

Quality of higher education & its issues in post Independence India

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Abstract

Introduction: India has been a major seat of learning for thousands of years. The present format of higher education in India was started in 1857 with the inception of universities in the three presidency towns. At present, India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human's creative and intellectual endeavors such as arts and humanities, natural, mathematical and social sciences, engineering; medicine, dentistry, agriculture, education, law, commerce and management, music and performing arts, national and foreign languages, culture, communications etc.

Higher Education in India has evolved in distinct and divergent streams with each stream monitored by an apex body, indirectly controlled by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The 433 universities/ institutions, are mostly funded by the state governments. However, there are 42 important universities called Central universities, which are maintained by the Union Government and because of relatively large funding, they have an edge over the others. The engineering education and business schools are monitored and accredited by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) while medical education is monitored and accredited by the Medical Council of India (MCI). Likewise, agriculture education and research is monitored by the Indian Council for Agriculture Research. Apart from these, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) controls all the teacher training institutions in the country.

India's higher education system is the second largest in the world, after the United States. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission (UGC), which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state. Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by 12 autonomous institutions established by the UGC. Indian higher education system has expanded at a fast pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students in a decade from 2000-01 to 2010-11. As of 2011, India has 42 central universities, 275 state universities, 130 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 33 Institutes of National Importance. Other institutions include 33,000 colleges as Government Degree Colleges and Private Degree Colleges, including 1800 exclusive women's colleges, functioning under these universities and institutions as reported by the UGC in 2012.

Higher education in modern society seeks to preserve, transmit and advance knowledge and is committed to change.

Keywords: Higher Education, Education system, Policy, Skill.

Introduction

The National Policy on Education, 1986, failed to achieve the desired results. NPE envisages a review of the implementation of various parameters of the Policy every five years. The Govt. of India, thereafter announced on May 7, 1990, the appointment of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti to review the NPE. Despite efforts at social and economic development since attainment of independence, a majority of our people continue to remain deprived of education. It is a matter of grave concern that our people comprise 50% of the world's illiterate.

There is a need to make education an effective instrument for securing a status of equality for women, and persons belonging to the backward classes and minorities.

It is essential to give work and employment orientation to education and to exclude from it the elitist aberrations which have become the glaring characteristics of the educational scene.

Educational institutions increasingly being influenced by casteism, on communalism and obscurantism and it is necessary to lay special emphasis on struggle against this phenomenon and to move towards a genuinely egalitarian and secular social order.

The review committee was required to evolve a framework which would enable the country to move towards

the above perspective of education. The comprehensive report of the committee entitled *Towards an Enlightened and human Society* submitted in December, 1990, was tabled in both the Houses of Parliament on 9th January, 1991.

The report of the Ramamurti Committee was considered by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) at its meeting on 8-9 March, 1991. It decided to appoint a committee to examine the report thoroughly and also to review the implementation of various parameters of the NPE, 1986. Accordingly, the CABE Committee on Policy was appointed on 31st July, 1991, under the Chairmanship of Shri N. Janardhana Reddy, Chief Minister and Minister of Education, Andhra Pradesh.

The Janardhan Reddy Committee or the CABE Committee submitted its report in January, 1992, which was considered by the CABE in May, 1992, resulting in the revision of the NPE. The Revised National Policy on Education, along with the Report of the CABE Committee, was tabled in both Houses of Parliament on May 7, 1992, by the Minister of Human Resource Development, Mr. Arjun Singh. In his statement the minister observed that while the NPE, 1986 had stood the test of time and the framework envisaged by it continued to be relevant, the developments of the last few years and experience in implementation of the policy had necessitated certain modifications.

Quality and education

A major challenge developing nations like India face today is that of creating an environment conducive to the culture, economic and social development of their people. Historically, education has been a determining factor of the progress of human civilization. The modern world is using education increasingly as an instrument for all-round development. There is a growing and welcome realization amongst the developing countries that education is the key to development. Education shapes the destiny of a nation. The quality of manpower in any country ultimately determines the sustainable well-being of its people. Creation of social opportunities for all sections for society is a reflection of the progress of that society and education is the principal instrument for developing human capabilities, education, as a liberating force, foster growth, social equality and technological progress. Globalization and the emergence of a new society more dependent and information technology further underline the importance of education in pursuing development goals.

The Chinese philosopher Confucius stated that the goal of education was to produce men of quality who combined competence with virtue. Thus quality is “multidimensional” and through higher education it strives to develop human resources of global standards. Perceived thus, quality defines the goals and purposes of education. Quality impact the content of higher education, its processes, its output or product, as it seeks to develop human resources with required skills, excellent in performance and capable of, delivering the goods as a unit of the work force.

