An Overview of Challenges in Indian Higher Education System

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Abstract

India is required to develop a globally relevant and competitive higher education system because of structural shifts in global economy and technology process which raises the demand for highly skilled workers and innovators. By 2020, 3.5 billion jobs are expected to be created globally and by 2030, more than 90% of India's GDP is expected to be contributed by skill intensive industries namely manufacturing and service sector. India is currently at the stage of demographic transition where population growth is slowing down, but the population of young people continues to expand. This young and large population should be educated for the socio-economic growth of the nation. Though the Government of India has given the required thrust to the higher education sector by initiating various plans and committees yet gross enrolment ratio (GER) is required to increase and there is a room for improvement and betterment in this sector. Hence, there are various challenges in higher education system.

Keywords: Higher education, Challenges, Gross enrolment ratio.

Introduction

Today, India is the largest contributor to the global workforce, its working age population surpassing 950 million. 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.[1] India is required to develop a globally relevant and competitive higher education system because of structural shifts in global economy and technology process which raises the demand for highly skilled workers and innovators. By 2020, 3.5 billion jobs are expected to be created globally and by 2030, more than 90% of India's GDP is expected to be contributed by skill intensive industries namely manufacturing and service sector.[2] If India wants to be socio-economically developed country, this is necessary to empower people through quality education. As John Legend says 'the best way to fight poverty is to empower people though access to quality education.' Along with this, Right education is also needed. Great Philosopher and educationist J. Krishnamurthi said, "Right education should help the student not only to develop his capacities but to understand his own biggest interests."

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Higher education plays an essential role in the development of social, human and technical skills. India is recognized for its strength of higher education institutions in the world, which offers the facility of education, research and training in the areas of Arts and humanities, engineering, management, mathematics and social sciences, medicine, agriculture, education, law, music, communications, national and foreign languages etc.

The university and higher education institutions consist of 757 universities and 38056 colleges.[3] India is currently at the stage of demographic transition where population growth is slowing down but, the population of young people entering the labor force continues to expand.

This young and large population should be educated for the betterment of the nation. By 2020, India will have the largest tertiary-age population in the world [4] and will have the second largest graduate talent pipeline globally, following China and ahead of the USA.[5] In this global world, India is facing many serious challenges in higher education.

Objectives of Study

- To study the current structure of Higher education in India.
- To study the challenges of higher education in India.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is descriptive and data is based on secondary sources. I have collected data and information with the help of books, magazines, newspapers, articles, research journals, E-journals, provisional report on higher education in India conducted by MHRD, government of India etc.

Structure of Indian Higher Education

In India the institutional framework consists of Universities established by an Act of Parliament (Central Universities) or of a State Legislature (State Universities), Deemed Universities (institutions which have been accorded the status of a university with authority to award their own degrees through central government notification), Institutes of National Importance (prestigious institutions awarded the said status by Parliament), and Institutions established by State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated with the University (both government-aided and unaided).[2]

Challenges in higher Education

Higher education helps in developing knowledge based economy and provides skilled manpower and training to execute specific tasks and jobs. Higher education also inculcates social and moral values in students.

Indian higher education landscape is changing rapidly. Demographic bulge, expanding school education and rising aspirants has put considerable pressure for expansion of higher education.

There are greater expectations from higher education. During the last five years the GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) has increased more than 5%. In this global world India is facing many challenges in higher education like:

The Supply-Demand Gap

Despite an average growth rate of over 7% in the last decade, India's GER in higher education is very low. By some estimates, even if India succeeds in its target of 30% GER by 2020, 100 million qualified students will still not have places at university.[6] India needs to drastically increase the number of places at universities and enrolment through distance learning programs. Over the last decade, the diversity of courses offered by universities and colleges has narrowed, resulting in saturated markets for engineers, technology graduates and MBAs.[7]

Quality Education

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.[8] This condition has to be improved.

Faculty Shortage

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, 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. Therefore, this shortage of faculty must be removed.

