

Issues in Higher Education: Reflexions of Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The new challenge before the country at the beginning of the twenty first century is to become a developed society, which requires a vibrant economy driven by knowledge has to be ushered in soon and also a new society where justice and human values prevail has to be created. With the explosive growth of knowledge in the past and with the development of handy tools of information and communication technologies as well as of other scientific innovations, competency has become a hallmark of growth all over the World. It influences Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions. Therefore, India has to rise very soon and reorient its higher education system to be influential, competitive, meaningful and purposeful. The world has realized that the economic success of the states is directly determined by their education systems. Education is a nation's strength. A developed nation is inevitably an educated nation. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Since independence, India as a developing nation is contentiously progressing in the education field. Although there have been lot of challenges to higher education system of India but equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and to make higher education system much better. It needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn is of utmost important. India needs well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. India provides highly skilled people to other countries therefore; it is very easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. The current study aims to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India.

Keywords

Education, Opportunities, Challenges, Innovation, Universities.

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The development of any nation depends on the development of more importantly its academic institutions as well as research activities. Institutions of higher education are considered as precious instruments for sustainable human development through creation and expansion of knowledge which brings a catalytic change in society. Presently the Gross Enrolment Ratio of India in higher education is about 26% (2018-19). Other countries such as USA (82%), China (73%), and Brazil (75%) have much higher enrolment rates. There were 903 universities running up to 2018 in India. The National Knowledge Commission recommends to establish 1500 universities for expansion of opportunities for students in higher education. According to academic ranking by London Times Higher Education supplement only one IIT of India figures among the top 200 Universities of the World. Similarly according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities in the year 2019 about 8% universities of USA figured among the top 500 universities in the world. The others are 26 from UK, 35 from Australia and 50 from Singapore. Out of over 950 universities only few Indian Universities were included in the list of top 500 in the world that too at the lower ranks. These circumstances need expansion with quality assurance of higher education in India. The need of expansion with quality and impact of globalisation have created challenges in the field of higher education in India.

The new challenge before the country at the beginning of the twenty first century is to become a developed society, which requires a vibrant economy driven by knowledge has to be ushered in soon and a new society where justice and human values prevail has to be created. With the explosive growth of knowledge in the past and with the development of handy tools of information and communication technologies as well as of other scientific innovations, competency has become a hallmark of growth all over the World. It influences Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions. Therefore, India has to reorient its higher education system to be influential, competitive, meaningful and purposeful.

Salient Features of Higher Education in India

India is now at a crucial stage. It is one among the largest education markets in the world. About 681 million population (50% of the total population) below the age of 25 years are waiting for education. Nearly 30 million of India's population is in between age group of 18-23, which is the target age group for higher education. The emergence of India as a knowledge based, service driven economy has made its human capital its major strength and opportunity for the growth. But its infrastructure

is not sufficient for delivery of education, particularly in the field of higher and vocational education. Globalisation, technological advancements and inability of the educational system to educate and train this human capital demand new avenues in education and training.

Indian higher education is very complex. Its college enrolment is around 374 million. It is the third largest in the world next to China. Female participation rates are even lower, large regional imbalances and wider disparities among various socioeconomic groups exist. The number of institutions is about 51,000 having average 750 students for each. But they are not effective. Public institutions are not in proper shape. The governance of higher education is centralised and burdensome. There is no demand for accountability. They are not improving properly. The existing vocational education and training is limited and of poor quality. Most of the professional education is not wide. The curriculum is not updated. Many of the institutions are not accredited. Government support continues to be scarce and spread unevenly. There is small number of students have access to student loans. Most institutions are raising fees enormously in professional institutions without any guidance.

The 12th five year plan had set its goals as “Expansion of enrolment in higher education with inclusiveness, quality and relevant education with necessary academic reforms in the university and college system. Our long- term goal is to set India as a nation in which all those who aspire good quality of higher education can access it irrespective of their paying capacities.” The Government had set a target of 25% GER by the end of the 12th plan (2017) and of 15% by the end of 11th plan 2012. But still India spends merely about 3.7% GDP on education. Of this 0.66% is the amount spent on higher education which is very less. Kothari Commission (1966) recommended for spending 6% of its GDP on education. However, The National Knowledge Commission (2012) recommended 1.5% of GDP for higher education out of total 6% GDP for education. Higher education across the world is undergoing a process of differentiation. This is happening horizontally as new providers enter the system, and vertically as institutional types proliferate. A diverse system, with a variety of institutions pursuing different goals and student audiences, is best able to serve individual and national goals.

Despite these challenges, higher education system of India equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and have the capability to make its identity at international level. However, it needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of universities and colleges in the current millennium, and emerging scientific

research on how people learn is of utmost important. India provides highly skilled people to other countries therefore; it is very easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation.

Expansion of Higher Education Sector in India

As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes, public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions. However these comparisons tend to overemphasise research, using research performance as a yardstick of institutional value. If these processes fail to address the quality of teaching, it is in part because measuring teaching quality is challenging.