Today there is a strong feeling that the skills of graduates do not match the needs and the expectations of the employment sector. In the developing countries unemployable graduates pose a greater problem than unemployment itself. What are these skills which are expected by the employers of the graduate work force? What are the skills which describe ‘quality education’ and which such as education is capable of fostering in its products? The five top skills identified by employers and required of the educated work force are;

1. Time management
2. Ability to work under pressure
3. Accuracy and attention to details
4. Oral communicator skills
5. Managing different tasks at the same time

The UNESCO document on “Thematic Debate: The requirements of the World of Work”, has added a few more to this list, as flexibility, innovativeness, creativity, entrepreneurship, versatility and teamwork. These skills today are the parameters by which the quality of higher education is assessed. Such education enables, persons, societies and even nations acquire competencies required for living meaningfully in a competitive globalization world.⁵

Quality assurance in higher education

NAAC’s two their system of quality assurance works firstly, through performance evaluation by way of assessment accomplished through a process based on self-study and peer

review report NAAC grants accreditation to the institution certifying it at a particular level on its 9-point scale. Assessment ensures that a self critical community, academicians, students, support staff and managers are striving and contributing towards continued quality enhancement. Accreditation on the other hand, assures all the stakeholders, the community, academicians, student, employers and other organizations that the institution/university has clearly defined and educationally appropriate objectives and the required conditions for their achievement. Viewed thus the philosophy of NAAC is ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judgmental. It believes that overall quality of an institution must be the concern of all the stakeholders. This leads to quality assurance as different from quality control, which implies a rejection of substandard.⁶

Quality of higher education in India in post Independence scene

Historically the earliest university in India dates back to sixth century BC and was set up in Taksashila, now in Pakistan. Later in fourth and fifth century AD the highly acclaimed universities of Nalanda and Vikramshila came into existence. The modern higher education system is however merely 150 years old with the first universities being set up in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857 under the British rule.

India has tremendous potential to transform itself into a knowledge economy. According to the 2001 census, there were 41.2 million people in the age group of 6.24. The National Commission on Population expects working age population to comprise over 63% of the aggregate by 2016.

India has made substantial progress in increasing literacy (18% in 1951 to 65% in 2001) and access to basic education over the last few decades. India also possesses a large pool of highly educated people in science, engineering, IT and R & D who are making a mark both domestically and globally. Globalization and technology advance will further open knowledge space for Indian citizens.

Demand-pull for higher education in India arises primarily from two sources—from the actual beneficiaries, and from expected industrial growth.

Apart from the growing proportion of people in the age group of 15-59 years, demand-pull is supplied to higher education through development in primary education in recent years. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has made laudable progress, addressing the needs of 209 million children in the age-group 6-14 years. The aim is to achieve universal enrolment and retention by 2010. Secondary education enrolment touched 3 5 million in 2003-04. By contrast, annual enrolment in higher education was 0.5 million in 2004-05. As the pressure from the newly literate increases, demand for highly education will rise in the coming decade.

Sectoral industry reports points to expanding demand for skilled and professional personnel, as India becomes a services outsourcing centre and a hub for manufacture of goods. Some indicative figures for expected job creation are given below:

1. India could achieve \$165 billion in merchandise trade by 2009-10, creating an additional 21 million new jobs (Press Release, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, April 7, 2006).
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3. The National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council in its recommendations has said that raising the rate of growth of manufacturing to 12% could create 1.6 to 2.9 million direct jobs annually, and another two three times that number indirectly.
4. In his Budget speech in February 2005, the Finance Minister stated that 10 million additional jobs could be generated through assured irrigation, 2.5 lakh jobs are being created annually in the food processing sector, the textile sector could create employment for 12 million people in the next five years, while more jobs could emerge from the construction industry. The above estimates cut across sectors and overlap; however, they do point to a need for ensuring a qualified workforce.
5. A third source of demand that could be explored is positioning India as an education hub for overseas students. In 2002-03, foreign students in Indian higher education institutes' numbered 7,756. India could seize a larger share of trade in higher education services, which could be more as estimated at \$30 billion last years.

In 2004-05 there were 342 universities, including deemed universities, and 17,625 colleges offering general and professional education in India, among the largest networks

of higher education in the world. With more than five million graduates joining the workforce every year, India boasts of 3,50,000 engineers' 25,000 medical doctors and 12,000 Ph.D., It has over 250 universities, 1,500 research institutions and 10,000 higher education institutes that churn out 10 million graduates every year. By 2015, India is estimated to have about 20 million students enrolled in higher learning, with 1.4 million engineering students, 60,000 Doctors and 50,000 Ph.Ds.⁷

Development of Education in India has attained new level essentially after the independence of the country. India is a developing nation and it has been expanding in every field. Development of education in India brought about a transformation and the concept of education got modified. Literacy rate has increased from around 3% in 1880 to around 65% in 2001. According to the 2011 Census, the Literacy Rate is recorded to be around 74%. All levels of education in India, from primary to higher education portray a challenge. India got well-known educational institutions such as the IITs, IISc, IIMs, NITs, AIIMS, ISI, JU, BITS, and ISB. The higher education system of India is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States.

