



Futuristic Agenda for Higher Education in India

KEYWORDS

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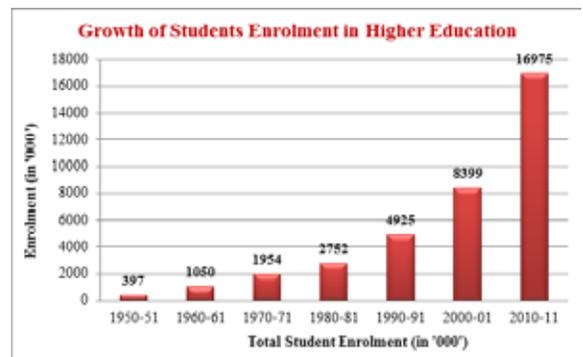
ABSTRACT *Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) has rightly observed that, higher education is the principal site at which our national goals, developmental priorities and civic values can be examined and refined. With one in four graduates in the world being a product of Indian system, Indian higher education is currently the third largest in the world after USA and China. There has been an impressive growth of higher education in India since independence. But we have still not been able to match the standards of global education as far as higher education is concerned. For instance, currently there are lots of issues regarding various aspects of higher education which requires urgent attention. The system needs a major restructuring and reformation to stand competitively in this era of globalization. The paper tries to delineate on the problems and futuristic agenda of Indian higher education for the betterment of quality.*

Higher education is critical for developing a modern economy, a just society and a vibrant polity. It equips young people with skills relevant for the labour market and the opportunity for social mobility (12th Five Year Plan). India has one of the largest systems of higher education in the world offering facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human creativity and intellectual endeavour. In the context of current demographic structure of India where the majority of population is below the age of 25 years, the role of higher education is critical. By 2020, India will have one of the youngest populations in the world, with an average age of 29 years (*Estimates and projections of the economically active population: 1990-2020*, International Labour Organisation (2011)). Higher education in India has witnessed an impressive growth over the years. The number of higher educational institutions (HEIs) has increased from about 30 universities and 695 colleges in 1950-51 to about 700 universities (as of 2012-13) and 35,000 colleges (as of 2011-12) as per a recent UGC report. Unfortunately, it is the Indian experience that this expansion in quantity has overshadowed the quality of higher education. Lately, a chorus of criticism is heard from various well-meaning quarters about the deteriorating quality of higher education. Educational opportunities and traditions that Indian Universities have built up, since independence have been able to produce graduates, capable only of pursuing limited careers, but, in the new globally competitive environment that is emerging in the country, the Indian student is now required to develop a multifaceted personality to cope up with the rapid changes in the world at large. This calls for the development of body, mind and spirit, through the educational processes in the institutions of higher education. Therefore, much greater challenges continue to exist with respect to quality and the provision of relevant education. Exceptions apart, majority of our higher education institutions perform poorly in the area of quality on a relative global scale. This paper delineates on current issues and future prospects for betterment of higher education of country.

Low Enrolment Rate

The access to higher education is measured in term of gross enrolment ratio, (GER) which is a ratio of persons enrolled in higher education institutions to total population of the persons in age group of 18 to 23 years. As per

the surveys and reports of MHRD and UGC, the enrolment ratio has raised to 20% which is better than the previous figures.



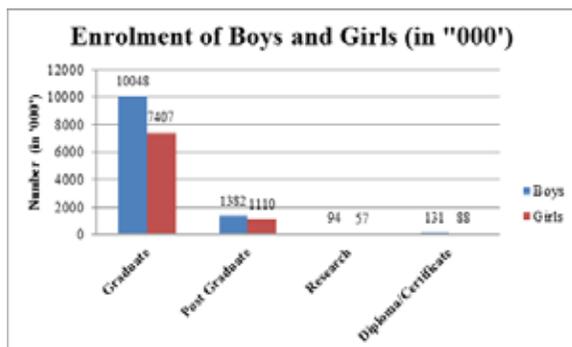
Source: MHRD for 1950-51 & 1960-61 and UGC for 1970-71 onwards

Although India has shown improvement in the past decade and the number of institutes and number of students enrolled have improved but it is still not consistent with the global ratios for GER. The average GER ratio worldwide is considered to be 30% and India is lagging behind in it. India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education compared with 34% in USA, 55% in Japan, 28% in China and 38% in Brazil. In order to achieve the goal of increased access to higher education by all sections of the society and in view of the limited financial resources with central/state governments, newer models of private sector participation may need to be evolved with well defined policies, facilitative norms and monitoring mechanisms. Appropriate merit-cum-means of incentivizing the private service providers will have to be thought of and put into practice (As per 12th Five Year Plan).

