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Higher Education Scenario in India: A critical overview

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Abstract

Higher education keeps an important position in the development of a country. In the 21st century, institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our society. The standard of living has raised considerably across the world because of quality education. This led the global community to feel the importance of education in life and enforced them to gather at a platform to make education a fundamental right of every individual in every society of the world. Development of any country depends 20% on natural resources, 16% on infrastructure and 64% on human resources and social factors. This calls for a high quality and well trained human resources from our education systems. The modernization and globalization demand different aspects to be updated in higher education as competitive markets need efficient product. The process is on and many schemes and programmes are carried out for the overall improvement of higher education. This paper highlights not only enrollment, retention and completion as our primary duty for higher education but also it is our duty to employ them for the development of the society, of the nation and the world as a whole though quality education and research.

Keywords: Higher education, quality education, enrollment, retention, human resources

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in our lives in all aspects and respects. The human life evolved over a period of time in significant way through education. In other words, education is the most powerful weapon in the hand of human being to change self, change society and the world. In the 21st century, institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our society. As higher education continues to establish its value beyond the private benefits that inure to individual citizens, research indicates that a strong system of higher education is a significant contributor to the country's ability to compete in the global marketplace and is critical to our economic strength, social well-being, and position as a world leader university is a higher learning institution that brings men and women to a high level of intellectual development in the arts and science, and in the traditional professional disciplines, and promotes high-level research, (Alemu1, 2018) ^[1]. The standard of living has raised considerably across the world because of quality education. This led the global community to feel the importance of education in life and enforced them to gather at a platform to make education a fundamental right of every individual in every society of the world. Development of any country depends 20% on natural resources, 16% on infrastructure and 64% on human resources and social factors. This calls for a high quality and well trained human resources from our education systems (Mishra, 2012). Numerous schemes and initiatives have been carried out for the development of education to direct life in a purposeful way. Higher education in this sense plays a significant place to shape the future of the individual, society and of the world.

India has significant advantages in the 21st century knowledge race. It has a large higher education sector, the third largest in the world (In student numbers) after China and the United States. Because of interdependence and integration of world economy in recent years, the Indian higher education system has a new role and a challenge to provide to the nation and the world at large, skilled human power at all levels, having breadth of knowledge and confidence to effectively confront the social and economic realities, UGC (2003). It uses English as a primary language of higher education and research. But there are a small number of high-quality institutions, departments, and centers that can form the basis of the

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quality sector in higher education (Matliwala, 2016) [6]. Quality education and research not only made available many options in life but also influence life in all aspects to live in meaningful way and understand others alike globally. Higher education in India is also improving day by day to meet the global standards and global needs. Different significant initiatives are carried out by the government to achieve the national and global aims of education. Investment in education and infrastructural advancement are growing day by day remarkably.

In this sense, the higher education system, its structure and functions are to be focused to gain a clear understanding. Universities generally prescribe a set of criteria under its statutory powers to grant affiliation to colleges. These criteria, among others, include the provision of infrastructure (Classrooms, laboratories and libraries, administrative buildings, hostels and residences, books and equipment), number of teachers required for courses to be offered, the qualifications required of the teachers, funding arrangements, management structures and the approval of the state government concerned, where necessary (Egyankosh).

Current Scenario of Higher Education in India

India is a multicultural and multilingual nation. It was the second most populous nation of the world and now left China behind. As higher education is increasingly associated with social evolution and in particular with the economy, R&D activities in universities can no longer be regarded as purely academic but should also be seen as strongly related to the business environment and society (Miller *et al.*, 2016) [16]. In this sense it is natural to have challenges and issues of higher education to achieve the national goals of education and the capacity to develop skilled manpower of good quality in adequate number.

It is pertinent to mention here that at the beginning of India's independence, there were 20 universities and 591 colleges while Student's enrolment at the tertiary level of education was 0.2 million (The higher education should promote innovation in teaching-learning methodology so that traditional educational practices may be reoriented according to contemporary needs, (Jaysawal and Saha, 2023) [4]. After independence, the growth has been very impressive. India now possesses a highly developed higher education system that offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human creation and intellectual endeavors (Vashishtha and Singh, 2020) [14].

