Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The role of higher education in national development is well-established. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence. Presently India's higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of number of institutions and is often cited as one of the main contributors in the economic rise of India. It has undergone rapid development in the post-independence era. At the launch of first five-year plan in the year 1950-51 there was in India only 28 Universities, 695 Colleges and 1,74,000 students. Today we have 504 Universities, 25951 colleges and more than eighteen million students. In spite of this large education system the condition of higher education in the country is very poor. Presently Gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education in the country is only 12.4% while GER for China is more than 23%, for U.K. 57% and 83% for U.S. It the biggest challenge before us, there is an urgent need of inclusion of those remaining peoples in higher education in India. To achieve the enrolment ratio of 30% it would need another 800 to 1000 Universities and over 40000 colleges by the year 2020. In this research paper an effort has been made to present the development and current scenario of higher education in India by analyzing the various data and also identify the key issues and challenges before higher education sector like low GER, including education, quality education, relevance education, research and development and faculty shortage in India's higher education sector. Looking into the present scenario of the higher education in India I recommend some points in order to further meet the challenges.

Introduction

The role of higher education in national development is well-established. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence. Presently India's higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of number of institutions and is often cited as one of the main contributors in the economic rise of India. It has undergone rapid development in the post-independence era. At the launch of first five year plan in the year 1950-51, there were in India only 28 Universities, 695 Colleges and 1,74,000 students. Today we have 533 Universities, 33,023 colleges and more than eighteen million students. In spite of this large education system the condition of higher education in the country is very poor. Presently Gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education in the country is only 12.4% while GER for China is more than 23%, for U.K. 57% and 83% for U.S. It the biggest challenge before us and there is an urgent need of inclusion of those remaining peoples in higher education in India. To achieve the enrolment ratio of 30% it would need another 800 to 1000 Universities and over 40000 colleges by the year 2020. In this research paper an effort has been made to focus on that aspect of higher education and some other challenges facing it.

Objectives of the Research

The main objectives of this research paper were following.

(1) To analyze the development and present scenario of higher education in India.

(2) To identify the key issues and challenges that India's higher education sector is facing.

(3) To present the recommendations to meet these challenges.

Methodology

This study intended to examine the issues and challenges of Indian higher education system based on secondary data. The data had been collected and furnished from the official website of the HRD Ministry of India, University Grant Commission, recent economic surveys of India and other related research papers, books, news papers and published work.

Development and 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

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responsibility between the Union (Central) 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. Institutions of higher education and their intake capacity are given in Table-1.

Table-1
Institutions of higher education and their intake capacity

Capacity Indicators	1950	1991	2004	2006	2009	2011
No. of University level Institutions	25	177	320	367	467	533
No. of Colleges	700	7,346	16,885	18,064	25,951	33,023
No. of Teachers (in Thousands)	15	272	457	488	588	-
No. of Students Enrolled (in Million)	0.21	4.9	9.95	11.2	13.6	-

Source: Website of UGC & Annual Report 2010-11 of UGC

Table-1 shows that in the year 1950 the country had just 25 university-level institutions this figure has gone up to 533 in 2011; more than 21 fold increase. The growth of degree colleges during the period has been even larger, more than 47 times. The number of colleges has gone up from 700 to 33,023. The growth of number of teachers during 1950 to 2009 has gone up to 5, 88,000; more than 39 fold increase. The student's enrolment ratio has gone up to more than 64 times. The number of registered students has gone up from 0.21 million to 13.6 million. The phenomenal increase in enrolment of this order would not have been possible without the growth in the number of institutions of higher learning, both universities and colleges in particular. In India university-level institutions widely differ in terms of their structure and coverage. These could be sub-divided into six broad groups: central universities, state universities, deemed universities, institutions of national importance, established under central legislation, institutions of national importance, established under state legislation and private universities. Details of university level institutions in India are given in Table-2.

