

A study on challenges and opportunities in Education system in India

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Abstract

India's higher education system is highly centralized and undergoing large changes since its inception in 1947. Largely based upon the British system of education, educational policy is ever-developing. After independence there is a remarkable growth in the higher education system of India offering education and training in almost all aspects of human creativity and intellectual endeavour. However, the overall scenario of higher education in India does not match with the global Quality standards. 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 need well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. Higher education system plays an important role for the country's overall development which includes industrial, social, economic etc. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. The vision of higher education in India is to realize the country's human resources potential to its fullest with equity and inclusion. The higher education sector, in recent decades, has witnessed a tremendous growth in many aspects such as its institutional capacity, enrolment, teacher-student ratio, etc. The rapid expansion of the higher education system at the same time has brought several pertinent issues related to equity, efficiency, excellence and access to higher education in the country. 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. No doubt, Education has attained a key position in the knowledge society both at national and global level as well. 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. The current study aims to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India.

Keywords: Higher Educational System, Quality Education, Challenges, Opportunities.

1. Introduction

For centuries, India has been a major centre for learning and many popular universities existed here. Even today, the country has some of the best Universities in the world. Besides, it is also facing many challenges in its primary education while striving to reach 100% literacy. Through the Universal Compulsory Primary Education, maintaining the quality of education in rural areas has been difficult and Kerala is the only Indian state to achieve this goal.

All levels of education, from primary to higher education, are overseen by the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education and Literacy. The Indian government has also heavily subsidized the education, although there is an initiative to make the higher education partially self-financing.

The Indian Education System has many stages such as the Nursery, the Primary, the Secondary, the Higher Secondary, the Grad-

uation, and the Post Graduation. The Preprimary or the Nursery has the Lower Kindergarten and the Upper Kindergarten, where the basic reading and writing skills are developed. The Primary school has the children between the ages of six and eleven. It has the organized classes of one to five. The Secondary school children are between the ages of eleven and fifteen and the classes are organized from six to ten. The higher secondary school students are between the ages of sixteen and seventeen and the classes are organized as eleven and twelve. In some states, the classes between six and eight are also referred as the Middle schools and those between eight and ten are referred as the high schools. There are many different streams available after secondary education. The Higher Education in India aims at providing education to specialize in a field and includes many technical schools, colleges, and universities. The schools in India are controlled by various

boards such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) board, the state government boards, the National Open School and the International schools.

There are plenty of government-funded schools in each major Indian city catering to the working classes. Even though there are many Government high schools with English as the medium of instruction, the students are usually taught in the regional language. These institutions are heavily subsidised and the study materials are also subsidised sometimes. The Government schools have the state curriculum. The secondary education is also provided by a number of private schools and these schools will either follow the national curriculum or the state curriculum.

2. Literature Review

For a long period, India did not have an organized way of educating its population. The gurukula system was prevalent in India in ancient times, which rendered access to education very difficult for the common person. The organized system of education is a British legacy, introduced by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a progressive quantitative expansion of the system in the early part of the twentieth century, and at the time of independence in 1947; there were approximately 21 universities and 500 colleges in the country (Gnanam, A & Stella, A. 1999). The expansion of higher education system in India has been chaotic and unplanned. The drive to make higher education socially inclusive has led to a sudden and dramatic increase in the numbers of institutions without a proportionate increase in material and intellectual resources. As a result, academic standards have been jeopardised (Béteille, André., 2005).

Feigenbaum (1994) believes that "quality of education" is the key factor in "invisible" competition between countries, since the quality of products and services is determined by the way that managers, teachers, workers, engineers and economists think, act and make decisions about quality. While Seymour, D.T (1992) admits that education, and in particular higher education itself, is also driven towards commercial competition imposed by economic forces.

In the context of the Information Technology Revolution, Communication Explosion, the Knowledge Economy and Globalization, India's production of Professionals is phenomenal. With over 300 Universities and 15,600 Colleges spewing out 2.5 million graduates each year, in terms of the volume of production, India trails behind only the US and recently China. Each year India produces 350,000 engineers, twice the number produced by the US. A recent evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes all over the world, conducted by a Shanghai university, has not a single Indian University in the world's top 300 whereas China has six (Kaushik Basu, 2006).

Shaswat Kumar (2006) feels that developing the right core skills at early age is important for long-term employability. Research shows that threshold skill levels in language, cognitive ability and ICT literacy help the individual absorb domain inputs rapidly and be employable.

With the talent shortage resulting in increasing salaries and high attrition rates, some experts cautioned that India could lose its competitive advantage in the IT sector. This could lead to a situation where multinational companies might start scouting for alternative locations, if India was unable to meet their growth

demands due to the shortage of quality manpower (Indu,P., IC-FAD).

