



Higher Education Scenario of the North-Eastern India

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the most crucial indices of socio-economic development. In India, higher education is of vital importance to build knowledge-based society of the 21st Century. It is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources of the country. The present study is aimed at analysis and to highlight the status of higher education institution of the North-East and the steps adopted by these institutes for quality improvement since this region's development is impeded by certain inherent difficulties. The result shows that the general infrastructural facilities are satisfactory, but considering the changing student needs, the facilities are inadequate. The Higher Educational Institutes of this region are in the process of gradual development towards excellence.

Keywords: Higher Education, Quality education, North-east India

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is regarded as a facilitator for growth for any society. According to UNESCO Report in the 21st century "higher education is the mandate to bridge the knowledge gap between countries and communities enriching dialogues between people, culture, international living and networking of ideas, research and technologies." The institutions where post 10+2 education is provided are generally regarded as higher educational institutions. "Apart from primary and secondary education higher education is the main instrument for development and transformation"-Dash, Trilochan and Mawthoh, laisan¹. Ministry of Human Resource Development, University Grant Commission and statutory bodies for professional disciplines work as the collective control mechanisms for higher education in India. These are regarded as policy formulators as well as the regulatory bodies in regard to higher education.

Higher Education in India has acquired special significance since independence. This is to be gauged in terms of what the society expects from it and the fulfillment of these expectations in terms of its requirements. Referring to the 21st century, which has been acknowledged worldwide as the Knowledge Society, every nation now finds itself operating in an increasingly competitive and globalised international environment where the information infrastructure, research and innovation systems, education and lifelong learning and regulatory framework are crucial variables.

It has also made an impact on higher educational institutions in northeast India. Even some of the institutions are venturing towards introduction of professional and skill based programs in their curricula; several institutes are upgrading their technological environment. In fact some changes are happening all the way around but there is still long way to go for all round development of the educational environment of the higher education institutions of northeast India. The present study highlights on all these key issues and endeavors to find an answer and solve the key problems.

Significance of Higher Education in the North-East India:

This region's development is impeded by certain inherent difficulties such as inadequate infrastructure, adverse climatic conditions and mountainous landscape. The region's peace and social life is often disturbed by border clashes and ethnic tensions. However, the region is endowed with rich biodiversity and natural resources. The literacy rate in many of these states is above the rest of the country. Skilled human resources to exploit the local resources, if developed, such as tea, timber, tourism, oil, coal and bio-resources, offer immense potential for the economic progress of the region. It is needless to mention that quality higher education is prerequisite for creation and development of skilled human resources. Quality higher education, thus especially in north eastern region will help to circumvent the natural resource constraints and creation of knowledge infrastructure towards self-empowerment of the people.

OBJECTIVES

The present paper is designed to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To have an overview of the profile of higher educational institutions of northeastern India.
2. To identify the difficulties suffered by the higher education institutions in northeast India.
3. To find out suitable solutions to overcome those loopholes and to enhance quality in education.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data collected from reputed articles of research journals, books, prominent sites relevant to higher education, magazines, etc. The study is all about to focus on higher educational scenario in the north east India.

STATUS:

Before independence of India, there were only 16 colleges in the north eastern region², majority were located in the Assam area. The establishment of the first University at Guwahati

in anuary 1948 gave a real boost to the expansion of higher education from the pre-university up to the postgraduate and doctoral level in the whole of North East India. In spite of the late start, higher education in North Eastern India had a very rapid growth in post independent era. The University network in North East India today consists of: (1) Gauhati University, Assam (2) Dibrugarh University, Assam (3) Assam University, Silchar (4) Tezpur University, Assam (5) Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar (6) Manipur University (7) Mizoram University (8) The North Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya (9) Nagaland University (10) The Tripura University (11) Sikkim Univer-

sity. (12) Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat (13) Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, Guwahati and (14) Central Agricultural University, Imphal. Thus at present there are fourteen Central and State Govt. Universities in North East India. Except in the state of Assam where there are six Universities and Manipur have 2 Universities, all other states have only one University. However this region has another 16 private and deemed universities.

The state-wise number of universities and number of Colleges in the North-East included under Section 2(f) and 12 B of the UGC Act, 1956, as on 31.03.2011, is as under:

State	No. of Universities					No. of Colleges under		
	Central	State Govt.	State Pvt.	Deemed	Total	2(f) & 12 B	2(f) only	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	1	-	-	1	2	7	2	9
Assam	2	4	1	-	7	215	26	241
Manipur	2	-	-	-	2	49	6	55
Meghalaya	1	-	6	-	7	28	7	35
Mizoram	1	-	1	-	2	20	4	24
Nagaland	1	-	2	-	3	19	2	21
Sikkim	1	-	4	-	5	6	5	11
Tripura	1	-	1	-	2	18	-	18

Source: UGC Annual Report 2010-11.

The grade system of higher education conducted by NAAC in NER is lagging behind from the standards. There are many colleges and universities in NER, which lacks in resources allocation like finance, infrastructure, educational facilities and poor administration, which degrade the value of higher education. On the other hand, political leaders and bureaucrats' disinterest in the field of education is one of the main factors which impact negatively upon the growth of higher education in this region.

