
HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: NEED OF REFORMS

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ABSTRACT

India has emerged as a global leader and a strong nation. Education is the key to the task of nation building as well as to provide requisite knowledge and skills required for sustained growth of the economy and to ensure overall progress. According to the Census Data 2011, India is overpopulated with a population of 121,01,93,422 which means India today is a powerhouse of talent of 121,01,93,422 plus. In order to convert the population from a challenge to an opportunity, the area that requires immediate attention is education and training.

An academic revolution has taken place in higher education particularly in the past half century marked by a paradigm shift in scope and opportunity. Over the years higher education system has become an enterprise having much of business orientation with all its exposure to fierce competition at different levels of stakeholders. Indian education system considered as one of the largest of its kind in the world also faces/encounters enormous challenges in the new millennium. These challenges are diversified and manifold stretching from contemporary curriculum development, quality assurance and accreditation and ethical value propositions to policy planning and governance. In a technology driven society knowledge rewrites the fate of a nation and so does higher education. One of the major reasons for India's performance for being not that encouraging was due to suboptimal investment on higher education in the recent past. With unprecedented growth of knowledge typically in the area of information and communication followed by globalization shrinking the world into a global village, competitiveness has become a decisive force of growth. This necessitates massive investment on higher education so that availability of internationally acceptable highly skilled manpower can be ensured. But, this drive for internationalization of higher education is a highly ticklish and delicate move and should not be accomplished at the cost of identity of the nation as rightly quoted "Internationalisation of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nation (Knight and Dewitt, 1997)". As a part of India's integration into the world economy the role played by potential foreign participants need a special mention. The impact of potential entrants on Indian higher education system can be felt in most of the functional areas like access, equity and quality. Moreover, in view of the inherent lapses in the regulatory structure of the system, unregulated foreign participation may lead to unfair and exploitative practices; to mention a few high capitation fees, misrepresentation of courses and corruption in admission process which may further accentuate the functional and ideological differences. Thus, in order to ensure excellence and reasonable match between demand for and supply of globally acceptable labour, striking balance has to be restored between accessibility to world-class educational system and model exemplifying national value ethics and standards.

INTRODUCTION

Education starts with us when we start our life journey. From the very first moment, a baby steps into this world, she/he starts to learn. She/he learns to cry, to show any sort of discomfort, smiles to show his/her happiness and also learns to identify his/her mother's touch. This process continues throughout his/her life because she/he learns something new every moment of his/her life. John Dewey said: "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself." 25% of Indian population is still illiterate and out of the total population of 1.21 billion in India, 220 million children go to school. India's GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) is 12.4 percent. The GER in developed countries is between 50 percent to 70 percent. Our current education system selectively discards talented students with inquisitiveness, ability to ask questions and dream to-do something challenging, something better for the society. This paper is an attempt to evaluate India's efforts at reforming educational sector, analyses the growth of education in India during last two decades and suggests ways to ensure that education remains both affordable and accessible to all.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

At the time of Independence, one important deficiency in the education system was that education was heavily art and humanities-based. With passage of time, this deficiency has been removed to some extent. Now, India has the third largest number of science graduates in the world. Until the late 1970s, school education had been on the State List of the Indian Constitution, which meant that States had the final say in the management of their respective education systems. However, in 1976, education was transferred to the Concurrent list through a constitutional amendment, the objective being to promote meaningful educational partnerships between the states and the States have to follow it. The National Policy on Education (NPE) was formulated in 1968 and the National Policy Resolution of 1986, which was later, updated in 1992, where specific responsibilities for organizing, implementing and financing its proposals were assigned. About 80% of the funding for higher education is provided by the states and 20% by the centre through various bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC). The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) maintains the coordination between the central and state. But one serious flaw is still there. Indian scientific teaching is not basically search-based. Thus the young Indian scientists do get some established scientific knowledge but not many of them can do research or show any research results because research is a costly affair and Indian laboratories lack proper facilities for the same. Still, it can be said with pride that in the fields of nuclear, space and computer research, Indian scientists are next to none. The media has also brought about a revolution in the field of education. Teaching through satellites and open universities has opened new vistas for the employed and those who cannot attend any educational or vocational institution. The new communication systems, including the web and Internet, have brought about new type of revolution.

In spite of this, the typical institutions, particularly in rural areas and small towns still lack basic educational facilities. The class-rooms are over-crowded, the syllabi are outdated and the teachers are not well-informed. The examination system which is mainly based on learning by notes also needs some improvement. The poorest are still unable to learn. The primary education needs much more attention and it should be made less costly. Female education is also a somewhat neglected field.

CONTRIBUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPEMENT

Higher education has historically included economic development as part of its core mission. The colleges and universities serving the region have allocated fiscal, physical and human resources and created entrepreneurship systems within the institutions to advance economic development, create a quality workforce by growing, training, and attracting the finest talent development. Senior administrators provide strong, visible leadership designed to create a quality workforce by growing, training, and attracting the finest talent support current business and industry.

ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PROMOTING THE TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Higher education can be a technology driver and instrumental in raising the economic development of the region by doing the following:

- designing cutting-edge technologies which result in new products, businesses, and jobs
- supplying advanced technology for use by the region
- providing technology instruction to create a skilled workforce addressing the digital divide for targeted areas and populations.

RECENT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

A brief overview of the Indian higher education system provides an essential backdrop for the following research findings and comments.

There are three main types of tertiary institution in India: 1) universities and university-level institutions, 2) colleges and 3) diploma-awarding institutions. These are categorised by funding source: central government, state government and private.

Table: Higher education institutions in India

TYPE AND NUMBER OF INSTITUTION	CENTRAL	STATE	PRIVATE	TOTAL
University and university-level institutions		152		316
659				191
Colleges				669
19,930	33,023			13,024
Diploma-awarding institutions			0	3,207
9,541	12,748			
Percentage enrolment in 2012			2.6%	38.6%
100%				58.9%

PRESENT CHALLENGES BEFORE HIGHER EDUCATION

These falls into broad categories: the low quality of teaching and learning; the supply-demand gap; uneven growth and access to opportunity; and constraints on research capacity and innovation.

- The low quality of teaching and learning: Arguably, the greatest challenge facing higher education in India is the chronic shortage of faculty. Various reports estimate that 30-40% of faculty positions are unfilled. Most faculties have had no training in teaching.
- The supply-demand gap: India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross

enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.

- Uneven growth and access to opportunity: Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies. Other issues in teaching and learning which compound the problems include:
- Constraints on research capacity and innovation: With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with broad challenges:

- Outdated, rigid curricula and the absence of employer engagement in course content and skills development and very few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.
- Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.
- High student: teacher ratio, due to the lack of teaching staff and pressure to enrol more students.
- Separation of research and teaching; lack of early stage research experience.
- An ineffective quality assurance system and a complete lack of accountability by institutions to the state and central government, students and other stakeholders.

This has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across south Asia³², and an insufficient basis for movement to higher levels of study and research. These problems are endemic across higher education institutions in India, including many of the 'top tier' institutions, but particularly so in affiliated colleges and state universities.

KEY REFORMS IN INDIA PROPOSED IN 2013-2017(FIVE YEAR PLAN)

The central government operates a five-year planning cycle. The twelfth five-year plan (2013-17) for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion.

Excellence

Priority issues include improvements in teaching and learning, and a focus on learning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching; more international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and consortia.

Equity

Further initiatives targeted at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities.

Expansion

Scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects; enabling flexible and skills-based learning; ensuring a more even

spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment

CONCLUSION

All the positive steps taken till now are welcome. However, implementation of the initiatives is a key to success. These are some points that the nation will have to consider upon. And the path ahead isn't that easy. Walls, windows, doors and teachers will not make a school, till we have hungry children wanting to be in the fields and factories, to earn their meals. The Vision and Mission of Education for all will have to inculcate and imbibe in one and all, leaders and followers that for every child born poor and needy, there will have to be a well-drawn plan, to ensure that s/he doesn't remain so – for if we fail in providing the basic needs of food and shelter to a child, she/he will never see the light of the day, through education – at least. A healthy mind comes in a healthy body. The nation should strive towards total health of children, education will follow. Education for the masses is a massive task. It would need a single minded focus of the State, to implement this programme in a country, which is the 7th largest in the world in terms of size and the 2nd most populated of all. Reform in education is a cultural, political, financial and administrative challenge. The children of today are to be the citizens of tomorrow. We as a citizen of today will able to provide a slate to every child and a pen to write his/her own future. And we will achieve this at least in the coming decade

Given this background, an attempt has been made in this paper to identify the recent status of higher education system of India and explore the possibilities of revamping and revitalizing the core functional areas so that growth in this crucial sector becomes qualitative and sustainable.

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