Table-2
University Level Institutions in India

S.No.	Type	2002	2006	2007	2009	2010
1	Central Universities	18	20	25	40	41
2	State Universities	178	217	231	234	257
3	Deemed Universities	052	102	102	128	130
4	Institutions of national importance (Central Legislation)	12	13	33	39	39
5	Institutions of national importance (State Legislation)	05	05	05	05	05
6	Private Universities	-	10	21	21	61
Total		**265**	**367**	**417**	**467**	**533**

Source: Website of UGC (The figures for 2010 are up to 1st July 2010)

Table-2 shows the impressive growth of university level institutions in the country during the last eight years. These impressive numbers, however, mask several problems of the higher education sector in the country. The expansion of higher education in India has been poorly planned and has remained somewhat erratic. Although all states and three union territories have university-level institutions, their distribution is far from being uniform. Tamilnadu has the highest university level institutions numbers 54 while Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of colleges. University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for coordination determination, and maintenance of standards, release of grants. Professional councils such as All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Distance Education Council (DEC), are responsible for recognition of courses, promotion of professional institutions and providing grants to undergraduate programmes and various awards. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous institution established by the UGC in 1994 to assess and accredit institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, based on prescribed criteria. NAAC has accredited only 159 Universities (30%) and 4253 colleges/institutions (13%) till March 2010.

Issues and Challenges before Higher Education

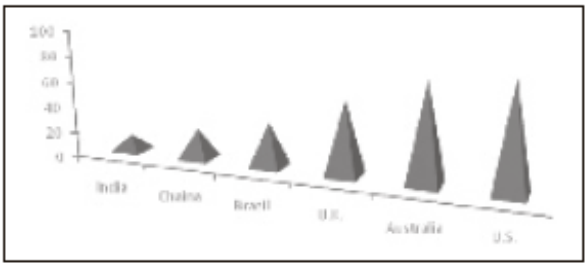
The rapid expansion of higher education system in India has brought several pertinent issues. In the present scenario following are the main issues and challenges before our higher education system.

Issues related to Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

As pointed out earlier, the growth and expansion of higher education in the country, in post-Independence period, has been rapid and sizeable. Yet it could have been quite inadequate. Moreover, it has been uneven which has given rise to numerous access-related issues. Presently Gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education in the country is only 12.4%. However, the enrolment level varies across states. Enrolment ratio in different states of the country ranges between 1.0 and 33.7 percent. We also need to recognize that our enrolment ratio is far below from several other countries. GER of important countries are shown in Diagram-1.

Diagram-1 shows that GER is 23 per cent for China, 34 per cent for Brazil, 57 per cent for U.K., 77 per cent for Australia and 83 per cent for the U.S. Lower GER is the biggest challenge before us; therefore there is an urgent need of inclusion of those remaining peoples in higher education in India. If India were to increase that figure of 12.4% to 30%, then it would need another 800 to one thousand universities and over 40,000 colleges in the next 10 years. Addressing a higher education summit organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), former HRD Minister Kapil Sibal said "We will need 800 new universities and 40,000 new colleges to meet the aim of 30 percent GER by 2020. Government alone cannot meet this aim". Statistics show that there is a huge gap between the demand and supply. Thus, enrolment expansion is the biggest challenge before the country.

Diagram-1
GER in Different Countries in 2010



Issues related to Inclusion Education

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge facing the Indian higher education system is that of inequity in educational development, with a large section of the population remaining illiterate and a large number of children not getting even primary education. This has 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 developments have taken place for the benefit of the people. The problem of unequal distribution of educational development is quite complicated. It is not uniformly distributed across the country. Many regions and many segments of population appear to be left out, providing clinching evidence of disparities and imbalances which need to be corrected as soon as possible. Prominent among such disparities are following.

1) **Rural-Urban Disparities:** Out of every 10 persons in India, 7 live in villages. This is what makes rural-urban disparity in higher education

still more disquieting. According to NSSO data (2004-05), the GER in rural areas is merely 6.74 percent, as compared with 19.88 percent in urban areas.

2) **Inter-State Disparities:** GER across different states and regions are far from uniform. There are 19 states and union territories in which GER is lower than the national average (10.84 percent).

3) **Inter-religious group Differences:** Amongst the various religious groups, Muslims are found to have the lowest GER (6.84 percent), a half of the national average. It contrasts with the fact that other religious groups have GER higher than the national average.

4) **Inter-Caste Variations:** While national average of GER is 10.84 percent, Scheduled Castes have GER of 6.52 percent, Scheduled Tribes 6.57 percent, and Other Backward Classes 8.77 percent.

5) **Gender Disparities:** GER for girls is just 9.11 percent as compared with 12.42 percent for boys. GER for female belonging to lower caste groups and some social groups (particularly Muslims) is even lower.

6) **Disparities among Occupation Groups:** GER for the agricultural labourers 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.

