

## Dimensions of Higher Education in India: A Comprehensive Review

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**ABSTRACT:** Higher education means the education beyond the level of secondary education. It is often assumed that education imparted by the colleges or universities are higher education. But in fact higher educational institutions include Professional Schools in the field of Law, Theology, Medicine, Business, Music and Art. It also includes other institutions like Teacher's Training School and Technological Institutions. Today, Knowledge is power. The more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. A lot has been researched and said about Higher Education in India and many papers have been presented on the same. These have brought forth the fact that Higher Education is extremely diverse and the challenges and issues faced by higher education institutions are just as diverse. The process of education is not merely digesting books. It is also about doing several co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that give a broader meaning to life in general and education in particular. Through this paper the author has attempted to compile and present a comprehensive review of various dimensions of Higher Education in India presented so far so that a cryptic and precise report is generated for a quick review.

**Key words:** Higher Education, Knowledge, Educational Institutions, Educational System

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education has a special significance in the context of a quasi-traditional or transitional society like India. India is now considered to be one of the most promising economies of the world. While, higher education gives India an edge in the world economy as evident from the availability of the skilled manpower, and research scholars working abroad, unemployment, illiteracy and relative poverty continue to be the major deterrents to realize her potential in human resources

In India the central Government and the state Governments are trying to nurture talent through focusing on the expansion of higher education. India has certainly come a long way from 28 universities and 578 colleges in 1950–51 to over 500 universities and more than 25,000 colleges at present. Today, the country has the largest number of higher education institutions in the world and close to 20 million students enrolled. As per reports of 2011, there are 227 government-recognized Universities in India. Out of them 20 are central universities, 109 are deemed universities and 11 are Open Universities and rest are state universities. Most of these universities in India have affiliating colleges where undergraduate courses are being taught. However Jawaharlal University is a remarkable exception to this rule. According to the Department of higher Education government of India, 16,885 colleges, including 1800 exclusive women's colleges functioning under these

universities and institutions and there are 4.57 lakh teachers and 99.54 lakh students in various higher education institutes in India. Apart from these higher education institutes there are several private institutes in India that offer various professional courses in India. Distance learning is also a feature of the Indian higher education system (9).

According to the University Grants Commission (UGC), India still needs 1500 more universities with adequate research facilities by the end of the year 2015 in order to compete in the global market. In the current scenario the country lacks the critical mass in higher education. Its gross enrolment ratio (GER) is a mere 11 per cent compared to China's 20 per cent, the USA's 83 per cent and South Korea's 91 per cent. This means that in comparison to India, China has double the number of students pursuing higher education.

Higher Education unquestionably faces huge challenges. While on one hand there is a need to bring as many young people as possible into the higher education fold, on the other it is required to significantly focus on building quality and global competitiveness. It is a known fact that quality of education has a wide-ranging impact on Employability and labor production.

### 2. THREATS AND CHALLENGES FOR INDIAN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

and brightest to the academic profession. Consequently, quality of education delivered in most institutions is very poor. There are many basic problems facing higher education in India today. These include :inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large vacancies in faculty positions and poor faculty thereof, low student enrolment rate, outmoded teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender, and ethnic imbalances. Research in higher education institutions is at its lowest ebb. There is an inadequate and diminishing financial support for higher education from the government and from society. Many colleges established in rural areas are non-viable, under-enrolled and have extremely poor infrastructure and facilities with just a few teachers. A series of judicial interventions over the last two decades and knee-jerk reaction of the government – both at the centre and state level and the regulatory bodies without proper understanding of the emerging market structure of higher education in India has further added confusion to the higher education landscape in the country. There is an absence of a well-informed reform agenda for higher education in the country.

### **5. WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?**

Education is a seller's market, where there is no scope of incentive to provide quality education. Quality is the key to India's future growth as knowledge economy start dominating. It is here that Indian Higher Education System is being found to be most wanting. This lack of quality, except in a handful of institution, permeates throughout the higher education sector, be it engineering, medicine, Business Administration or in Science, commerce, humanities, liberal arts and law institutes. Only a handful of these institutions make the mark. The total number of higher education seats in India is approximately over 3 Million per year, but those with high quality, may not number much more than 30,000. The problem with the institutes with poor quality is that they fail to inspire the students even to a small extent. The rapidly expanding Indian industry finds the graduates of these institutes lacking in simple skills required for employability. Therefore on one hand, the industry do not find enough people to employ, spiraling up the salaries and its wage bill; on the other hand, many who graduate do not find ready employment Quality results require quality

teachers. Even the best institutions in the country be it IITs or JNUs struggle to find enough quality teachers. The other institutes find it almost impossible. Many of the new private institutions are the worst sufferers. In many of these institutes, "fresh graduates who fail to get any other job," become the teachers. As soon as they acquire some experience and get a bit better, they drift to industry. This is the main reason that quality is a commodity in serious shortage in our academia. The students are not too bad. Once inspired, many of them are capable of working hard and even work on their own to learn adequately. But most of these youngsters fail to see even one quality teacher and fail to be inspired in any way. Unfortunately, there is clearly a lack of educated educators and teaching is not an attractive profession. It's a last choice in terms of career. Number of Ph.D.s produced each year is very low and those required by academia is far higher. In fact, at many institutions fresh graduates are employed to teach, leading to poor quality of classroom instruction. The lack of facilities some time deter the students, but not to the same extent as low quality of teachers. Colleges which lack quality are also incapable of creating an open atmosphere for learning.

