an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to monitor the quality of overall higher education in India.

e) Cross Culture Programmes- After education, tour to every 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.

f) Action Plan for Improving Quality- Academic and administrative audit must 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. Universities and colleges should realize the need

for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions.

g) World Class Education- Indian government is not giving priority to the development of Standard in education. India must 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 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 must adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.

h) Personality Development- Finally, education must be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunity for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. As a result business process outsourcing (BPO) activities have increased competition in the world trade leading towards the production of quality goods and their easy availability everywhere in the world market. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skilful men.

i) High-tech Libraries- Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. 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.

Higher education institutions in India can only be set up by a Trust or a Society. Policymakers are opposed to setting up of higher educational institutions as for-profit corporate entities, ostensibly because education is a public good and hence should be outside the purview of commerce. As observed earlier, all policies by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) are based on NPE of 1986. Given the socialist structure of the polity, NPE 1986 has strong underpinnings of social good; not surprisingly, profit making is a strict no. However, many of India's colleges and universities both private and public face acute shortages of faculty, ill-equipped libraries, out-dated curricula, and poor infrastructure. Building a good educational institution requires great physical and soft infrastructure, i.e., infrastructure, faculty and research. In an era of soaring market-driven salaries in other sectors, how can there be hope to attract and retain talent if competitive compensation is not paid? All these require great deal of financial resources. Soaring land rates make it even more difficult to recoup investments. Hence, it is imperative that educational enterprises have

access to fungible capital, which becomes well-nigh impossible given the 'Not- For-Profit' structure of the sector. The need of the hour is to make every possible effort to attract serious players with institutional funding who can enter the sector and build transparent and high-quality institutions.

No doubt the intentions behind having a 'Not-For-Profit' structure might be noble, yet the question one needs to ask is whether this is serving the desired purpose. The fact, that everybody including law-makers know but fail to acknowledge, is that commercialization of education can happen even in educational bodies set up by a Society or a Trust. In addition, it is now 26 years since NPE was written in 1986 (the previous version was in 1968), and a lot has happened in these two and a half decades. NPE is due for a thorough overhaul, including actively considering allowing for-profit entities. The visceral dislike by some policymakers and bureaucrats towards for-profit education needs to be addressed and allayed.

Conclusion

After independence, India lacked a national network of universities and affiliated colleges that could provide outreach to a country with vast diversities. Similarly, the feeder secondary institutions were of unequal quality making it difficult to provide a high quality academic curriculum while also ensuring access for wide swath of the population. Over the last seventy five years, India has endeavour to expand access to (That is provide a greater number of seats) higher education, but there does not appear to have been corresponding focus on improving quality. In fact, in an effort to meet the primary goal of creating social mobility and equality of opportunity, many say the government has overcompensated, instituting strict commonalities in terms of free structure and curriculum across 250 plus universities. This “excessive egalitarianism” is an unusual goal for tertiary systems and has served to minimize distinction and excellence in institutions. The emphasis on levelling has served to make the majority of higher education degrees meaningless in the marketplace. And rather than respond, the middle class, in large part, has opted for either education abroad or via a private institution. According to Harvard professor of government, Devesh Kapur and his policy research colleague Pratap Mehata, the system feels no pressure to enhance the median quality of education.

India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. Still a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children's do not get even primary education. This is not only excluded a large section of the population from contributing to the development of the country fully but

it has also prevented them from utilizing the benefits of whatever development have taken place for the benefit of the people. India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilize this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss. Opportunities are available but how to get benefits from these opportunities and how to make them accessible to others is the matter of concern. 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. To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the Financial Resources, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance, infrastructure and at the end the responsiveness of various institutions.

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