



## Higher Education in India: Present Issues & Challenges

### KEYWORDS

Higher education, Knowledge economy, Quality education, Financing

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**ABSTRACT** *It hardly needs any justification that higher education is an engine of economic growth in any country including India. Higher education has significant role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies. It provides an opportunity to critically reflect upon the social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. Keeping in above, present paper seeks to examine the emerging issues and challenges in Indian higher education system in the present era. Issues like access, equity, inclusion, quality, privatization and financing concerning higher education, are very complex and interrelated with political, economical geographical and international dimensions. To develop India as an education hub or to become a prosperous partner in global economy, India has to qualitatively strengthen education in general and higher education with research and development in particular.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Education has always been considered as the only key component of human development and greatest liberating force. It is considered as fundamental to all round development of the individual both at material and spiritual levels. Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education, and training are key to moving society toward sustainability. Education creates human capital which is the core of economic progress and assumes that the externalities generated by human capital are the source of self sustaining economic process. In order to become prosperous global economy with in first five ranks, India has to qualitatively strengthen higher and technical education. In this regard, higher education has significant role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies. Keeping in above backdrop, the second section describes the higher education scenario in India. Section III is dedicated on the various issues of higher education in India. Section IV, provides policy implications with challenges ahead. And lastly, Section V concludes the study.

### II. HIGHER EDUCATION SCENARIO IN INDIA

Higher education is recognized as a critical factor in inclusive and faster growth in any country including India. It generates skilled labour force and inputs for research and development. It fosters higher growth rate and enables people to compete in a globalize world. Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. A large numbers of additional students are knocking at the doors of higher education institutions in the country. With the public funding being no more in a position to take-up the challenging task of expansion and diversification of the higher education system. Indian higher education has expanded exponentially over the past five decades and there has been a considerable increase in the spread of educational institutions along with enrolments at every stage. There were 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence and after then mushrooming growth have taken place in Indian higher education. In this regard, the growth of higher education in terms of institutions and enrolments in India can be interpreted from table-1.

**TABLE 1: GROWTH OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR INTAKE CAPACITY IN INDIA**

YEAR → INSTITUTIONS & ENROLEMENT ↓	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2009
Number of University level institutions	28	45	93	123	177	266	467
Number of colleges	578	1816	3227	4738	7346	11146	25,951
Number of teachers (in 000')	24	62	190	244	272	395	588
Number of students enrolled (in 000')	174	557	1956	2752	4925	8399	13642

Source: UGC Reports

Table 1 reveals that there has been appreciable growth of higher education since 1951. Number of university level institutions and colleges has grown up from 28 to 467 and 578 to 25951 respectively from 1951 to 2009. As a result, the number of teachers as well as students has also increased significantly. The growth of students' enrolment is more than the growth of number of teachers over time, may be due to the massive investment by government at school level. The correct assessment of the availability of higher education can be made in terms of number of enrolments in these institutions which can be shown from table.

**TABLE 2: GROWTH OF STUDENTS ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

YEAR	TOTAL ENROLMENT	% INCREASE
1990-91	4924868	7.0
1991-92	5265886	6.9
1992-93	5534966	5.1
1993-94	5817249	5.1
1994-95	6113929	5.1
1995-96	6574005	7.5
1996-97	6842598	4.1
1997-98	7260418	6.1
1998-99	7705520	6.1
1999-00	8050607	4.5
2000-01	8399443	4.3
2001-02	8964680	6.7
2002-03	9516773	6.2
2003-04	10011645	5.2

2004-05	10542262	5.3
2005-06	11137627	5.6
2006-07	11887095	6.7
2007-08	12727082	7.0
2008-09	13641808	7.2
LGR	5.44%	

Source: UGC Reports

The total enrolment in higher education system has significantly increased at the LGR of 5.44 per cent after liberalization due to concrete government efforts.

### PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Quality of higher education can be judged by the one of the important indicator viz. magnitude of public expenditure. Strong and vibrant education systems with national values cannot be built by a heavy reliance on private finances. The following table 3 shows the trend of public expenditure on higher education including technical education in India.

TABLE 3: BUDGETED EXPENDITURE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA (REVENUE ACCOUNT) (Rs. in Crores)

Year	Higher Education	Technical Education	Total (Higher Education)
1990-91	2312	753	3065
1991-92	2444	810	3254
1992-93	2700	907	3607
1993-94	3104	1018	4122
1994-95	3525	1189	4714
1995-96	3871	1290	5161
1996-97	4288	1450	5738
1997-98	4859	1623	6482
1998-99	6117	2073	8190
1999-00	8248	2459	10707
2000-01	9195	2528	11723
2001-02	8087	2560	10647
2002-03	8859	2820	11679
2003-04	9380	3138	12518
2004-05	9562	3387	12949
2005-06	10689	3720	14409
2006-07	12177	4167	16344
2007-08	15577	7020	22597
2008-09	18356	7377	25733

Source: Analysis of Budgetary Expenditure on Education by MHRD

The public expenditure on higher education is increased at the CAGR of 12.01 per cent during 1990-91 to 2008-09 which is necessary but not sufficient to improve the quality of higher education in India.

