Higher Education In India: Prevailing Issues, Challenges And Suggestions

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Abstract: Higher education is one of the most essential factors in the development of a nation. The education system of India has been transformed to the needs of time and changing scenario of the world. Higher education in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period and presently India has the largest higher education system in the world in terms of number of institutions. At the beginning of first five-year plan in year 1950-51 there was only 28 universities, 695 colleges and 1,74,000 students and today we have 711 universities, 40,760 colleges and more than twenty six million students. In spite of this large education system the condition of higher education in India is very poor and facing many problems. This research paper aims to reveal the development and current scenario of higher education by analyzing the various data. This study also reveals emerging issues and challenges in the field of Higher Education in India like low GER, inclusive education, quality education, relevance education, research and development, shortage of faculty and inadequate infrastructure. Finally the paper concludes various suggestions for improvement in quality and quantity of higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Institutions, Issues, Challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most essential factors in the development of a country. It is the foremost sector that shoulders the biggest responsibility of shaping the future of nation. India has been renowned since ancient time for its higher education institutions. Nalanda, Vikramshila and Takshila were few of the oldest universities in the world and were the centre of excellence in the field of higher education during ancient time. Students from far off countries came to study in these universities. The education system of India has been transformed to the needs of time and changing scenario of the world. Higher education in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period and presently India has the largest higher education system in the world in terms of number of institutions. At the beginning of first five-year plan in year 1950-51 there was only 28 universities, 695 colleges and 1,74,000 students. The numbers now have increased 25 times in the case of the Universities, 57 times in the case of Colleges and the students enrolment has gone up to over 158 times in the formal system of higher education in comparison to the figures at the time of beginning of first five year plan. As per the annual report (2014-15) of University Grant Commission, the number of Universities had gone up to 711 – (46 Central, 329 State, 205 State Private, 128 Deemed to be Universities, three Institutions established under State Legislation) and 40760 colleges in the Higher Education sector. During the academic session 2014-2015, the total enrolment in all courses and levels in regular stream was 265.85 lakhs including 124.76 lakhs women students, constituting 46.93%.

Over the last two decades, India has remarkably transformed its higher education landscape. It has created widespread access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all levels. With well-planned expansion and a student-centric learning-driven model of education, India has not only bettered its enrolment numbers but has dramatically enhanced its learning outcomes. A differentiated three-tiered university system – where each tier has a distinct strategic objective – has enabled universities to...
build on their strengths and cater across different categories of educational needs. Further, with the effective use of technology, India has been able to resolve the longstanding tension between excellence and equity. India has also undertaken large-scale reforms to better faculty-student ratios by making teaching an attractive career path, expanding capacity for doctoral students at research universities and delinking educational qualifications from teaching eligibility. Yet the weaknesses far outweigh the strengths. India educates approximately 20 per cent of its young people in higher education compared with more than half in the major industrialized countries and 28 per cent in China. It is the big challenge before us to achieve 30 per cent gross enrolment ratio (GER). Almost all of the world's academic systems resemble a pyramid, with a small high quality tier at the top and a massive sector at the bottom. India has a tiny top tier. None of its universities occupies a solid position at the top. A few of the best universities have some excellent departments and centers, and there are a small number of outstanding undergraduate colleges. At present, the world class institutions are mainly limited to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and perhaps a few others such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. These institutions, combined, enroll well under one per cent of the student population. 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 study abroad and most do not return. A stunning 86 per cent of students in science and technology fields from India who obtain degrees in the United States do not return home immediately following their study. Another significant group, of about 30 per cent, decides to earn MBAs in India because local salaries are higher and are lost to science and technology. A corps of dedicated and able teachers work 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.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present research paper were the following.

✓ To analyze the development and present scenario of higher education in India.
✓ To identify the key issues and challenges prevailing in higher education system of India.
✓ To present suggestions to meet out these issues and challenges.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to identify and analyze the prevailing issues and challenges of Indian higher education system based on secondary data. The data had been gathered and furnished from the official website of HRD Ministry of India, University Grant Commission, recent economic survey of India and related research papers, books, newspaper and published work.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Since ancient times, India has been a centre of excellence in the field of higher education. Nalanda, Vikramashila and Takshashila were few of the oldest universities in the world and were the most renowned seats of higher education during their time. Students' from far off countries came to study in these universities. Today India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world and also some world-class institutions for higher education. The present system of higher education dates back to Mountstuart Elphinstone's minutes of 1823, which stressed on the need for establishing schools for teaching English and the European sciences. Subsequently, the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were set up in 1857, followed by the University of Allahabad in 1887. The first attempt to formulate a national system of education in India came in 1944, with the Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on Post War Educational Development in India, which recommended the formation of a University Grants Committee, which was formed in 1945 to oversee the work of the three Central Universities of Aligarh, Banaras and Delhi. After independence, a full-fledged Ministry of Education was established on 29th August 1947. In 1952, the Union Government decided that all cases pertaining to the allocation of grants-in-aid from public funds to the Central Universities and other Universities and Institutions of higher learning might be referred to the University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC was formally established in November 1956 as a statutory body of the Government of India through an Act of Parliament for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India.