The government of India has been doing great for the overall improvement of higher education in the country. But it is noticed that the real picture of higher education in India is still far from the framed goals and more need to be done to achieve cent percent enrollment, retention and completion of higher education (Olo *et al.*, 2021) [8]. The modernization and globalization demand different aspects to be updated in higher education as competitive markets need efficient product. On the other hand, the real picture at the government records and the actual happening in the higher education is matter of discourse in terms of different aspects and concerns.

RUSA is a welcome step taken by the government to realize the goals of education in the country, especially in the field of higher education. Equity, equality and inclusion practices at every educational institution can maximize the height and wide of higher education. India is aspiring to compete in

global ranking of higher education, on the other hand, the financial and lethargic situations in Indian education is posing obstacles in its path. The gross enrolment ratio and production of highly qualified individuals are dichotomous in each other (Jaysawal and Saha, 2023).

Different agencies are working hard at the central level for the overall improvement of higher education in the country. In this regard, development of National Education Policy-2020 is an epitome. On the 29th of November 2006, the Chairman National Knowledge Commission wrote to the Prime Minister, recommending 1500 universities from India. Again, 2 years later, in 2008, Yasphal Committee recommended 1500 universities from India. These numbers are by no means large.

The USA has 3500 universities; the UK with a population less than that of Tamil Nadu has 125 universities; Germany with a population of 82 million has 350 universities; Japan with a population of 127 million has 726 universities. It not only focuses on the higher education but also education at all levels to be improves to meet the needs of the individual, society and the world (Matliwala, 2016) [6]. Hence, the higher education in India is now following multidisciplinary approaches for the knowledge building process and the enhancement of quality education at universities and higher institutions. The tradeoff between the education system and the job market poses a great challenge for all of us and professional education and training on integrated basis enhanced in all possible ways.

Structure of Education

Since independence, India has been updating the entire education system in terms of goals, curriculum, methods, pedagogy, functions and structure. At present 10+2+3 pattern is going on and after implementation of National Education Policy-2020, it will be changes. A brief outline of existing education structure in India is mentioned below.

Class	Schooling	Years
Pre-Primary/Nursery	Nursery	2
1st-8 th	Elementary	8
9 th -10 th	Secondary	2
11 th -12 th	Higher Secondary	2
Undergraduate (+3)	Bachelor Degree	3
Post-Graduate	Master's Degree	2
M.Phil.	Master's Degree	2
Ph.D.	Doctorate	4

The M.Phil. degree one of the masters degrees is eliminated by the University Grants Commission recently (NEP 2020). The entire education structure will be changed after implementation of National Education Policy 2020. The existing structure has many loopholes and the precious time of the student's lapse due to various reasons. But some are able to continue their study because of open schooling, Open University, distance education, correspondence courses and online courses.

Global Standards and Indian Higher Education

Global standard of education enables us to adapt and adopt new environment and challenges efficiently across the globe. In other words, it helps us to get employment opportunity and work efficiently in completely different environment, society and work culture. The global citizenship education is a part of curriculum to develop those capabilities in every individual through education. In

this connection, the government of India also striving hard to make education globally recognized at every sector. Next to China and United States India has the third largest higher education system in the world in terms of size and its diversity and largest in the world in terms of number of educational institutions (Sharma and Sharma, 2015) ^[11].

But still from the many studies it can be noticed that our students face numerous challenges in different work culture. India educates approximately 10 per cent of its young people in higher education compared with more than half in the major industrialized countries and 15 per cent in China (Sanklecha, 2017) ^[9]. The all-round personality development is slow and not up to level as comparison to other nations of the world. As per the data provided by the NAAC, as of June 2010, "not even 25% of the total higher education institutions in the country were accredited. And among those accredited, only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level" (Sheikh, 2017) ^[12].

On the other hand, the investment in education is also negligible as comparison to other nations. There is no any Indian university placed in top 10 universities in world QS ranking. The enrollment, retention and completion of elementary, secondary and higher education are far from the expected levels. In this sense, to meet the global standard of education, it is our collective responsibility to work together at a common platform and enhance quality research trends in Indian education system. All sections of the society and even global society are to be included in this race to achieve the global standard education at Indian universities. But the quality of education is a matter of concern still today at every level of education.

