
Issues and Challenges in Higher Education

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Abstract

We need highly educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can think of changing the status of our country from a developing nation to a developed nation very easily. India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. 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. Universities and their constituent colleges are the main institutes of higher education in India. The present paper is an attempt, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues of quantity and quality in 'Higher Education'.

Keywords: education, government, UGC, NAAC, quality, issues, standards etc.

Introduction

India is now considered to be one of the most promising economies of the world. While, higher education gives India an edge in the world economy as evident from the availability of the skilled manpower, and research scholars working abroad, unemployment, illiteracy and relative poverty continue to be the major deterrents to realize her potential in human resources. The taskforce constituted by World Bank and UNESCO during 2000 has also observed that higher education helps increase wages and productivity that directly enrich individuals and society.. The government has taken many steps to increase student enrollment in higher education and quality improvement in higher educational institutions. The world-class institutions in India are mainly limited.

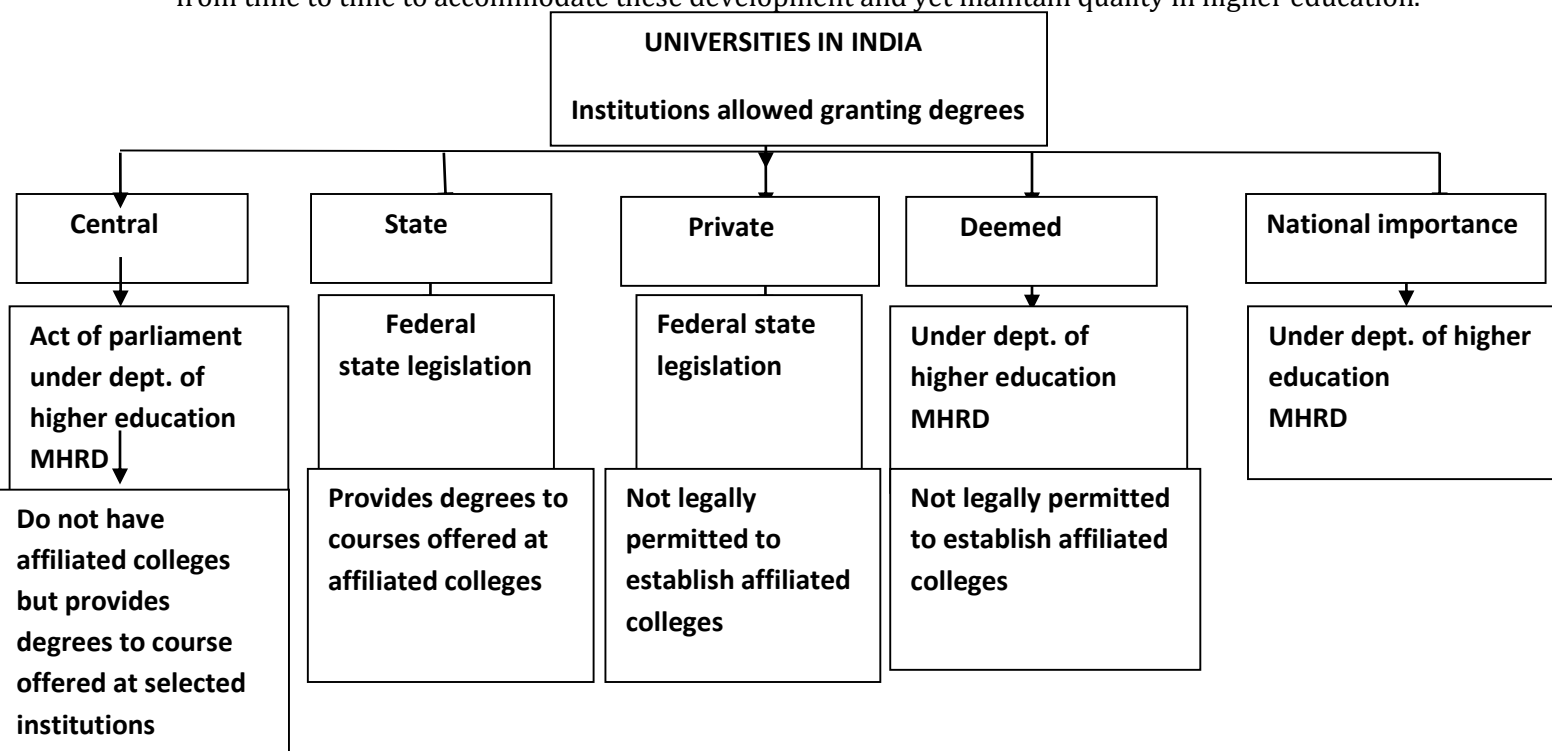
Table 1. Universities in India (*As on 25-05-2016*)

Universities	Total Number
State Universities	347
Deemed to be Universities	123
Central Universities	47
Private Universities	237
Total	754

Source: <http://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/alluniversity.pdf>

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 development. The University Grants Commission of India is not only the lone grant giving agency in the country, but also responsible for coordinating, determining and maintaining the

standards in institutions of higher education. The emergence of a worldwide economic order has immense consequences for higher education more so under the changes that have taken place in the recent past with regard to globalization, industrialization, information technology advancement and its impact on education. Added to these are the policy changes that have taken place at the UGC, 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), the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) and such other regulatory bodies from time to time to accommodate these development and yet maintain quality in higher education.