IV. KEY PLAYERS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

The University Grant Commission of India is responsible for coordination, determination and maintenance of standards in institutions of higher education along with release of grant to them. Apart from the UGC here are various professional councils that are responsible for recognizing courses, promoting professional institutes and providing grants to undergraduate programmes. They are All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Distance Education Council (DEC), Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), Bar Council of India (BCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), Medical Council of India (MCI), Pharmacy Council of India (PCI), Indian Nursing Council (INC), Dentist Council of India (DCI), Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) are the statutory professional councils of India. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous institution.
established by the UGC in 1994 to assess and accredit institutions of higher education.

V. PRESENT SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION

After independence Indian government has adopted policy of welfare state and providing facility of educational services to the peoples of the country. In India education has been a joint responsibility between the Union and state governments. The Union government can pass nationally-binding legislation for higher education and is the final accreditation authority. The department of higher education lies within the ministry of human resource development in the union government. There has been phenomenal growth in the higher education system and a virtual explosion in the number of universities and colleges. Over past six decades, India has covered a long distance on the path of expanding the institutional capacity in higher education. As per the annual report (2014-15) of University Grant Commission, the number of Universities had gone up to 711 – (46 Central, 329 State, 205 State Private, 128 Deemed to be Universities, three Institutions established under State Legislation) and 40760 colleges in the Higher Education sector. During the academic session 2014-2015, the total enrolment in all courses and levels in regular stream was 265.85 lakhs including 124.76 lakhs women students, constituting 46.93%. Institutions of higher education, their intake capacity and faculty wise enrolment are given in table-1, 2 & 3.

Table 1: Growth in Institutes of Higher Education

Table 1 shows that in year 1950 the country has only 25 university-level institutions this figure has gone up to 711 in 2015, more than 28 times increase. The growth of colleges during the period has been increased from 700 to 40760 i.e. 57 times more. The faculty has been increased 84 times more from 15 Thousand in 1950 to 1261 Thousand in 2015.

Table 2: All India Growth of Students Enrolment: 2000-01 to 2014-15

There is a large increase in student enrolment from 8399443 to 26585437 (264%) in last 15 years i.e. 2000 to 2015. During the academic year 2014-15, there had been 265.85 lakhs (provisional) students enrolled in various courses at all levels in universities/colleges and other institutions of higher education as compared to the unrevised figure of 237.65 lakhs in the previous year, registering an increase of 11.87 per cent.

Table 3: Students Enrolment: Faculty-wise: 2014-2015

Out of the total enrolment of students (265.85 lakhs), 37.41% students had been in the faculty of Arts, followed by 17.59% in Science and 16.39% in Commerce/Management. Thus, 71% of the total enrolment had been in the three faculties of Arts, Sciences and Commerce/Management, while the remaining 29% had been in the professional faculties, the highest percentage being in Engineering/Technology (16.27%), followed by Education/Teacher Training (4.57%) and Medical courses (4.02%), etc. In a country like India, where Agriculture and allied occupations are the main occupations, the enrolment in Agricultural Courses had been just 0.78 percent and in Veterinary Science, it is a miniscule of 0.11 percent. Thus, it is evident from the faculty-wise distribution of enrolment that the ratio of professional to non-professional enrolment has been almost 1:3 and hence there is a need for an appropriate policy change which may rationalize and reduce the disparity and increase the need to focus on vocationalisation of education.

VI. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The above data reveals that there is an impressive development in higher education in India during last fifteen years but these impressive numbers mask several problems prevailing in higher education system. The expansion of higher education in India has been poorly planned and remained somewhat erratic. In the present circumstances following are the main issues and challenges before our higher education system.
A. LOW GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER)

India has achieved remarkable growth in higher education sector but still have low gross enrolment ratio. The present GER for higher education in country is only 21%. However, enrolment level varies across the country and demography. Enrolment ratio in different states and union territory of country ranges from 4% to 45%. In comparison to other developed countries we have very low GER, which required to be increased to line up with developed societies of the world. The diagram shows the GER of the world is 30%, USA have 94%, Russia 76% UK 62%, Germany 61% Japan 55%, and China have 28%. If India has to increase the GER up to 30%, then it would need 1000 universities and about 45000 colleges in next five years. Thus enrolment expansion is a big challenge before the country.

