

CHALLENGES AND TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Indian higher education system is a large system. While it has the third largest enrolments in the world-after China and the United States, with nearly 18,500 institutions, the country has the distinction of having the highest number of institutions for higher education in the world-almost four times that in the US and Europe and more than seven times the number of institutions in China. The average size is, however, small. Average enrolment per institution in India is about 550, though this has little meaning since there are a few institutions with more than 10,000 students, while some have less than a hundred. It is not necessarily true that the universities are big while the colleges are small. There are some colleges that have a large number of students, while there are a few universities that have less than a few hundred students enrolled. A large majority of them are non-viable, understaffed and ill equipped; two-thirds do not even satisfy the minimum norms of the University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body for regulation of higher education in the country. Thus, the size of an institution is highly variable, and the system extremely fragmented. Out of nearly 18,500 institutions, only 381 are universities and the remaining are colleges. Education, particularly higher education as the instrument of individual, societal and economic transformation is well recognized now more than ever. Consequently, there have been a greater interest and investment in higher education world over with the concomitant increase in the number of students who opt for higher education. This demand for higher education from a sizeable portion of the population is going to continue during the years to come. The Paper analyses various trends in higher education and challenges in great detail.

Keywords: Higher, Education, Norms, institutions, enrolment, UGC, challenges.

In order to meet the long term demand effectively and efficiently, it is essential that the educational system draw a long term plan. An analysis of the changing context reveals the following trends. The various trends are:

Trend I

1. Shift from elitist to mass education
2. Continuing quantitative expansion

Trend II

1. Decreasing funding from governmental sources
2. Debate on higher education as a non-merit item
3. Increasing demand for non-formal & life-long learning
4. Socio-political pressure based on demographic, political, socio-economic changes
5. Increasing private initiatives
6. Increasingly market driven

The increase in student enrolment seems to be impressive in our country but it is not different from the experience of other nations. However, its impact becomes nullified due to the growing population here, as compared to other countries. The implication of the quantitative expansion, though resulted in the increase in expenditure on higher education, had not affected significantly the percentage of students in the total population or in the relevant age group.

India has the second largest system of higher education and is one of the lowest per capita income countries in the world. In the context of the ongoing economic reforms, a major problem which decision makers confront today is how to provide financial sustenance for the system. This problem gets further accentuated by the changing perception on the subsidization of higher education by the government.

Government has been the major source of funding higher education. When we consider education a national investment, it is higher education and not school level education that one should take into consideration, though school level education is the pre-requisite for higher education. Universal school education can at best help in creating an enlightened society but higher education is the ultimate infrastructure for all kinds of human resource development. But now, in order to restrict spending on education, there seems to be an attempt to distinguish primary education from higher education stating that primary education is a merit item for subsidy and higher education is a non-merit item.

The increasing economic integration across the world is one of the important changes that have to be dealt with. There has been an increasing trend in organizations of industrial or other production systems on a global scale rather than on national or regional scale. It means that these systems take the whole world as their market. There has also been a trend towards the formation of cross border alliance in the competitive world. Most of the nations encourage free trade and have reduced to trade protection measures they are originally obsessed with. Any set of major corporations now enjoy complete freedom to locate their operations and research facilities anywhere in the world. This has brought highest quality, relevant higher education to the key position in attracting global corporations because of the skills and knowledge such operations look for in the local workforce.

Now the universities are expected not only to generate and transfer knowledge but also to provide extension services to transfer the benefits of knowledge they generate and preserve, and also be directly involved in the transformation of society and its economic development through partnership activities like university-industry linkage.

Quality has always been the obsession of the human kind in all that they seek or do. The very basis of organic evolution is its diversity and survival of the fittest. As elaborated earlier, in the changing socio-economic context, competition and selection for the best (in quality) has become the order of the day. In the internationally competitive world quality has become the pass word. Quality in all the products, processes and even in the services is the function of value addition through intelligent efforts. Unskilled or uninformed can hardly contribute to the value addition. This in turn is enhanced by the quality in education that sharpens the intellect and provides the knowledge base for intelligent effort. Realisation of this basic truth now, in the thick of global competition, has made the quality concern in education, a prime agenda for many nations, including ours.