It is time for all those who are concerned with policymaking, planning, administration and implementation of Higher Education to revitalize the very thinking on the subject and put it on the right track. Keeping in view, Government constituted a Knowledge Commission to suggest measures to alleviate the problems that higher education sector is afflicted with and make India a Knowledge super power in the global economy. But the government also realizes a need for an expansion of the higher education sector, and the states poses challenges to ensure quality education even in the existing institutions. The government after pursuing neo-liberal policies for the last 17 odd years is keen to open the higher education sector to the private providers, either through public-private participation or foreign direct investment in higher education. Opinions of people are varying in this regard. While one section is opposed to commodification of education, the other section thinks that involving the private sector is the only way out. How would the higher education sector evolve in response to these challenges is a crucial issue for us to understand and anticipate.

Source: www.scienceandnature.org

Objectives of the study

The present paper is an effort, to identify and discuss a number of critical issues, of quantity and quality in Higher Education in India. It is meant to be a modest contribution to assess 'Higher Education' against the background of the current scenario and the possibilities of meeting the challenges.

Issues of higher education system:

The present system of higher education does not serve the purpose for which it has been started. In general education itself has become so profitable a business that quality is lost in the increase of quantity of professional institutions with quota system and politicization adding fuel to the fire of spoil system, thereby increasing unemployment of graduates without quick relief to mitigate their sufferings in the job market of the country. So, the drawbacks of the higher education system underscore the need for reforms to make it worthwhile and beneficial to all concerned.

Most observers agree that Indian higher education, the significant and impressive developments of the past few decades notwithstanding, faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Quality of education delivered in most institutions is very poor. While India has some institutions of global repute delivering quality education, such as Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) and Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), we do not have enough of them. It has very narrow range of course options that are offered and education is a seller's market, where there is no scope of incentive to provide quality education. There is clearly a lack of educated educators and teaching for many is not an attractive profession. It's a last choice in terms of career. Number of quality Ph.D.s produced each year is very low and those required by academia is far higher. In fact, at many institutions fresh graduates are employed to teach, leading to poor quality of classroom instruction. Most of the education institutions esp. in states such as Maharashtra and states in South India are owned by politicians. This Education system which is highly regulated by the government has been set up to benefit politicians. The growth of higher education in India has been largely guided by the serviceable prerequisite of the economy. After independence, the role of the state in planning out a development path and also in building higher education institutions was guided by mutuality of purpose. Most observers of higher education in India feel that performance of higher education institutions has been less than satisfactory in terms of access, equity and quality. There was an urgent need to work for the development of the educational sector to meet the need of the emerging opportunities, increasing younger generation population and challenges of the 21st century.

Challenges of higher education system:

Government tried to establish new education policies in the system but this is very sad to delineate that they were not sufficient for our country. Still we are facing lot of problems and challenges in our Education System. India recognizes that the new global scenario poses unprecedented challenges for the higher education system.

- The University Grants Commission has appropriately stated that a whole range of skills will be demanded from the graduates of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce, as well as from the various professional disciplines such as agriculture, law, management, medicine or engineering.

- It requires a major investment to make human resource productive by coupling the older general disciplines of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and having adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and develop appropriate attitudes. It seeks to do so by a new emphasis on community based programmes and work on social issues.
- Concepts of access, equity, relevance and quality can be operationalised only if the system is both effective and efficient. Hence, the management of higher education and the total networking of the system has become an important issue for effective management. The shift can occur only through a systemic approach to change as also the development of its human resource and networking the system through information and communication technology.
- There are many basic problems facing higher education in India today. These include inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large number of vacancies in faculty positions, low student enrolment rate, outmoded teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender and ethnic imbalances.
- Apart from concerns relating to deteriorating standards, there is reported exploitation of students by many private providers. Ensuring equitable access to quality higher education for students coming from poor families is a major challenge. Students from poor background are put to further disadvantage since they are not academically prepared to crack highly competitive entrance examinations that have bias towards urban elite and rich students having access to private tuitions and coaching. Education in basic sciences and subjects that are not market friendly has suffered.
- Research in higher education institutions is at its lowest ebb. There is an inadequate and diminishing financial support for higher education from the government and from society. Many colleges established in rural areas are non-viable, are under-enrolled and have extremely poor infrastructure and facilities with just a few teachers.
- A series of judicial interventions over the last two decades and knee-jerk reaction of the government – both at the centre and state level and the regulatory bodies without proper understanding of the emerging market structure of higher education in India has further added confusion to the higher education landscape in the country.