B. ISSUES PERTAINING TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The major challenge prevailing in higher education system of India is that of inequity in educational development. There is disparity on the basis of class, gender, caste, ethnicity and religion. The large section of our population remaining deprived of higher education and not only excluded from contributing to the development of country but also prevented from utilizing benefits of development. The problem of unequal distribution of educational development is quite complicated. Many regions of the country and many segments of population appear to be left out, providing clinching examples of inequity and imbalances. The prominent among such inequities and disparities are following.

✓ **RURAL-URBAN DISPARITY:** 70% of the population of India lives in villages which have poor facilities to higher education. Most of the institutes of higher education are situated in cities which are beyond the reach of poor people of villages. This creates the rural-urban disparity in higher education and data of NSSO (2004-05) shows that, the GER of rural area is 6.74 percent, as compared with 19.88 percent in urban areas.

✓ **REGIONAL DISPARITIES:** Grass enrolment ratio across the different states and regions of the country is highly variable and it ranges between 4% to 45%. There are 16 states and union territory in which GER is lower than the national average (21%).

✓ **RELIGIOUS DISPARITY:** There is a great disparity of higher education among various religious groups. According to all India survey of higher education (2014-15) the GER among different groups is as 24.2% in Hindus, 13.8% in Muslims, 36.9% in Christens and 28% in Sikhs.

✓ **VARIATIONS AMONG CAST GROUPS:** It is also a challenge to increase the level of higher education among all casts. While the national average of GER is 21, Schedule Castes have GER of 15.1 percent, Scheduled Tribes 11 percent, and other backward classes 20 percent.

✓ **GENDER DISPARITIES:** GER for females is 19.8 percent as compared with 22.3 percent for males. GER for female belonging to lower caste groups and some social groups is even lower.

✓ **DISPARITIES AMONG OCCUPATION GROUPS:** GER for agricultural laborers only 1.41 percent and casual workers in urban areas 3.26 percent is found to be far lower than that of the self-employed and regular wages and salary earners.

Thus inclusion education i.e. equal access to all is the biggest challenge before the country.

C. QUALITY RELATED ISSUES

Quantity and quality of highly specialized human resources determine the growth, development and security of the nation. According to a recent UGC report one fourth of India’s colleges and universities are below standard. Out of 40760 colleges that come under the UGC purview, only 9940(24.38%) are recognized under section 2(f), and only 8201 colleges (20.12%) are eligible to receive development assistance. A large number of colleges are precluded for UGC development grant, as they are unable to meet the minimum eligibility criteria laid down by the UGC. Similar is the situation of a large number of universities. Out of a total of 711 university-level institutions, 500 fall under the jurisdiction of the UGC.

Among these, 187 universities were actually provided with development grants during 2014-15. Out of 46 Central Universities, 13 Central Universities have obtained the NAAC accreditation. 9 Central Universities have obtained the accreditation earlier, but accreditation period is over and applied for reaccreditation. 11 Central Universities have applied first time for accreditation, 13 Central Universities have yet to apply for accreditation. Total 5947 Higher Education Institutes are accredited by the NAAC up to March 2015. Only 15% of the institutes of higher education have accreditation of NAAC. The scope for improvement in terms of quality and excellence is apparent. India’s highest quality institutions have severely limited capacity. In order to increase the supply quality should be maintained.

In global ranking of university there are only four Indian university stands in top 400 universities. In top 400 universities USA have 109, UK 49, Australia 25, China 12 and India have only 04. At present, the world class institutions are mainly limited to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and perhaps a few others such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. These institutions, combined, enroll well under one per cent of the student population. 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 study abroad and most do not return. A stunning 86 per cent of students in science and technology fields from India who obtain degrees in the United States do not return home immediately following their study. Another significant group, of about 30 per cent, decides to earn MBAs in India because local salaries are higher and are lost to science and technology. A corps of dedicated and able teachers work 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.

D. RELEVANT EDUCATION RELATED ISSUES

The issue of offering relevant education also poses serious challenge. Relevant education should involve three aspects. Firstly, it involves imparting of scientific knowledge, to the students on the subject so that we create knowledge society with scientific approach and mind. Beside knowledge, secondly, it also involves imparting of skill and working knowledge, and there by develops human resource necessary for economic development and finally relevant education also involve providing value education so the education serves as an instrument of creating citizens who cherish value of democracy, patriotism, secularism, fraternity and equality. In higher education we should develop such curriculum at college and university level which will meet these three goals of education and turn out person’s scientific temper, with necessary skills and values. Knowledge, skills should also translate into employability. Pursuing the objectives of National Skill Mission and encouraging industry-classroom relations can go a long way in making students industry ready and relevant.

E. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D) ISSUES

Research and higher education are complementary to each other. According to the available official statistics the expenditure on R&D in the field of science and technology as a percentage of gross domestic products was 0.8 percent during the year 2005-06 in India. For perspective, countries spending the most on science and technology as a percent of their GDP were Israel (5.11 percent), Sweden (4.27 percent), Japan (3.11 percent), South Korea (2.95 percent), the United States (2.77 percent), Germany (2.74 percent) and France (2.27 percent). Among other countries, China (1.54 percent), Russia (1.74 percent), U.K. (1.88 percent), Brazil (1.04 percent) have spent more than India. More over India’s higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers. So this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

F. FACULTY SHORTAGE RELATED ISSUES

This is the great problem throughout country even in the popular cities also because the ratio of teacher to students is not maintained. This is vital because proper attention and responsibility is to be maintained by the teachers and once the teacher has many students to tackle with the studies suffers. According to a recent report of HRD ministry premier educational institutes like the Indian institute of technology and the Indian institute of management are facing the faculty crunch with nearly one third of post vacant. According to a report published in The Hindu around 37.8 percent posts are vacant in the central university, 22 percent in the IIMs, 39 percent in the Indian Institute of Technology and 35.1 percent in other central education institutions coming up under the Human Resource Development Ministry. The pupil teacher ratio in India is 23, which is very high and a big challenge to imparting quality higher education.

G. SHORTAGE OF INFRASTRUCTURES

Infrastructure of institutes is one of the most components in imparting higher education and its scarcity is a big issue and challenge to us. Many institutes of higher education have acute shortage of class rooms, laboratories, hostels, laboratory apparatus and play grounds etc. Poor infrastructure especially in research oriented institutions makes a lot of bright students migrate to other countries which causes brain drain.

H. ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES

The majority of students come from the ordinary class and many of them are unable to provide for their minimum necessities of life. Economic miseries have grown due to the rising prices, habits of wasting money on luxuries. Students hold part time jobs in order to pay for their educational expenses and must divide their attention between a job and university career. These are some of the causes of students’ unrest. It is very difficult to enumerate all the causes of student unrest as they cover a wide spectrum of spheres. Scarcity of public financed education and exorbitant fees of private institutions make education unaffordable to a vast majority.

F. OTHER ISSUES

The participation of students in demonstrations, strikes, processions, mass meetings, walk outs, setting libraries on fire, damaging laboratories and university properties, indulging in ragging like activities on campus. These are the nationwide issues emerged out of students’ unrest. The student in modern society is involving more intensely in social change. The modern student is breaking away from the traditions and restrains, new culture and new thinking – Gandhi-giri for Gandhi’s philosophy, Anna-giri for Anna Hajare’s anticorruption mission is coming into existence on the campus.

F. VII. SUGGESTIONS

In the era of globalization the development and prosperity of nation is dependent on qualified and skilled hands of human resources. So we have to overcome these issues and challenges prevailing in higher education sector of India. As per the present scenario of higher education, there are some suggestions to meet out the challenges.

✓ There is a need to introduce new courses as per demand of industries, service sector and agricultural sectors in India besides traditional courses. The government should encourage traditional and new courses those are necessary to national building and development of society. Industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements. Skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability of academia to understand and make sure good jobs
We need more universities because we are more in number and present number of universities is too less. India needs as many as 1500 universities by 2020. Japan with a population 123.7 crore has 726 universities, Germany with 8.2 crore has 350, UK with 6.1 crore has 125 and the US. With a population of 30.4 crore is reported to have 2466.

The new institutes should be opened in the area where GER is low or where there is no institute nearby.

For better output from the educational system there is a need to maintain optimum teacher-student ratio. The government should give attention on recruitment of teachers.

The centre and state government should develop a separate infrastructure fund for educational institutions to provide better infrastructure.

Disparities in enrolment should be removed by offering ‘poor-friendly’ financial assistance by setting up a government finance organizations

Quality textbooks should be provided that can foster universal and eternal values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people and nation.

A differentiated three-tiered university system i.e. carrier focused, research focused and foundation institutes, where each tier has a distinct strategic objective has enabled universities to build on their strengths and cater across different categories of educational needs. The first tier exclusively to furthering India’s intellectual capital, the other two focus on delivering economic and social value respectively.

While English may continue as the medium of instruction in the universities and colleges, there has to be some provision for the production of knowledge and its dissemination in the mother tongue in the University. This is because there is a greater possibility for the production of knowledge, especially in humanities and social sciences, in the mother tongue than in other languages.

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.

The collaboration and exchange of students among Indian Universities and foreign Universities for research should increased more and more to raise the standards of research.

It should be made compulsory to all institutes to get recognized under Section 2(f) and 12B of the UGC ACT, 1956.

VIII. CONCLUSION

After independence, there has been tremendous growth in institutions of higher learning in all disciplines. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 7%. 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 and at the end the Responsiveness. Education is the basis of human establishment and hence should be treated with profound seriousness. Maintaining the education standards will satiate the concerns of youth which is looking for opportunities within the nation.

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