Development of education in India regards that free and compulsory education should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 years. Moreover, the 86th Amendment of the Indian constitution makes education a fundamental right for all children aged 6-14 years.⁸

Following table (Table 1) show the Decadal increase# (in per cent) in the Number of Universities, Colleges, Enrolment and Teachers at Higher Education Level, 1950-51 to 2004-05.

Table 1: Decadal increase (in per cent) in the Number of Universities, Colleges, Enrolment and Teachers at Higher Education Level, 1950-51 to 2004-05.

Institutions and year	1950-1960	1960-1970	1970-80	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2004
Colleges	214.71	77.41	46.82	21.32	93.91	58.13
Universities	60.71	106.67	32.26	49.59	44.57	30.83
Teachers	158.33	206.45	28.42	11.07	45.76	19.49
Enrolment	220.11	251.17	40.7	78.96	70.54	24.79

Note: # Refers to percentage increase in the previous decade, i.e. between 1950-51 and 1960-61 and so on.

Table 2 Number of Higher Education Institutions Available per Lakh Population (18-23 years)

All India	12.17
West Bengal	5.46
Tripura	6.13
Jharkhand	6.45
Daman & Diu	6.73
Uttar Pradesh	6.96
Uttaranchal	8.08
A & N Islands	8.37
Sikkim	8.48
Delhi	9.29
Bihar	10.13
Jamu & Kashmir	10.54

Gujarat	10.68
Rajasthan	10.78
Kerala	10.81
Haryana	10.85
Tamil Nadu	11.11
Punjab	11.46
Chhattisgarh	11.83
Arunachal Pradesh	12.12
Madhya Pradesh	12.53
Assam	12.9
Himachal Pradesh	15.13
Maharashtra	16.59
Orissa	18.57
Chandigarh	19.14
Meghalaya	19.22
Nagaland	19.54
Andhra Pradesh	19.61
Manipur	22.55
Karnataka	23.35
Goa	24.59
Mizoram	25.53
Pondicherry	26.98

Source: GOI (2006), Selected Educational Statistics, 2003-04

Major concerns and emerging challenges

Access

Though India can boast of having the largest system of higher education in terms of the number of institutions, in relative terms, it still lags behind developed and even several developing countries in terms of access. The access to higher and technical education is still abysmally low, around 12 per cent in 2003-04. Obviously, this means almost doubling the access to reach a minimum threshold of 20 per cent. The primary onus of increasing access of this level lies with the state, which needs to mobilize additional resources to open new institutions, besides increasing the intake capacity of the existing institutions. Priority must be given to the backward areas in opening new institutions. Besides, the private service providers with a proven track record need to be identified, and alongside the public institutions, they too may be promoted through appropriate incentives.

Equity

It is important that the increased access to higher education should be inclusive. As discussed earlier, the representation of SCs, STs and women in higher education is less than their proportion in the population. Education, particularly higher education, is being looked at providing avenues for social mobility for the marginalized sections. Indeed, the recent spurt in the demand for reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) may be a reflection of the important role of higher education in social mobility. We can no longer afford to ignore such demands. Neither these demands can be satisfied with tokenism. Plans are afoot to nearly double the intake capacity of the central institutions to accommodate the demand emerging out of reservations. At the same time, we should also guard against the dilution of

standards. Extending access through sub-standard institutions will be of no good as it will segment the higher education and help in reproducing the socio-economic inequalities. High academic standards should be maintained with due consideration to special needs of marginalized groups. Students from marginalized groups should be helped through special arrangements for the required academic rigour. It has also been noticed that the students from the marginalized sections tend to concentrate in certain easy disciplines. They should be encouraged to take more progressive and hard disciplines so that social equity in higher education assumes utmost importance.

Cost recovery and privatization

The higher and technical education in India is being increasingly privatized in multiple ways. On hand, the public institutions had to resort to cost recovery methods to stem out from financial crisis. On the other, private institutions are cropping in large numbers changing the very face of higher and technical education. Some of these issues in turn are discussed below.

Fees

It is asserted that fee levels remain very low compared to the past. Though it is necessary that fees should not be at an absurdly low level, it may not be fair to expect the fee to provide substantial resources to higher education. In fact, it is noted by several researchers that the cost recovery level through fees is not high anywhere in the world and in advanced countries it hardly touches 15 per cent. In India also the total fee income constitutes about 15 per cent of

expenditure on higher education. In many universities, the fee income exceeds the recommendations made by the Punnayya Committee [CABE Committee 2005].⁹ But we must be aware that any increase in fees beyond affordable levels may lead to regressive effects on the level and composition of enrolments.

