



Challenges and opportunities in Indian higher education

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Abstract

In the words of Nelson Mandela “Education is the most powerful weapon which one can use to change the world”. In today’s times, countries around the globe are realizing the importance of powerful Education system and its association with economic success and development. Today development process is seen synonymous with education. From Indian perspective, its higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Since independence, despite of odds and serious challenges, India has continuously been striving to develop its education field and has been successful in achieving important mile stones in its journey. Yet, there remains a lot to be done to make higher education system much better and in compliance with international standards. It needs greater transparency and accountability, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn is of utmost important. The future of India depends on highly skilled and well educated people who can drive our economy forward. India has been sourcing highly skilled professionals to other nations, thus, it is only a matter of time that if this resource is developed and utilized efficiently, will transform our country from a developing to a developed nation. The current study aims to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India.

Keywords: education, opportunities, challenges, colleges, universities

Introduction

India's higher education system is one of the largest education hubs in the world. Since the past few years India has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities, private Educational Institutions & Colleges. The ‘Right to Education Act’ which clearly specifies compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of the country with statistics revealing a staggering enrolment in schools over the last few years.

But India has failed to produce world class universities.

However, India still continues to face stern challenges despite growing investment in education. A higher percentage of people are still illiterate since the quality of education in India whether at primary or higher education is significantly poor as compared to major developing nations of the world.

Despite these challenges, higher education system of India has the capability to make its identity at international level just by bringing greater transparency and accountability. India provides highly skilled people to other countries therefore; it is very easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation.

Development of Higher Education in India

As higher education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the quality of programmes, public assessments and international rankings of higher education institutions. The society and the people in need of education are emphasizing research and using it as a yardstick of institutional value.

India has been always been a land of scholars and learners. In

ancient times also, India was regarded all over the world for its universities like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and its scholars. Central Government and state Governments are trying to nurture talent through focusing on the number of Universities and Colleges for expansion of higher educations. There is no doubt to the fact that much of the progress achieved by India in education has come from private sector. The involvement of private sector in higher education has accelerated establishment of institutes and has also brought drastic changes in the field and today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector. Both the public sector and the private sector are working simultaneously in Indian education sphere. UGC is the main governing body that enforces the standards, advises the government and helps coordinate between center and states. UGC is continuously working and focusing on quality education in higher education sector.

Major challenges in Higher Education in India

Government has been trying to boost the education system and implement various education related policies but they are not sufficient to place Indian Universities on the global chart. Some of the basic challenges face by the higher education system in India are:

- **Enrolment:** The country’s Gross Enrolment Ratio or GER in higher education has registered an increase from 24.5% in 2015-16 to 25.2% in 2016-17. This is definitely a positive sign but is low as compared to the other developed as well as developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the

growing demand in the country. Although India aims to attain a GER of 30% by 2020, it's still much behind countries like China, which, currently, boasts an enrolment ratio of 43.39%. USA's GER is 85.8% and Pakistan's is 9.93%.

- **Equity:** There is no equity in GER among different sects of the society. According to previous studies the GER in higher education in India among male and female varies to a greater extent. There are regional variations too some states have high GER while as some is quite behind the national GER which reflect a significant imbalances within the higher education system.
- **Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor infrastructure. There are a large number of colleges which are functioning on a building which is shared by other business men.
- **Quality:** Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today since quality in education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Government is continuously focusing on the quality education but still large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC due to which the universities do not mark their place among the top universities of the world.
- **Faculty:** Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers is a big challenge to quality education for many years. Large numbers of NET / PhD candidates are still unemployed even there are a lot of vacancies in higher education departments which is a biggest blow to the higher education system. There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as, limited numbers of quality faculty to advice students.
- **Research and Innovation:** There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. Most of the research scholars are without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time which directly or indirectly affects their research. Moreover, Indian Higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers, which is a great challenge to the higher education system in India.
- **Political interference:** Most of the educational Institutions are owned by the political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. These Political leaders use the students to organize campaigns for their elections and eventually forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.
- **Structure of higher education:** Management of the Indian education faces challenges of over-centralization, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism. As a result of increase in number of affiliated colleges and students, the burden of administrative functions of universities has significantly increased and the core focus on academics and research is diluted.

Opportunities in Higher Education

Higher Education sector, irrespective of its challenges, has now been identified as one of the promising areas for private and foreign investments. But with the help of new-age learning tools, the possibilities are endless and it is easy for India to overcome the challenges and bring a paradigm shift in the country's higher education sector. The society has to be made aware of the importance of education and the knowledge has to be imparted using advanced digital teaching and learning methods and then the country can easily stand in the Global Competition of higher education. India has immense opportunities to collaborate at national and international level on areas of systemized reform, quality assurance checking, digital teaching methods, international credit recognition, standardized qualifications frame work etc. There is a need to build stronger relationships and increase mutual understanding in higher education by increasing support and participation in platforms (conferences, workshops, seminars) which enable debate and dialogue with other countries of the world.

Higher education has always been a powerful tool in reducing or eliminating income and wealth disparities. The idea of equalizing educational opportunities can best be implemented if the ability to profit by higher education is spread among all classes of people. If this chance is given even the great reserves of untapped ability in the society can rise to the top.

Suggestions for Improving the System of Higher Education

- There is a necessity to make Indian Educational system globally more relevant and competitive.
- Implement innovative and transformational approach from primary to higher education level.
- To improve quality and reputation at Higher educational institutes
- Good infrastructure of to attract the students.
- Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes.
- Government to generate linkage between national research laboratories and research centers of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research.
- Need to focus on the professional approach of teaching to gain excellence, deeper knowledge of subject so that students get jobs in the companies.
- Universities and colleges must be kept away from the political affiliations and Favoritism.
- Money making process should be out of education system etc.
- Multidisciplinary approach in higher education to diversify knowledge to various subjects.

Conclusion

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all round personality identifying the best in him or her. Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence yet it is not equally accessible to all. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going

above 9%. Still a large section of the population remains illiterate and a large number of children's do not get even primary education. This is not only excluded a large section of the population from contributing to the development of the country fully but it has also prevented them from utilising the benefits of whatever development have taken place for the benefit of the people. No doubt India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilise this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss. Opportunities are available but how to get benefits from these opportunities and how to make them accessible to others is the matter of concern. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education in India. To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the Financial Resources, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance, infrastructure and at the end the Responsiveness.

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