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Higher Education: Issues and Suggestions for Improving Quality

Dr. Jasraj Kaur	Associate Professor, Dept. of Education and C.S. Punjabi University Patiala
Ketema Geleta	Research Scholar, Dept. of Education and C.S. Punjabi University, Patiala

ABSTRACT

Education is the key yardstick by which the growth and development of a country can be delineated and as such it has occupied an honored place in the society. Education Commission (1964-66) rightly pointed out, saying that the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms. In fact, classrooms are the places where the future citizens of the country are reared, trained, educated and motivated to accept the new challenges and to face the changing situations. The system of Indian higher education is one of the largest systems in the world which fulfills the educational needs of millions of students from different sections of the society. Higher education in India is undergoing rapid changes. Globalization and privatization are imposing new challenges. In the wake of the transition from elitist to mass education, universities worldwide are under pressure to enhance access and equity, on the one hand, and to maintain high standards of quality and excellence, on the other. There are many basic problems facing higher education in India. The present paper aims to identify issues and challenges in the field of Higher Education in India. The paper also suggests some measures for improving quality of higher education.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Education is the most vital input for the growth and prosperity of a nation. It provides strength and resilience to enable people to respond to the changing needs of the hour. It has the power to transform human beings into human resources. Education Commission (1964-66) rightly pointed out, saying that the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms. In fact, classrooms are the places where the future citizens of the country are reared, trained, educated and motivated to accept the new challenges and to face the changing situations. Higher education enjoys a significant position in the education system as it equips people with appropriate knowledge and skills to be gainfully employed. India has one of the largest systems of higher education in the world. 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.

The efficiency of higher education depends on the efficiency of universities. According to late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Former Prime Minister of India, "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for freedom, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards ever higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people" (as cited in Ray R, 1961).

Teaching, Research and Extension works are the three dimensions of higher education. Research generates knowledge; Teaching helps disseminate it and Community Extension involves its application to real life situations. The UGC insists that universities and colleges should give equal importance to extension activities so that our university system would be transformed into an instrument for social change.

Issues of Higher Education

Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair...In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrollments are abysmally low, almost two-third of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters...— Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007. The prospects and development in the higher education sector in India needs a critical examination in a rapidly globalizing world.

Low Enrolment Rates: The GER in higher education at 19.4% leaves a vast proportion of eligible population out of the system. The Indian GER is significantly less than comparable figures in other developed and emerging nations such as the USA (89), Russia (76), the United Kingdom (59), Malaysia (40) and China (24).

Quality Education: Indian higher education faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Perhaps the clearest and boldest statement of this issue can be found in the "Report to the Nation 2006" of the National Knowledge Commission which concludes that there is 'a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep'. As per the recently released by Times Higher Education Rankings, 2013-14, none of the Indian HEI features on the list of top 200 institutions, which is a reflection of quality of HEIs in the country. Quality of education delivered in most institutions is very poor. It has very narrow range of course options that are offered and education is a seller's market, where is no scope of incentive to provide quality education.

Research and Development: Research and higher education are complementary to each other. India's higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers. So this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

Faculty Shortage: According to the 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 (2010) 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.

Access and Equity: Several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Poverty leads to high drop- out rates even at primary, middle and secondary school levels. Financial constrains also often form a significant factor in advancing equity.

Evaluation and assessment system: It is well known that one of the important components of higher education is the manner in which students' academic performance is evaluated. A great degree of diversity has been observed in terms of assessment and grading of the students in the University system at present.

Interference of political factors: Most of the Institutions, imparting education (Aided-non-aided) are owned by the

dominant political leaders and these leaders are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. They have established their own youth cells and encourage students' organization on political basis. They exploit the students' energy for their political purposes. The students forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

Suggestions for Improving Quality of Higher Education

There are some suggestions for improving quality of higher education-

- The Governmental control in the Universities must be reduced, so that the University autonomy and accountability are strengthened and academic decisions are taken on merit.
- There is an urgency to review the University Acts in different States and revise the same in the light of the new requirements and the challenges being faced by the Universities. New technologies of information and communication should be utilized for obtaining administrative efficiency.
- New methods and procedures of financial regulations should be devised and direct interference of the finance department in the financial management of Universities, which is counter-productive, should be stopped.
- The Universities and National Institutes of higher learning should design their courses in collaboration with industry and such courses be updated regularly, e.g. every year, according to need. Industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements. Skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability of academia to understand and make sure good jobs.
- E-Learning appears to be a fast emerging mode of global entry at the present time. The Universities and other Institutions of higher education can design their web sites for offering online education worldwide.
- While restructuring the syllabi and courses, efforts should be made to develop an optimal combination of acquisition of theoretical and practical skills. The courses should be so designed that critical reading and interpretation of classics, practical field work wherever relevant and application of readings and other skills are given importance.
- Quality of higher education can improve considerably through an extensive and optimal use of audio-visual technologies and Internet. The courses should be so designed to make good use of these modern developments.
- Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops.
- Quality depends on its all functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipments, services to the community and the academic environment. It also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimensions: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances.
- Colleges and Private institutes should set up Internal Quality Assurance Cell and must follow a minimum standard to give degrees. The quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction.
- Complete transparency should be maintained in the working of Executive/ Academic Bodies and other Governing Councils of the Universities. Expenditure on administration and other miscellaneous activities needs to be rationalized.
- It is entirely feasible to inculcate values in the students. It requires sustained efforts to practice, absorb and assimilate values. A Cell for Value Education may be established at the UGC to plan, implement and oversee this requirement. Public Private Partnership is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. To achieve excellence, we thus need to create a real partnership between government, educators and industry.
- Good salary packages and benefits to the faculty so that good

brains can be attracted to this profession.

CONCLUSIONS

The Higher Education system is witnessing significant transformations and reforms. India in order to become a developed nation by 2020, the decisions that are going to be taken on education sector are likely to hold the key to India's future as a center of knowledge production. We need higher educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. According to Former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh, 'The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building'.

To attain and sustain national, regional or international quality, certain components are particularly relevant, notably careful selection of staff and continuous staff development through the promotion of appropriate programs for academic development, including teaching/learning methodology and mobility between countries, between higher education institutions and the world of work, as well as student mobility within and between countries. To conclude, Higher education in India is an extraordinarily important part of modern Indian society. In order to effectively plan for reforms and improvement, it is necessary to have in realistic perceptions of what is possible and what is not.

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