No. of Educationally Backward District in North Eastern Region:

Sl. No.	Name of State	Total No. of EBDs
1	Arunachal Pradesh	11
2	Assam	12
3	Manipur	-
4	Meghalaya	5
5	Mizoram	7
6	Nagaland	1
7	Sikkim	4
8	Tripura	4

Source: UGC website, early 2010.

The table interprets that the states in the northeastern India are victimized of unsatisfactory literacy ratio and as a consequence the no. of educationally backward districts. Almost all the states except Manipur are victimised of that.

Findings & Discussions:

In the N.E. India most of the Colleges have initiated new courses such as BBA, BCA, Travel & Tourism, Sericulture, Environmental science etc. in addition to regular bachelor programs on self-financing basis. Even in universities also various professional courses have been introduced in addition to the general academic courses. It is positive symptom for the Higher Educational institutes of this region, but the problem is most of the teachers are on contractual basis with lump sum pay which sometimes creates negative feelings towards full dedication of the teachers towards their service.

Student's feedback and continuous internal assessment are necessary to improve students' performance, but it is also missing in some colleges mostly coming under rural background. Even the propensity to conduct workshops and seminar on academic and socially relevant areas by the colleges in the region is not encouraging.

Some of the negative aspects of higher educational institutions of north east India are analyzed as below:

1) Demand-Supply Gap

From quality as well as from quantity point of view, the scenario of higher education would look far better with lesser drop out ratio. But, the drop-out ratio of students is comparatively more in the rural colleges of North-eastern region since most of them are first generation learners of higher education. In some of the colleges cut-off mark cannot be applied and therefore most of the students are unable to cope up with the present higher education system.

ICT can affect the delivery of education and enable wider access to the same. In addition, it increases flexibility so that learners can access the education regardless of time and geographical barriers. Even it can generate curiosity to learn attitude among students and can also enhance the quality of education. But unfortunately the use of ICT is hardly seen in most of the higher educational institutions of the region. There are many colleges in North-East India where electricity problem is a common phenomenon. In those institutions we can expect only the traditional method of teaching.

2) Inadequate physical infrastructure:

Quality education is possible when facilities, resources and technologies are upgraded and it is not possible without adequate funds. According to NAACs assessment and accreditation most of the higher educational institutions in the region are not ranked highly. The higher educational institution of this region are bound to grade in the lower side since quality of input is also very low, inadequate teacher-students ratio, poor communication etc. and due to this grants are also given on the lower side which hinders improvement in physical infrastructure.

3) Teacher problem:

Quality of teaching depends upon quality of teachers. Availability of adequate and qualified teacher is a prerequisite of quality education. Quality teachers always prefer better colleges/Universities in the sense better input, standard teacher-student ratio, better communication, better physical facilities, better research facilities etc. and due to which the sometimes highly qualified teachers are not interested to work in North-Eastern region.

4) Lack of innovative outlook and research

Most of the higher educational institutions in northeast India lack innovative outlook and ingredient of research which also hinders the development of the teachers, students and the

overall infrastructure of the institutions. Educational institutions are still following the traditional mode of teaching and learning instead of modern devices like use of digital class room and other technologically sophisticated instruments to help to improve class room atmosphere.

5) Inadequate funds

Most of the higher educational institutions in the northeast are suffering from limited funds. As a consequence they are constricted to expend on areas like improvement in technology and research based activities.

6) Lack of job guaranteed courses

Education is always seen as a medium to guarantee livelihood prospects in future. But in today's competitive world where whole world is running after professional courses the educational institutions in NE region are still venturing for traditional courses. Although in recent years the situation has changed and most of the institutions are providing professional education courses but these are failed to provide the infrastructure for campus recruitment or somehow not fulfilling the guarantee to provide services.

Suggestions:

1) The System of Examination: Academic standard and adequate coverage of the syllabi need to be ensured while framing of question papers. Professionalism and computerization for the timely declaration of the results is too much required in the higher educational institutes of this region. Utmost care, seriousness and accountability in the scrutiny of answer scripts is also need of hour.

2) Research and Technological Development: Research, technology developments are inseparable components of any University. Research projects help to generate resources, strengthen infrastructure facilities and augment the academic

resources for the benefit of the students in addition to the personal recognitions to the scholar. A team consisting of experts from industries, Universities and research institutes and legal fields may be constituted to formulate policy on consultancy and patent and also to formulate policy on the technological development on the basis of local needs and available local resources.

3) Establish relationship between job and education:

Without establishing the relationship between job and employment higher education cannot create interest and thus cannot attract raw talents of the region. So universities and colleges should focus on extending job oriented programmes.

4) More support and funds: In order to improve the higher education scenario in the region we expect more support from UGC as well as from Govt. directly to those institutions suffering from limited funds. Government should even think of a particular strategy to eradicate the problem of increase in the no. of educationally backward districts.

Conclusion:

North East Region was found to be lagging behind in quality education and lack of constructive higher educational institutions as compared to other regions of India. Though there are number of colleges and universities, the quality of education imparted is not up to date. The region has been witnessing rapid expansion of higher educational institutes, but due to lack of attention in systematic educational planning, it demeaned the value in quality higher education. Due to lack of industries in this region, majority of the educated youths remain unemployed. Paucity of financial allocation, regional backwardness, political negligence and poor administration in higher educational institutes in North-Eastern Region drives the colleges and universities into disappointing condition.

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