India has always been a land of scholars and learners. In ancient times also, India was regarded all over the world for its universities like Takshila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and its scholars. By independence India had 20 universities, 500 colleges enrolling about 2,30,000 students. Since independence India has progressed significantly in terms of higher education statistics. This number has increased to 993 Universities and 39931 colleges including 10725 stand alone institutions up to December, 2019. Central Government and state Governments are trying to nurture talent through focusing on the number of Universities and Colleges for expansion of higher education. There is no doubt to the fact that much of the progress achieved by India in education has come from private sector. In fact the public sector and private sector is not in opposition to each other but they are working simultaneously in Indian education sphere. UGC is the main governing body that enforces the standards, advises the government and helps to coordinate between centre and states. The table shown below depicts the growth more than nine times in the last five decades and the number of colleges has been increased from 3603 in 1970-71 to 39931 in 2018-19 and no. of universities from 103 to 993 in the corresponding period. Source:

Year	No. of Universities	No. of Colleges
1970-71	103	3603
1980-81	133	4722
1990-91	190	7346
2000-01	256	12803
2006-07	387	21170
2010-11	659	33023
2018-19	993	39931

Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) and www.statista.com, 2020.

Challenges in Higher Education in India:

The Indian education system has not developed fully. Not a single university is in top 200 universities of the world. In India the government tried to boost the education system and implemented various education policies but they were not sufficient to put an example for the universe. UGC is continuously working and focusing on quality education in higher education sector. Still there are lot of problems and challenges in the education system. Some of the basic challenges in higher education system in India are

(I) Infrastructure: Poor infrastructure is a major challenge to the higher education system of India particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. There are large number of colleges which are functioning on second or third floor of the building on ground or first floor there exists readymade hosieries or photocopy shops.

(II) Structure of Higher Education: Management of the Indian education faces challenges of over centralisation, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism. As a result of increase in number of affiliated colleges and students, the burden of administrative functions of universities has significantly increased and the core focus on academics and research is diluted.

(III) Enrolment: The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.

(IV) Equity: There is no equity in GER among different sects of the society. According to previous studies the GER in higher education in India among male and female varies to a greater extent. There are regional variations too. Some states have high GER while as some is quite behind the national GER which reflect a significant imbalances within the higher education system.

(V) Faculty: Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. Large numbers of NET/PhD candidates are unemployed even there are lot of vacancies in higher education. These deserving candidates are then applying in other departments which is a biggest blow to the higher education system.

(VI) Research and Innovation: There are very nominal scholars in our country whose writing is cited by famous western authors. There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as, limited numbers of quality faculty to advise students. Most of research scholars are without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time which directly or indirectly affects their research. Moreover, Indian Higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centres. So, this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

(VII) Quality: Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today. However, Government is continuously focusing on the quality education. Still large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world.

(VIII) Political Interference: Most of the educational Institutions are owned by the political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. They are using the innocent students for their selfish means. Students organise campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

Indian Higher education system is growing very fast irrespective of various challenges but there is no reason that these challenges cannot be overcome. With the help of new-age learning tools, it is easy for country like India to overcome these problems and bring a paradigm shift in the country's higher education sector. With such a vibrant country with huge population properly educated, the possibilities are endless. If knowledge is imparted using advanced digital teaching and learning tools, and society is made aware of where we are currently lagging behind, our country can easily emerge as one of the most developed nations in the world.

India is a large country, with an estimated population of young people aged between 18 to 23 years to be around 150 millions. The sheer size of the market offers huge opportunities for development of the higher education sector in India. India now boasts of having nearly 40000 colleges and 1000 universities, which has been quite a remarkable growth during the last seven decades. The year 2019 witnessed more than 30 million enrolments, which makes India the 3rd largest educational system in the world. Unfortunately, the educational infrastructure of India is inadequate to handle such huge volumes. In spite all the government spending in the educational

sector, it is just too insufficient to meet the growing requirements. Therefore, higher educational sector has now been identified as one of the promising areas for private and foreign investments. It offers immense investment opportunities in both non-regulated and regulated segments.

There are opportunities for strategic engagement and capacity building in higher education leadership and management at the state level. There are opportunities for India to collaborate at national and international level on areas of systemic reform, including quality assurance, international credit recognition, and unified national qualifications framework. Equality of educational opportunity in higher education is considered essential because higher education is a powerful tool for reducing or eliminating income and wealth disparities. The idea of equalising educational opportunities also lies in the fact that the ability to profit by higher education is spread among all classes of people. There are great reserves of untapped ability in the society; if offered the chance they can rise to the top. A great deal of talent of the highest level is, in fact, lost by inegalitarian system of education.

The need to enhance the employability of graduates is presenting entry points for collaboration in enterprise education and entrepreneurship, links with industry, research skills, and the wide range of transferable skills including English. The emerging interest in Indian higher education institutions in the vocational skills market provides areas for potential engagement with international partners. There is a need to build stronger relationships and increase mutual understanding in higher education by increasing support and participation in platforms (conferences, workshops, seminars) which enable debate and dialogue with other countries of the world.

Improving the System of Higher Education:

- There is a need to implement innovative and transformational approach from primary to higher education level to make Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive.
- Higher educational institutes need to improve quality and reputation.
- There should be a good infrastructure of colleges and universities which may attract the students.
- Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes and also generate linkage between national research laboratories and research centres of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research.

➤ There is a need to focus on the graduate students by providing them such courses in which they can achieve excellence, gain deeper knowledge of subject so that they will get jobs after recruitment in the companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to the higher education.

➤ Universities and colleges in both public and private sector must be away from the political affiliations.

➤ Favouritism, money making process should be out of education system.

➤ There should be a multidisciplinary approach in higher education so that students knowledge may not be restricted only upto his own subjects.

Concluding Remarks:

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthens. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all round personality identifying the best in him or her. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last seven decades after independence, yet it is not equally accessible to all. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 8%. Still a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children 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 utilising the benefits of whatever development have taken place for the benefit of the people. No doubt India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is atmost priority. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilise this potential properly is the issue which needed for attention. 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 of sustain that rate of growth, there is an express 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.

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