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Public-Private Participation in Higher Education; An Introspection on The Quality Delivery and of Social Inclusion.

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ABSTRACT

It is my earnest attempt to view the public-private venture in Indian higher education through the prisms of quality delivery and of social inclusion of marginalized sections; and furthermore, whether the collaboration acts as a catalyst for an organized upward social mobility? While this is the case, (PPP model) what is the role of the government and its various agencies in sustaining the very objectives of the University Grants Commission such as expansion, equity and excellence of higher education? The strategic role of private sector in Indian higher education The public-private partnership involves long lasting relationships between these sectors and both are equally benefiting out of the venture. Many countries in the world over have successfully been experimented this partnership model in different sectors including health, education, telecom, banking, construction etc. Indian higher education, on the one hand is undergoing a phase of apprehension-cantered transition, as opportunities along with required standard of facilities on a wide variety of subjects remain disproportionate to the number of students eligible for higher studies, followed by irregular funding; and on the other hand is a series of crisis ranging from policy-paralysis to implementation delay and from autonomy to assessment as well. The private sector now accounts for nearly 64% of the total institutions for higher education and 59% of total student enrolment of higher education in India. We therefore should not omit the role and contribution of private sector side by side with public sector for the sustained growth of Indian higher education system , in general and of professional education , in particular. The very debut of private- stake in Indian higher education therefore, seeks mainly to address two extremes of problem that policy bottle-neck and financial bottle neck. The quality delivery and social inclusion of Indian higher education The public-private partnerships in higher education are often found of not fulfilling the mandatory provisions of India, including quality delivery of services against international standards and inclusion of weaker sections –SC/ST/OBC, minorities and physically disabled population, as well. For the better quality assurance, it is inevitable to make a shift of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of higher education from traditional point of view (teaching, research and community services) to modern point of view (market ready work force, the conducive input support system with a modern outlook for academic improvements and research &teaching capabilities with world class quality retention).

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

India has now second largest higher education enrolment ratio in the world next to China and America, occupied third position as well. In the academic year 2011-12, India has 659 Universities, 33,023 colleges and 25.9 million students but her higher education system is still on the cross-roads in many respects, due to fall short of consistent foresighted strategies and time bound execution of the same. Besides these, it is extremely imperative to mention that India spends merely 0.6% of her GDP for higher education (Earnest & Young-FICCI-2009) and it alludes that the government alone is insufficient to meet upcoming complex requirements in different areas of higher education.

Indian higher education, on the one hand is undergoing a phase of apprehension-centred transition, as opportunities along with required standard of facilities on a wide variety of subjects remain disproportionate to the number of students eligible for higher studies, followed by irregular funding; on the other hand is a series of crisis ranging from policy-paralysis to implementation delay and from autonomy to assessment as well. An inaccessible education system together with poor result delivery will give rise to a social divide in our society that economically well off sections will be going abroad for their higher studies, whereas weaker sections will be neither getting a quality education nor improving of their socio-economic conditions, as well.

Under this circumstance, it is my earnest attempt to review the public-private participation of higher education in Indian context through the prisms of quality delivery and of social inclusion of marginalized .While this is the case, (PPP model) what is the role of the government and its various agencies in sustaining the common objectives that quality delivery of higher education on par with social inclusion of marginalized?

The strategic role of private sector in Indian higher education

India now requires a well framed system of higher education that must provide a special emphasis on the following areas -industry-ready workforce, world class research capability, a wide knowledge network centres, interface with corporate-institutions, and continues skill enhancement support system for faculty improvement. According to FICCI, the demand for higher education in India grows at 20% a year whereas the supply of higher education grows at 11% a year. It thus, calls for an additional capacity building through the participation of private sector for the expansion of higher education system and of utilizing the unique demographic dividend of India with sizeable young population. According to Bloomberg week, India would require an additional 6,000 Universities and 35,000 colleges in the next 12 years. Indian higher education enrolment ratio is almost 16% against the international average of 27% (Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) and beyond FICCI Higher Education Summit 2012) and the twelfth five year plan aims at 25.2% GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) with 35.9 million students in higher education institutions during this plan period.

As of now, nearly 14.6 million students are enrolled in higher education (in India) and thus, we require 21.3 million seats more to achieve the target, as planned for. In addition to this, India has already identified the resource gap of nearly 2.2 trillion rupees immediately in higher education for meeting various requirements. It requires a huge investment in the areas of higher education and therefore, the role of private sector is crucial for the dissemination of quality education among fragmented social strata of India.