Quality Concerns of Higher Education

The quality of higher education can be sense if we go through the position of our nation in quality research publications in the world. It needless to say that we need more efforts to bring that into our education system. Numerous motivated initiatives are carried out in the nation to attract talents to the higher education. Still there is no visible sign of that which sometime disappoints many those who are connected with research works across the globe. In most of the state and central universities more than 30% of faculty positions are lying vacant. While the student enrolment in higher education is growing with faster rate in the last few years (Sharma, 2015) ^[11]. In other words, the quality assurance agencies of higher education are still working hard to achieve that goals by improving our entire education system.

Quality research reflects in its implications to improve our social problems and helps to mitigate all those challenges which pose as obstacles in the way of development. The social implications are the high priority of any research in world and our society is benefited out of it, otherwise there is meaning of research and education and it is just waste of time, money, energy and manpower. So, it is a great responsibility of everyone those who directly or indirectly connected with the education system in the nation to rebuild it from the grass root level. It is easy to tell in words, but difficult to materialize into works. India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil (Jadhao, 2018) ^[17]. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment,

which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years. Still the collective efforts never be gone to vein. Change is a continuous process and we can be able to do that of course. In other words, it is natural that there are many prospects also apart from loopholes in higher education.

Prospects of Higher Education in India

Though it is not satisfactory when we compare the standard of higher education with the global standards, still there many prospects which helps to take opportunities in life and makes many options to shape our future. The enrollment, retention and completion in higher education are increasing year by year. It can be sense that the apex regulatory body of higher education has already declared doctorate degree will be minimum eligibility criteria to get into assistant professor position at universities. In other words, it can be said that the number of doctorate degree holder students are increasing day by day and there is no employment opportunities accordingly (Mujtaba and Scharff, 2007) ^[10].

India is the 2nd most populous nation of the world after China and will be most doctorate degree holder youth nation in near future of the world. It means there are still numerous opportunity in higher education in the country. Quality education will be gradually and efficient youth mass will be available soon. The improvement in higher education is going on in rapid ways and the government of India has already started at least one central university in every state of India.

Many institutes of national importance are working for the overall improvement of higher education to meet quality standard globally. Many student exchange programmes are there and overseas scholarships are provided by the government to bring quality in higher education. Rastriya Uchhatar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is also going on for cent percent enrollment, retention and completion of higher education in India. In addition to this to mitigate all problems and meet the coming challenges, a wide preparation is going on. Still some default challenges are visible in the field of higher education.

Challenges of Higher Education

Prospects and challenges are like the two sides of a same coin. In this connection, there are many challenges in the existing higher education system and in coming future new kinds of challenges will be there. The education commission set up in 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari (Kothari Commission, 1964) had recommended that government should spend at least 6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education. However, in over 45 years, we have been able to achieve only half the target. The Knowledge Commission additionally recommends an increase of at least 1.5% of GDP for higher education out of a total of at least 6% of GDP for education overall (Gupta and Gupta, 2012) ^[3].

It is noticed from many studies and reports that there are many challenges in our higher education system for instance, lack of infrastructure, inadequate funding, lack of teachers, quality researches still a dream, no employment opportunity, tradeoff between education and job market, time consuming process, lack of leadership and management in higher education etc. Quantity and quality of highly specialized human resources determine their competence in the global market. According to a recent government report

two-third of India's colleges and universities are below standard (Vashishtha and Singh, 2020) ^[14].

It is our collective responsibility to face those challenges and focus on the prospects to improve the higher education by quality research and development. Nepotism and corruption should be rooted out to enhance quality education, research and pull efficient professional experienced teachers in to the university system. The quality assurance agencies should work more to bring quality in higher education and defeat those challenges with efficient outcomes. All the rules and regulations, research manuals, proper facilities for research scholars are to be taken care off so that quality education and research can be achieved.

A Critical Overview

Though there are countless challenges in higher education, still nothing is impossible when we work in a team to achieve the goals. It is tough and difficult but not impossible on the part of every one those who directly or indirectly connected with higher education. Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by 12 autonomous institutions established by the University Grants Commission.

The government of India is doing great so far, though the outcome is not expected level as comparison to other nations of the world. In other words, a lot need to be done and collective efforts and works are necessary to meet the global demand and global standards. All aspects of human life are associated with education and quality education helps to develop all those smoothly which brings progress in life.

In this sense the scenario of higher education is neither too bad nor too good to achieve the global standards. The process is on and many schemes and programmes are carried out for the overall improvement of higher education. Only enrollment, retention and completion is not our primary duty for higher education but also it is our duty to employ them for the development of the society, of the nation and the world as a whole though quality education and research.

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