Some other challenges are the low quality of teaching and learning; the supply-demand gap; uneven growth and access to opportunity and constraints on research capacity and innovation. The low quality of teaching and learning arguably, and the greatest challenge facing higher education in India is the chronic shortage of faculty. Various reports estimate that 30-40% of faculty positions are unfilled. Most faculties have had no training in teaching. Other issues in teaching and learning which compound the problems include:

- Outdated, rigid curricula and the absence of employer engagement in course content and skills development. There are very few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.
- Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.
- High student: teacher ratio, due to the lack of teaching staff and pressure to enroll more students.
- Separation of research and teaching; lack of early stage research experience.
- An ineffective quality assurance system and a complete lack of accountability by institutions to the state and central government, students and other stakeholders.

This has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across south Asia [9], and an insufficient basis for movement to higher levels of study and research. These problems

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are endemic across higher education institutions in India, including many of the 'top tier' institutions, but particularly so in affiliated colleges and state universities.[7]

All India survey on Higher Education conducted by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, Provisional Data 2014-15 discusses some problems and key features of Indian higher education:

- In UTs of Andaman & Nicobar Island, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep, there is no University.[3]
- 76% Colleges are privately managed; 61% Private-Unaided and 15% Private Aided. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana has 83% and 82% Private Unaided Colleges respectively, whereas, Mizoram has only 3%, Chandigarh has 4% and Tripura has 9%; Bihar and Assam has only 10% Private Unaided Colleges.
- Total Enrolment in Higher Education has been estimated to be 33.3 million with 17.9 million boys and 15.4 million girls. Girls constitute 46% of the total enrolment. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education in India is 23.6, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 24.5 and female it is 22.7. For Scheduled Castes, it is 18.5 and for Scheduled tribes, it is 13.3 as compared to the national GER of 23.6.
- 267 Universities are privately managed. There are 43 Central Universities, 1 Central and 13 State Open Universities, 69 Institutes of National Importance, 316 State Public Universities, 5 Institute under State Legislature Act, 37 Deemed Universities Government and 6 Other Universities.
- The top 7 States in terms of highest number of colleges in India are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. College density, i.e. the number of college per lakh eligible population (population in age-group 18-23 years) varies from 7 in Bihar to 58 in Puducherry as compared to All India average of 27.

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- Uttar Pradesh comes at number one with the highest student enrolment followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Scheduled Castes students constitute

13.4% and Scheduled tribes students 4.8% of the total enrolment. 32.9% students belong to Other Backward Classes. 4.4% students belong to Muslim Minority and 1.9% from other Minority Community.

- The total number of teachers is 1418389. Out of which more than half about 61% are male teachers and 39% are female teachers. At all-India level there are merely 64 female teachers per 100 male teachers.
- Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Universities and Colleges is 24.

Recommendations

After surveying all the data, I humbly submit that Government of India must take steps towards these recommendations to improve our education system.

1. Government should offer help to the private institutions to establish good quality labs and quality research institutes.
2. Government should encourage the individuals, educationists, social workers to impart their knowledge and formal/ informal education.
3. Those who are not able to do researches due to lack of money, they must be supported by government.
4. Private sector should run universities not for a profit-basis through charitable trusts/ societies but as a part of a corporate social responsibility (CSR).
5. Good salary packages and benefits to the faculty so that good brains can be attracted to this profession.

Conclusion

As All India survey on Higher Education conducted by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, Provisional Data 2014-15 says many problems about higher education in India, we need to solve those problems immediately to develop our nation. Since independence, the country has witnessed extensive progress in the field of higher education. However there are serious concerns and issues in higher education that need to be addressed in the neo-liberal era. Any gap can act as a hurdle in the process of attaining excellence for any educational institution. The country has a unique opportunity to convert demographic surplus to its economic strength. This may require radical change and comprehensive reforms. We should initiate policies to improve quality of learning and teaching in education system, provide mechanisms to encourage networks and partnerships of universities for research, innovation and teaching.[10] Indian government is keen to encourage and strengthen international research links, particularly through Indian Diaspora.

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