Higher Education in 21st Century

Information technology has proven to be a powerful aid to the researcher; but its potential has yet to be fully exploited. Its recent forays into the higher education industry, through the establishment of the 'Virtual University', has led some to forecast the demise of the traditional university structure as it is presently constituted. This is because of the several advantages the 'virtual university' has over the traditional one; it encourages collaboration between universities and staff in distant locations; it affords the ready availability of first class libraries to students in varied institutions; and it is an excellent tool for cutting down costs. All that the internet is encouraging is the possibility of providing at lower cost the capacity to unite spatially disparate people. In this way, it enlarges the research community to include those outside one's physical neighbourhood, so that people with shared interests can interact while working in different places on the globe. These are exciting possibilities of which even Cardinal Newman would have approved. (Chandra,67).

Another significant population in terms of growth in higher education is that of international students and students for whom English is their second language. Academic assistance is frequently offered to them through formal coursework or more informal “conversation” groups in order to improve communication skills as well as to promote a better understanding of the cultural differences they experience in the classroom. Over one thousand Women’s Studies courses were offered in 1973. These courses along with Ethnic Studies and others new to the traditional college curriculum continued to grow exponentially throughout the sixties and into the seventies. Students demanded relevant coursework, and universities accommodated them by new ones. Requirements were relaxed, and students were frequently allowed to construct their own academic programs.

Challenges Higher Education

Technical change, growing integration, demographic shift and rising competition are shaping economies and societies. With this there is a burgeoning demand for higher education and the nature of this demand is changing continually. In this backdrop, higher education faces four key challenges. First, the advances in information and communication technologies and the advent of the Internet have impacted teaching-learning paradigms and more significantly, academic research. We now require more and differently educated people. There are resultant job losses and sometimes shifting of many intellectually-driven jobs from the developed world to the developing countries like India and China, thereby accelerating the process of globalisation. Second is the challenge of globalisation, which is happening at a faster pace than ever before. This is the direct by-product of the Internet era and has made national borders less relevant in today’s world, with increased mobility of students and workers alike. (Agarwal,413).

Government departments responsible for disseminating information to the rural population have a major responsibility to ensure that such information is available in a convenient fashion.

Higher bandwidth will make it possible for a larger audience to experience and play a role in shaping the high-end tools, such as Shockwave, Java, television and video to the desktop, and QuickTime VR, that most of us read about today.

Here are the major challenges faced by the Indian higher education at various levels.

Privatization of educational sector - Private Schools and colleges offer education at a very higher cost and demand donations. Many parents are compelled to abandon their child from higher education just because they are not able to arrange finances.

Absence of Employable skills - Students are learning theoretical knowledge but there has been skills gap in different sectors. Recruiters find absence of employable skills from Indian graduates. This challenge should be overcome by introducing paradigm shifts in the curriculums.

Prevalence of Quota System - India has great potential of meritorious students but somehow, a huge percentage of these students are restricted from the available educational opportunities due to the influence of quota system. Quota system is still a controversial topic which experts believe that is not good if we want to uplift the higher education in India. It is believed that intelligence and merit is far more better than the group from which you belong to.

Moral Issues of students - From the childhood, students are taught to prepare for those professions which have hefty salary package. This makes students money oriented from the very beginning of their career where a student mentality should be to learn as many as skills and exploiting the future of our country with our own hands.

Lack of research opportunities - We all have forgotten that the curriculum and course contents which we are teaching the generation Z right now were developed after

extensive research in the late centuries. This is an alarming concern to increase the research opportunities to induce innovations. It has been witnessed that research publications from India are rising since last decade but still it saunters behind other countries with major percents.

Faculty vacancies are still high - University Grant Commission (UGC), the committee for higher education has notified through the statistics that various teaching posts lie vacant which affects the teacher student ratio and sometimes, restrict authorities to give admission to more students.

Low GER - GER stands for Gross Enrollment Ratio which shows how many students are enrolled at different levels for education. India has a GER in higher education sector of around 15% which is too low. This figure says it all about the number of students taking admissions for their higher education. They may be financial constraints or other restrictions which has resulted in such low percentage.

With rapid technological advances, there are new ways of organising work. Consequently, occupational structure is changing and the job market for the highly skilled people is now more integrated resulting in division of labour at the global level. With its large and young population-a large proportion knowing English, the language of global business-Indian has a huge advantage. Building on its strength, the country has taken first few faltering steps to seize the opportunity. India is now perceived to be a frontrunner in global knowledge economy. However, there are concerns that the country's antiquated system of higher education and training will put a brake to this forward move. In the context of the challenges above, the purpose of higher education needs to be redefined. The concept of diversity, that is becoming a key characteristic of a large system of higher education, needs to be examined. And finally, growing competition and its changing nature has to be studied. With this, the nature of policy support and the manner the system is governed would also change.

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