Teachers and administrators spend more energy on controlling the students. Overall the academic atmosphere disappears. Often, the poor quality of teachers goes hand in hand with authoritarian and non-accountable administration. This is so both in Government as well as private run institutions. Teachers and administration spend more time on petty things like how to earn little more by setting question papers or taking other outside assignments rather than on educating and inspiring youngsters. As the problem of low quality teachers in these institutions is becoming very apparent, it is often said that the low quality of teachers is due to inadequate opportunity for these teachers to get trained. It is often forgotten that training of teachers in the form of Quality Improvement Programmes has been a major focus in the nation for the last thirty five years. While training the teachers continuously is important, this often hides the true problem of inadequate compensation. The result of these training the teacher program has been that most of the time when a teacher gets adequately trained, he/she leaves the educational institutes and migrate to the industry. Those teachers, who fail to benefit even from these quality improvement programs, stay as teachers. The only answer to the

sector there is much to be said for liberalizing the environment that confronts the managements today. The rules have to be clear and unambiguous and the oversight by government has to be non-intrusive. There is clearly no place for harassment in day to day operations.

In the most important aspect of quality, this is clearly of essence in the context of India emerging as a front runner in the comity of knowledge society. We consider the various stakeholders. The subsidy (partial as well as total) is leading students to make wrong decisions about seeking admissions. Reverse discrimination as is currently practiced should be seriously reviewed and modified. Rather than mere access through quotas, it should be strengthened by serious mentoring processes. Otherwise we would be found guilty of doing actual disservice to the students whom we seek to benefit. Teacher training apparatus and research ambience have to be created with serious and focused thought. This has to do with much more than finance. The other requirements such as NET /SET and M Phil/ PhD are so badly designed that there are no elements that test the qualities of the prospective teachers. The on-job training programs (orientation and refresher courses) are little more than a farce and are in serious need of a complete overhaul. There is of course no denying the fact that much public resources and private efforts are expended in their conduct. The pay structures are an example of incorrect pricing that leads to 'right' kind of persons entering the profession. The quotas for jobs in academics should be dispensed with at higher levels or promotions at least. Of course to do this, the Government will have to sacrifice petty politics and indulge in visionary statecraft.

Research is yet another weak ground. Not only do we require first rate infrastructure in terms of laboratories, library resources, equipment, and internet connectivity but also a threshold sized group of dedicated researchers that interact and work and play together. The current regime of organizing lectures of 48 minutes and use every excuse to disallow filling up of vacancies is hardly conducive to creation of research environment. But this is the easiest way for the bureaucrats (who have very little idea about research ethos to bring about expenditure management. Faith and extreme patience here are of essence. In the current context, with well paying jobs available to the 'good' students, it is difficult to attract students to

research. Indeed, as Kaushik Basu recently pointed out, most students always went out in search of well paid careers, but what has changed of late unlike earlier times is that even the 'best/ top' students do not enter the field of research. This means that mostly, only the not so good come in to do research – because they have nothing else to do! Ambience apart, it is necessary to use innovative ways to rectify the situation. The research scholarships – not numbers but amounts – have to be seriously enhanced. Also, to attain threshold level groups, multi/ interdisciplinary centers of excellence have to be created. Such centers will be in keeping with the current ethos of research and will have the advantage of reaping economies of scale. Whilst this is a strategy that will find many positive receptors, it is clear that this is well beyond the scope of government alone. It is here that private sector – in an enlightened self interest mode – play a vital role.

Privatization in higher education is probably the need today. Take for example the role played by private enterprise in transforming sectors, such as Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services (IT and ITES), telecom, banking, etc., is evident. Today, IT's growth story has put India on the global economic map. These sectors are shining examples of the progress that can be made when private enterprise is allowed to function in a free and encouraging manner. Unfortunately, the higher education operating environment provides certain challenges which discourage serious players from entering the field.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Although there have been challenges to higher education in the past, these most recent calls for reform may provoke a fundamental change in higher education. This change may not occur as a direct response to calls for greater transparency and accountability, but rather because of the opportunity to reflect on the purpose of higher education, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn. Now the time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building. We need higher educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. When India