Public-private partnership refers to a form of co-operation between public and private sectors, which aims at ensuring the funding, construction, management and maintenance of a public infrastructure or the provisions of a public service. The public-private partnership involves long lasting relationships between these sectors and both are equally benefitting out of the venture.

Many countries in the world over have successfully been experimented this partnership model in different sectors including health, telecom, banking, construction, roads and railways. The university system has more been evolving from public to private sector all over the world, particularly to meet demand for the tertiary education. The private sector now accounts for nearly 64% of the total institutions for higher education and 59% of total student enrolment of higher education in India. We therefore should not omit the role and contribution of private sector side by side with public sector for the sustained growth of Indian higher education system , in general and of professional education , in particular.

Equity in education on par with quality delivery has become an impending reality and subsequently, the government of India has constrained to draft a bill on public-private partnership venture, as an alternative solution for meeting the large demand for the sector. The very debut of private- stake in Indian higher education therefore, seeks mainly to address two extremes of problem that policy bottle-neck and financial bottle neck. Former consists of issues regarding policies, implementations and their evaluations; and later consists of deficit financing and the related issues such as lack of proper infrastructure, lack of quality retention among faculties and inadequate facilities for research & developments.

On the one extreme, the government needs to work hard for ensuring operational efficiency and subsequently, meets the mandatory requirements coupled with commercial interests of private parties; and on the other hand, private sector needs to provide constant financial assistance on a regular basis for the various academic requirements. Under the public- private partnership model of venture, the risk is equally distributed between these sectors and both are mutually responsible for meeting the national priority requirements and commercial interests, alike.

First of all, the interest wise clash between public and private sectors in higher education must be bridged up to a considerable extent through transparent provisions with stipulations; as former rests mainly on serving the national priority requirements and later rests more on making profit out of partnership with public sector. While implementing these models, the government needs to put in place a system that the admission of students in to colleges (private colleges) must be through a general list prepared by the government on the basis of merits and the private colleges should not allow to prepare a separate list based on criteria of their choice for the admission of students, teaching and non teaching staffs.

A similar model is prevailing in many parts of India and Kerala is indeed an epicenter of this model of public-private participation in education. The Kerala Education Act 1958, provides a stipulation regarding the powers and responsibilities of private service providers, as follows "Aided school/ college" means a private school or college, which is recognized by and is receiving aid from the Government, but shall not include educational institutions entitled to receive grants under Article 337 of the Constitution of India. "Educational agency" means any person or body of persons permitted to establish and maintain any private school under this Act.

There is a practice in Kerala that a separate criteria for the selection of candidates for the post of teaching and non teaching staffs between the government and aided institutions but salary is same. For the government educational institutions, the Kerala Public Service Commission (PSC) conducts competitive exams in the selection of candidates for the posts of teaching and non teaching staffs; and the selection is therefore based on merits and is following reservation criteria for the social inclusion of marginalized. Aided educational institutions, on the other hand are not following the selection criteria of Kerala PSC but salary is provided by the government for the posts filled by them.

It is a critical area needs to bring in public notice for avoiding these double standards and of ensuring equity of treatment for both staffs and students in education sector irrespective of the government and private educational institutions, through setting the necessary provisions. It requires well framed provisions for addressing the issues in Indian higher education, their implementations and monitoring of them, as well against the expected result delivery in every state.

The public-private partnership and of quality delivery

An education system of a country is measured by the performance of generations of people through their constructive contributions, as socially responsible citizens, rulers, policy- makers, professionals and scientists of various disciplines for the betterment of families, societies and the nation at large whereas the performance of a business is measured by actual profit generated against the expected in a given period of time. The former is therefore difficult to validate in a short period of time, since it takes years to manifest its effectiveness among different stake-holders; and later is easy to evaluate in taking subsequent remedial measures for the further improvements. It is thus, there are limitations for measuring the effectiveness of the education system and hence, following a predetermined set of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the same all over the world. Each country has its own set of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of her education system based on prevailing socio-economic, political, cultural and demographic conditions.

The QS world university ranking 2012, only Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD) placed 212th positions among top 400 universities in the world and rest of Indian institutes for higher education placed far below the ranking. It therefore calls for both quantity and quality improvements of our higher education system. The higher educational institutions in India suffer from quality variation based on market requirement (Nasscom-Mackinsey report-2005) that nearly 15% of graduates of general education and from 25% to30% of technical graduates fit for the employment.