Self-financing courses and seats

Many a time, the distance courses are being introduced solely with the aim of generating revenues for the university. The revenues generated through distance modes are seldom used for the benefit of distant learners but utilized to finance mainstream activities of the university. It hits hard the interest of especially those who are relatively underprivileged.

Yet another method resorted to by several institutions is to create both self-financing seats in the normal courses as well as self-financing courses. Though no data are available till now on extent of self-financing courses and seats, it is generally believed that this practice is picking up and even the mainstream universities and colleges are adopting it to generate additional revenues. If the trend continues, a time may come when the higher education system would gradually be restructured to offer only self-financing courses to be self-reliant. This would not only lead to truncated growth of higher education but also weaken our society.

Privatization

A matter of concern is that unlike the past, the private institutions of present genre are motivated by profit. The large growth of these institutions, it is argued, represents commercialization of higher education [Tilak, 2006].¹⁰ These institutions make huge profits. This raises questions of affordability and equity. They do not even reserve seats for the marginalized groups with severe implications of equity. These institutions do not hesitate to admit students with poor academic credentials. They also attempt to be financially efficient by reducing costs on vital components which adversely affects the quality. The contribution of private sector to research and advanced level education is also found to be limited [Tilak 2006]. It is rightly observed, "higher education is far too expensive to be made privately profitable unless it is reserved for the rich or is of very poor quality" [Patel 2003].¹¹

The regulation of private institutions is fraught with several legal issues. The courts are approached on almost all issues ranging from the criteria to admit students, fees, reservation policy, etc. The judicial response to privatization is increasingly seen to be characterized by "ambivalence" [Kumar 2003].¹² Though in many cases the court favors the public nature of higher education and attempts to curtail the adverse impact of rampant privatization, the trend is not good for the balanced growth of higher education.

Nevertheless, the participation of the private sector and emergence of private institutions cannot simply be wished away. In the context of the limited capacity of the public institutions and the existence of differentiated demand, we need to ensure how the two can co-exist. It is, therefore,

imperative to strengthen the regulatory mechanism so that the divisive nature of private education can be contained.

Internationalization of higher education

Another challenge faced by the higher education is its internationalization, not in the traditional sense of sharing experiences, but by way of international trade in educational services. Indeed, several foreign institutions have already been operating in India. Many of these institutions have been resisting any form of regulation. Some institutions of Indian origin and also a few public institutions are showing keen interest in going abroad to establish off-shore campuses. In fact, some of them have already set up their offshore campuses. This situation makes things very complex and therefore we need to evolve a policy on this subject and sooner we do it the better it is.

Need to rise public funding

Now, it is very much clear from the above discussions that the public allocation to higher and technical education is not only inadequate but also declining since the last decade and a half. As the public funding of higher education could not keep pace with the growing enrolment, the real unit costs have fallen dramatically since the 1990s. The financial stringency has led to cuts in expenditure on several items not on the basis of importance and relevance to higher education but the ease with which one can cut expenditures. As a result, the austerity measures have taken a heavy toll on the quality of education. Thus, it is imperative that these trends in funding be reversed and public funding for higher education raised.¹³

Conclusion

To conclude, there is an increasing demand for higher education in the growing Indian economy. The growing economy has, indeed, raised the aspirations of people of diverse background and it is necessary that system should respond by expanding access to accommodate these aspirations. The growing economy also needs highly educated manpower in large numbers. Unfortunately, the expansion of public higher education has slowed down at a time when it should have been expanded fast to increase the access. It is necessary that these trends should be reversed and the state should come forward to open new institutions, besides strengthening existing institutions. Quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of higher education should command highest priority in the policy discourse. It is important to note that the conventional system alone cannot do this job. Necessary convergence between conventional and distance modes has to be ensured besides bringing about qualitative improvement in all programmes of higher education.

In India, higher education was traditionally looked after by the government, but in view of lack of resources to meet the increasing demand, private sector has been allowed to share the responsibility. The country has a well developed educational set up in terms of range of programs and their acceptability in local industry, but it lacks in terms of international quality standards. Higher education institutions

managed by private sector emphasize more on commercial aspect than creation of knowledge which leads to deterioration of quality of education. The councils and government bodies responsible for quality assurance do not have internationally match-able quality norms on one hand and an effective system to monitor and control violation of the existing norms by the institutions on the other. Further, the political parties manipulate the issues of access and equity in higher education for their vested political interest rather than taking the right steps to enhance the quality of higher education. As a result those who can afford the high cost of higher education look forward for the opportunities abroad while the others have to compromise with sub-standard education. If India has to emerge as preferred location for higher education in the globalizing world it will have to develop a national policy to address the challenges of sub-standard quality, ineffective systems of monitoring and control in growth and development and political interference.

Source of Funding

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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