This suggests a need for state-specific strategies in addressing issues of expansion of higher education during the Twelfth Plan period. One of the key strategies is to recognize the various state education systems as the principal site for expansion and to focus on the average quality of state institutions.

Gap between various social groups

Education is vital for India's competitiveness and economic growth, but also for social stability. The disparity between enrolment of boys and girls is growing. Similarly representation of weaker section in higher education is low as compared to total development of higher education. There exists a wide variation between male and female GERs in the country. The gap between male and female GER is more pronounced in urban areas than in the rural areas. It can be seen from the graph below that Girls Enrolment ratio is low as compared to boys at all the levels of higher education.



The representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in enrolments in the Indian higher education have remained low over the years. The enrolment of SC and ST students as a percentage of total enrolment in higher education (Including Open Universities & Polytechnics) is 11.6% and 9.8% respectively. At the doctoral level the enrolment share of SC and ST is 11% and 4% respectively. Besides, their enrolment in science courses both at the masters and bachelor's levels are also low. This underscores the need to initiate special efforts for these groups.

This will call for much greater effort and greater number of programmes which can help in reducing the barriers to access to higher education by socially deprived groups which spring from different sources.

Issues concerning Teaching and Learning

India's higher education sector is working with half the teacher strength it actually needs. The first major government assessment of faculty crunch in colleges and universities across the country has thrown up shocking results, putting the faculty resource shortage in the country at large. Most of the central and State Universities do not have required strength of teachers. Details of some of the Central Universities (as on Feb 2014) have been given in the following table:

S. No.	Name of the University	Sanctioned strength*	Existing Strength
1	Delhi University	1706	753
2	Jawahar Lal Nehru University	809	510
3	Aligarh Muslim University	1506	1057
4	Banaras Hindu University	1862	1205
5	Central University of Haryana	140	33
6	Central University of Punjab	147	40
7	Sikkim University	201	69
8	Hyderabad University	556	412
9	Central University of Gujarat	147	62

***includes Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor**

Source: UGC (Vacant positions in Central Universities)

Shortage of quality faculty coupled with lack of faculty mobility across the regions is a major constraint in the development of Indian higher education system. Faculty development programmes are insufficient and ineffective in nature. Most of the teachers have had no training in teaching. 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. This has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across the country.

Role of the teacher needs to change from information providers to learning facilitators. This required a switch of focus from content teaching to learning outcomes. It was thought that very few teachers are professionally equipped for this transition. Assessment of teachers by students, peer assessment and self appraisal needs to be implemented more vigorously by all higher education institutions. A follow-up of such assessments with counselling, performance based reward system, and at times stringent corrective measures are needed for maintaining enhanced quality in higher education. An accepted national policy for student teacher ratio should be strictly adhered to in colleges and universities.

Research in terms of Quantity & Quality

Another important parameter to measure research is the enrolment and award of PhDs. The number of PhDs awarded in India has doubled over a ten year period from 1998 to 2007. But India is still lagging behind as compared to other countries. China has done a lot better than India when it comes to the PhD count. In 2002, India (11,974) and China (14,706) stood close producing a similar number of PhDs. America held the pole position producing a total of 40,024 PhDs. Within a span of merely five years, a comparative study by Sunder S of [Yale University](#), showed India producing 20,131 PhDs. China leaped up and in 2007, stood close to the USA with 41,464 PhDs. The USA accounted for 48,112 PhDs that year. In 2010, as per data put out by the China's [ministry of education](#), China [out-numbered](#) America in the number of PhDs produced with 48,978 students being awarded the degree as compared to 48,069 in the US. Therefore with a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement. As far as quality of research is concerned we have a very weak research base and because of this learning and teaching suffers at the higher education level. The professors do not want to do research and some of them who are doing it they stop taking interest in teaching. Most of the researches done in our universities have very less relevance for the society.

In order to improve research work in India, it is essential to curb repetition and plagiarism prevailing all around. Evaluation system of PhD should also be improved to raise the standard of research. To attract students towards quality research, UGC should provide a good amount of scholarships.

Conclusion

Although quality in higher education is hard to define and to identify, there is growing concern about it at national and international levels. The crisis is most acute in the developing world, as higher education is the fastest growing segment of education, but responses to the growth have resulted in fiscally unsustainable enrolments growth and a sharp decline in quality. As systems grow and enrolment rates continue to increase, existing resources are stretched thin. Moreover, when there is too much pressure for a national system to expand, more resources are put towards expansion and personnel costs, and less is earmarked for research. Without the ability to conduct research, universities can no longer serve as relevant reference points for the rest of the knowledge society. It is important for institutions to have the ability to make swift changes in response to changing needs and circumstances. The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building.

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