### III. ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The role of higher education in the emerging scenario of knowledge economy is very crucial and multifaceted for any country in general and India in particular. There are various issues that stand before the system of higher education. Issues like access, equity, inclusion, quality, privatization and financing concerning higher education, are very complex which are disused are as follows:

#### ACCESS AND EQUITY

Today the world economy is experiencing an unprecedented change. A paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education now a day. Consequently, access to higher education has increased to certain extent but not sufficiently. With the implementation of OBC reservations in the central education institutions, it is hope that inclusion will be taken forward.

The twin issues of inclusion and equity need to be given due importance while making policies for expanding access to higher education. Thus, several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Enhancing social access as well as

to bring equity in quality of higher education is still important in the country.

#### QUALITY

Quality in higher education is another burning issue which can be ensure through regular review of the functions of the institution either through self assessment or through outside agencies and by accrediting the institutions. The expansion of higher education over the years has also resulted in educational malpractices which exist in the form of capitation fees being charged by the private institution at the time of admissions and various other charges imposed upon the students. This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms. The various regulatory bodies regulating higher education have constituted autonomous bodies for monitoring quality standards in the institutions under their purview e.g., NAAC, NBA, AB, DEC etc. But, the quality norms of such councils are not comparable with international standards to a certain extent and the enforcement process is not stringent.

#### FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

One of the most important things that have to be noticed is the issue of financial constraints regarding higher education before the government. Expenditure on education in general and on higher education in particular by the government, is one of the parameters to judge the quality in education for any nation. The State Government has already been spending 20-30 per cent of its revenue budget on education. It could not afford to spend more. In India, higher education has received less attention in terms of public spending than other levels. It is not feasible for India to make massive state investments in research and development that produced research led universities in the west such as MIT, University of California, Berkeley in the US or University of Cambridge in Britain.

#### PRIVATIZATION

Over the past two decades, as earlier noted, the level of demand for higher education in India has increased well above the Government's capacity to finance. As a result, private higher education has flourished, with a boom in commercially oriented for-profit colleges.

In the present scenario, privatization of higher education is apparently a fledgling but welcome trend and is critical to maintain creativity, adaptability and quality. The economic trail of liberalization and globalization demands it. In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided involving high cost. However, the situation is not so simple. Private providers, in the interest of maximizing profit, have every incentive to 'minimize costs' by compromising on the quality of education provided in their institutions.

Last but not least, quality of teaching staff is one of the considerable issues for higher education sector to sustain in the future. Earlier, they were committed to their students to their subjects and to their profession. Today, high salaries are available but the commitment is less. Thus, it is the need of the hour to free the higher education system from unnecessary constraints and political interference.

#### IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS WITH CHALLENGES AHEAD

Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. And thus there has been considerable improvement in the higher education in India in both quantitative as well as qualitative terms. India is not knocking at the doors of the world but world is knocking at the doors of India. It is up to us to open the doors or keep it shut. In order to respond to the global challenges more strongly than ever before, India today needs a knowledge-oriented paradigm of development to give the country a competitive advantage in all field of knowledge. The present system of higher education produced some degree

holders with mere knowledge and information in a particular area, but it has failed to develop general employability skills needed for entry level employee. Hence, it is high time for planners, policy makers and practitioners of higher education to ponder over it and make necessary reforms in the course and strategies so that employability skills can be developed among the students.

To keep the higher education within the reach of poor aspirants, there is a strong case for effective monitoring and regulation of the private sector. To meet the growing demand for higher education, there is a need to search alternative sources of financing.

All this calls for a team of professionals in different areas to come together to develop proactive strategies for higher education to meet the future demands. Indian student is required to develop a multifaceted personality to cope up with the rapid changes in the world at large. Rising demand for higher education and associated shortage of faculty resources

leads to inevitable trade-off between quality and quantity.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In concluding words, we can say that over the period of time, growth have been take place in higher education in terms of institutions, enrolments etc. but it is not sufficient. Indian economy is facing various challenges regarding higher education, which need to overcome through appropriate policy formation and their effective implementation. We need job led growth and for this, the thrust should be on quality and vocational/technical education. India has demographic advantage in the form of huge number of young people. To make the best, these young minds need to be provided opportunities for accessing quality higher education only quality human resource will ensure emergence of a true knowledge society which will ultimately enhance the country's competitiveness in the global economy. For better contribution of higher education in Indian economy, there is emergence of paradigm shift from literature type education to productive, job oriented education as per requirements.

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