Suggestions for improving quality of higher education

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

1. **Towards a Learning Society-** As we move towards a learning society, every human activity will require contributions from experts, and this will place the entire sector of higher education in sharp focus. Although the priorities, which are being assigned today to the task of Education for All, will continue to be preponderant, the country will have to prepare itself to invest more and more on higher education and simultaneously, measures will have to be taken to refine, diversify and upgrade higher education and research programmes.
2. **Industry and Academia Connection-** Industry and Academia connection is 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 keeping in view knowledge + skills+ global professional skills = good jobs.

3. **Incentives to Teachers and Researchers-** Industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education and they are also industry ready and employable. Vocational and Diploma courses need to be made more attractive to facilitate specialized programs being offered to students. Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation.
4. **Innovative Practices-** The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. It offers opportunities for economic growth, improved health, better service delivery, improved learning and socio-cultural advances. Though efforts are required to improve the country's innovative capacity, yet the efforts should be to build on the existing strengths in light of new understanding of the research innovation-growth linkage.
5. **To mobilize resources-** The decline in public funding in the last two plan periods has resulted in serious effects on standards due to increasing costs on non-salary items and emoluments of staff, on the one hand, and declining resources, on the other. 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.
6. **Coming of Information Age-** The world is entering 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 for meeting the demands of explosion of information, fast-changing nature of occupations, and lifelong education. Knowledge, which is at the heart of higher education, is a crucial resource in the development of political democracy, the struggle for social justice and progress towards individual enlightenment.
7. **Student-Centered 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-centered education and employment of dynamic methods of education are the need of the day. 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 learning through ICT can facilitate the students to learn from experts sitting at far off places.
8. **Public Private Partnership-** Public private partnership (PPP) is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. Governments can ensure PPP through an appropriate policy. Such efforts need a very serious structuring for the research base institutions. We have to be optimistic that private-public partnership and the Industry interface will take place in the field of education at all levels, and particularly in the backward regions, which is the need of the hour. To achieve excellence, we thus need to create a real partnership between government, educators and industry- Partnerships that can provide our high-tech industries with skilled workers who meet the standards of their industry.
9. **To Provide Need Based Job-Oriented Courses-** Based on knowledge only vision of the future life and work can be had; based on this vision only a broad ambition can be fixed for oneself; and

- based on this ambition only one can lead interesting life doing satisfying job to do remarkable achievements in some field in the world. Hence there is a need to provide job oriented courses.
10. **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.
 11. **Towards a New-Vision-** In this new age, great cultural achievements of the past have to be recovered and enriched in the context of the contemporary advancement so that humanity can successfully meet the evolutionary and revolutionary challenges and bring about a new type of humanity and society marked by integrated powers of physical, emotional, dynamic, intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual potentialities.
 12. **Action Plan for Improving Quality-** Academic and administrative audit should be conducted every year in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-financed colleges should come forward for accreditation and fulfill the requirements of accreditation. Universities and colleges should realise the need for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions.
 13. **Individuality-** Some parents want to live through their children so they compel their wards to opt for specific streams. Some students can excel in studies whereas some can achieve wonderful things in Sports, Music, Dance, Painting, Science and Technology in the world. They should be allowed to follow the area of their interest. Further, fees for education in general should not be high; especially, the fees for higher studies should be within the reach of every class of people in the nation.
 14. **Privatization of Higher Education-** In any nation education is the basic necessity for the socio-economic development of the individuals and the society. Improved standard of education as first priority should be offered to the majority by the govt. 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 cater to the need of growing population.
 15. **Quality improvement-** Quality of educational institutions depends on all functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staff, 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. Universities like-Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Mumbai & University of Delhi are known for their tie ups. Other Universities should also follow the same.
 16. **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
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accountability. An Accreditation agency with a conglomerate of government, industry, academy, society etc. means significant stakeholders of the education system must ensure that the students are not taken for a ride. External review must be conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible by international experts.

17. **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 implemented in letter and spirit.
18. **High-tech Libraries-** Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they still can be updated. A library must be online and conducive for serious study so that Indian universities should concentrate more on providing quality education which is comparable to that of international standards.

Conclusions:

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. To attain and sustain national, regional or international quality, certain components are particularly relevant, notably careful selection of staff and continuous staff development, in particular through the promotion of appropriate programs for academic development, including teaching/learning methodology and mobility between countries, between higher education institutions and the world of work, as well as student mobility within and between countries. As a result, knowledge is not only going to be the driver of Indian economy, but also, it is going to permeate into all the strata of Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions. Therefore, India has to rise to the occasion urgently and reorient its higher education system to be vibrant, competitive, meaningful and purposeful; besides, there is absolutely no substitute to quality of higher education, although the country has been faced for a long time with the serious problem of meeting the quantity needs of our society.

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