Quality related Issues

Quantity and Quality of highly specialized human resources determine their competence in the global market. According to a recent government report two third of India's colleges and universities are below standard. Out of 16,000 Colleges that come under the UGC purview, only 5,813 (36%) are recognized under Section 2(f), and only 5,273 colleges (38%) 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 417 university-level institutions, 317 fall under the jurisdiction of the UGC. Among these, 164 universities were actually provided with development grants during the Tenth Plan. Out of 164 universities which, at present, receive development grants from the UGC, 111 universities are accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and, among them; only 32 percent have rated as A grade or above. Amongst the 4,870 colleges, as many as 2,780 are accredited by the NAAC and, among them, barely 9 percent are rated as A or above. Doubtless, quality and excellence in colleges leaves much to be desired. Thus, 68 percent of the universities and 91 percent of the colleges are rated average or below average in terms of quality parameters specified by the 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.

Relevant Education related Issues

The issue of offering relevant education also poses serious concern. 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 that education serves as an instrument of creating citizens who cherish value of democracy, 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.

Research and Development (R&D) Issues

Research and higher education are complementary to each other. According to the available official statistics [9] the expenditure on R&D in the field of Science & Technology as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was 0.8 percent during the year 2005-06 in India. For perspective, countries spending the most on S&T 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) and Brazil (1.04 percent) have spent more than India. Moreover, India's higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers. So this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

Faculty Shortage related issues

According to a recent report of HRD Ministry premier educational institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) are facing a faculty crunch with nearly one-third of the posts vacant. According to a report published in IANS [10] around 35 percent posts are vacant in the central universities, 25 percent in the IIMs, 33.33 percent in the National Institute of Technology (NITs) and 35.1 percent in other central education institutions coming up under the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry.

Other Issues

Besides the above issues some other issues include academic reforms-the way we operate imparting education in universities and colleges, the issues related to the regulation of the higher education system through various regulatory councils by the centre, the internalization of the higher education, issue of public - private partnership and similar issues.

Recommendations

In era of globalization there are so many issues and challenges for higher education sector in India. We want to face these challenges and try to better development of the nation by way of good human resource. Hence, there is an urgent need to do some qualitative changes in this sector. As per the present scenario of the higher education in India I recommend following in order to further meet the challenges:

1. In India most institutions are providing traditional courses, hence there is need to change their attitude and introduce new courses as per demand of industrial, service sector and agricultural sector in India. The government should permit only those traditional courses that are needful to nation building and development of society.
2. The government should permit grant –in-aid basis professional colleges in India. Policy of non-grant base colleges should restructure and make provision of partially or fully financial assistance for all types of professional institutes which are helpful for the human resource development in India.
3. In the era of globalization and commercialization educational system should try to provide commercial education; not education on only commercial basis. It must be required on social and moral basis also.
4. The students who are enrolled in higher educational institutes, have a lot of creativity. The institute should push their efforts and provide better perspective for them.
5. Private sector should run universities not for a profit-basis through charitable trusts/societies but as a part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR).
6. Drop out ratio of girls students is near about 3 percent at the XII or HSC level. It is not good for women's empowerment process in India. So, teachers, educational institutes and government as well as social institutes should concentrate on this problem and stop the drop out of girl students in higher education.
7. Examination system in Indian non-professional colleges may be outdated because it does not give good real output from the system. Hence, examination reforms are required on the basis of practices and creativity.
8. For better output from the educational system there is a need to maintain optimum teacher-student ratio. The government should give attention on the recruitments of the teachers in the higher education in India and offer, good salary packages and benefits to the faculty so that good brains can be attracted to this profession.
9. The centre and state government should develop a separate infrastructural fund for educational institutes to provide better infrastructural facilities to the educational institutes.
10. Government should offer tax concessions/fiscal incentives for setting up campuses of higher education by private / corporate sectors.

Conclusion

Although higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence yet it is not equally accessible to all. Till today a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children do not get even primary education. This has 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 developments have taken place for the benefit of the people. Our higher education system has not been able to change its organizational structure and form. Nor has it been possible to maintain uniform standards of education or ensure that education imparted is relevant to our present needs. Under the circumstances, it is necessary that we need to implement the reforms in the higher education system and also bring forth new factors of production, namely knowledge, skills and technology which have the ability to unleash the productive frontiers of the economy in the most efficient and dynamic way. Besides, India should try to become "knowledge economy" to promote inclusive growth.

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I am a slow walker, but I never walk back.

Araham Lincoln