A clear variance therefore continues to persist between labour market requirements and Indian higher education provisions; and the solution is to bridge up the gap between these two extremes through conditioned collaboration between industry and academia for the reconstruction of Indian higher education system.

Suggestions for improving the quality delivery of higher education

1. For the better quality assurance, it is inevitable to make a shift of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of higher education from traditional point of view (teaching, research and community services) to modern point of view (market ready work force, the conducive input support system with a modern outlook for academic improvements and research &teaching capabilities with world class quality retention).
2. The quality of teaching staffs must be ensured against international standard in Indian higher education. In India, a lion share of professional education institutions is run by private sector. It is therefore, the role of private sector is crucial for molding the higher education system in India and therefore, the private educational institutions must be encouraged to take academically more qualified teachers through different schemes. In Indonesia, for example, there is a subsidy from the government for private educational institutions, which take high qualified teachers. This is mainly to motivate private educational institutions to hire more qualified teachers for ensuring quality in higher education and India can also follow the same model.
3. It is possible to allow private educational institutions for sharing public facilities including interface with different academic knowledge network centers, library, students exchange programmes and students learning support system based on certain conditions.
4. Traditional courses must be continued while promoting modern market friendly professional education in the regime of public-private partnership in higher education, since private sector invests only in those areas which have high market demands.
5. For a better quality delivery, it is necessary to have a well drafted set of national policies on higher education on the basis of periodic assessment by experts in divergent fields and a national monitoring system with branches in every state to look over the academic issues requiring immediate actions. It is thus, the defunct system followed by a poor result delivery, which may thus have a direct bearing on our system for higher education. The social implication of the aforementioned conditions (unaffordable system of education and defective policy design) are therefore, bringing about social inequalities and thereby, exploitation of all sorts in our society.
6. The immediate requirements for the sector (higher education) may be ranging from competent teaching staffs with world class academic competency to proper assessment system, from a well furnished academic infrastructure to industry interface and from grants-in aid for research & development on issues of public importance to social inclusion of marginalized with quality retention.
7. Besides these, every institute for higher education must provide standardization of its service to a possible extent against international practice and avoid asymmetrical distribution of service deliveries among students through universities and colleges. These are therefore, calling for a total re-orientation of the sector

(higher education) with sufficient policy frame works and funds for addressing the above cited requirements.

8. While providing an opportunity to third party revenue generation for private service providers in the partnership, it is the responsibility of the government and its nodal agencies to ensure that it must not affect the quality of education and nor does allow an educational institution to concentrate more on third party revenue generation than providing the mandatory services, as agreed on.

Public –private participation and social inclusion

India higher education system has failed to ensure the social inclusion of marginalized, in several respects. It is imperative to bring socially disadvantaged sections including SC/ ST/OBC and minorities in to the main stream of the society, as a priority agenda of the nation for the millennium that eradicating social inequalities and exploitations through imparting the right kind of education. In addition to these, there are differences among various categories of population based on gender, urban or rural and rich or poor; along with physically disabled people. The Right of persons with Disability Bill -2012 (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment Department of Disability Affairs) aims at inclusion of physically disabled persons in education and also proposing for vocational training and employment opportunities among them. Of total population of India, the population of persons with disabilities comes nearly 2.1% and it is essential to address the issues of this section immediately for the social inclusion of disabled in higher education.

Suggestions for social inclusion of higher education

1. The private educational institutions must provide opportunities for socially weaker sections of the society including SC/ST/ OBC, minorities and physically disabled in higher education.
2. India can introduce a quota system which must include weaker sections and while the government is providing the permission for starting an educational institution (private and public), the compliance with quota system must be considered as one of the mandatory criteria.
3. The government must encourage the philanthropy endeavors from private parties for the inclusion of marginalized in higher education systems.
4. As of now, the government's grants- in- aid and scholarships are available only for public sector educational institutions and these facilities must be extended among meritorious students in private educational institutions on the basis of talents. Rashtriya Ucchathar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is on the right direction to furnish with necessary requirements for both private and public institutions for higher education at state level.

Conclusion

The public-private partnership model of venture aims at implementing the schemes and programmes of the government in collaboration with non-governmental agencies, corporate sectors, voluntary organizations, community action forums etc. The public-private partnership venture in education has become a reality and of imperative to make use of our unique demographic dividend of youth population, as the government runs with insufficient funds to cater to the large demand for the education sector in general and higher education, in particular. While implementing the public-private partnership model of venture in higher education sector, the equity, expansion and excellence must be ensured, in every respect.

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