3. Problem Statement :

The basic problems facing higher education in the country includes inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large vacancies in faculty positions, low student enrolment rate, outdated teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, ethnic and socio-economic imbalances.

The structure of higher education institutions is cumbersome primarily due to affiliation and funding sources. Moreover, the database relating to higher education is inadequate. In the absence of proper information on the relevant aspects of higher education, it is not possible to take a stock of the past achievements and ensure future development of this sector. It is in this background, the present paper relies on the outcomes of the reviews and reports of various government and nongovernment agencies.

4. Research Objective :

- To analyse the present status of higher education system in India.
- To highlight the opportunities and challenges faced by the higher education system in India.

5. Research Methodology :

This paper deals with descriptive study based on secondary data collected from the published and unpublished records, reports and contributions of several institutions, organizations and individuals in India. Specifically, the secondary sources include Annual Reports of UGC, Planning Commission, Education Department of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Economic Survey and other journals, books and websites. As these secondary sources have obvious limitations of sampling and dimensional studies, the present study could only be a macro analysis of higher education system in the country as a whole.

Analysis :

India is one the oldest civilizations on earth. Also known as Bharat and Hindustan and officially termed as the 'Republic of India', it is the largest liberal democracy of the world. India is divided into 28 states and 7 union territories. India is also the land of the Vedas - the oldest scriptures in the world. It is divided in four-volumes and is regarded as the storehouse of national thoughts. Today, India is the world's seventh largest country in terms of area and second in terms of population. The sights, the ancient temples and the lush paddy fields make the country unique and amazing. It has 22 major languages with 844 dialects, making this country and its people culturally diverse. The secular nature of India has attracted philosophers and researchers from across the globe to explore India.

India possesses a highly developed higher education system and it is the third largest in the world next to China and United States. Higher Education in India refers to the education obtained after completing 12 years of schooling or equivalent and is of the duration of at least nine months (full time) or after com-

pleting 10 years of schooling and is of the duration of at least 3 years.

Also, India has the advantage of English being the primary language apart from the respective regional languages in higher education and research. In India, unlike in western countries, higher education is predominantly a public sector activity and it is perceived as public good. In response to increasing expectations of the people in the country, the central government continues to play a leading role in the formulation and implementation of educational policies and action plans. At the apex level, the University Grants Commission is the main governing body and it embodies the enforcement of its standards, advises and makes recommendations to the government.

Higher education sector has expanded due to distance mode of education supported by new information and communication technology (ICT) as it costs 66 per cent less and the students need not leave their homes or profession. The internet and satellite technology are being put to use to further the cause of distance education. The Higher Education sector ensures the quality of the educational process with the help of accreditation agencies established for the purpose.

Challenges :

1. 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.

2. Infrastructure: Poor infrastructure is another 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 hosiery or photocopy shops.

3. 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.

4. 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 advice students. Most of the 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 centers. So, this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

5. 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 (Kumar, 2015).

6. Lack of Quality Research work: There is no shortage of funding for the top Indian Institutions such as IITs, IIMs and other institutes of national importance. However, budget for the Research is not under spent due to the insufficient good quality research work. Due to the limited focus on Research and Internationalization, very few Indian higher educational institutes are globally recognized.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Higher education benefits the individuals specifically as it equips young people with skills to cope with the rapidly changing labor market needs.
- It gives individuals powers to get better employment, higher salaries and higher propensity to consume and save.
- Investment in higher education enhances the labor power in order to trade it for higher wages.
- Collaboration with foreign institutions and use of the digital medium in the classroom, such as video lectures, foretell huge possibilities for online and blended learning, instructional design, teacher development, management and support systems. Government and institutions in India are creating more opportunities in higher education for streamlined learning to enhance preparedness for the entry of fresh graduates in the market.
- A strong integration of knowledge with co-curricular initiatives to support better learning and teaching is essential to improve standards of higher educational institutions. Today's demanding and diverse environment requires both students and teachers to be adept at multi-tasking and possess the knowledge to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems. Co-curricular activities, such as workshops, seminars, industrial training, internships, etc. provide a multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted approach to learning and teaching. Such initiatives are a fruitful opportunity in the context of higher education.

The demand for higher education and educational reforms in India will provide a multitude of challenges and opportunities in the higher education sector to international institutions and educational businesses. With rapidly widening middle class, this transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change. For higher education in India, excellence, equity, and expansion are three keys which constitute a challenge as well opportunity for the higher education system.

CONCLUSION

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. 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 six 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 9%. Still a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children's 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 utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilise this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss.

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 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, infrastructure and at the end the Responsiveness.

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