

Changing Scenario in Higher Education in India

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Abstract

INDIA has seen a consistently high rate of economic growth in the recent years. It has now become a major player in the global knowledge economy. Skill-based activities have made significant contribution to this growth. Such activities depend on the large pool of qualified manpower that is fed by its large higher education system. It is now widely accepted that higher education has been critical to India's emergence in the global knowledge economy. Yet, it is believed that a crisis is plaguing the Indian higher education system. The research is all about to determine the drastic displacement in the field of Education.

Introduction: An academic revolution has taken place in higher education particularly in the past half century marked by a paradigm shift in scope and opportunity. Over the years higher education system has become an enterprise having much of business orientation with all its exposure to fierce competition at different levels of stakeholders. Indian education system considered as one of the largest of its kind in the world also faces/encounters enormous challenges in the new millennium. These challenges are diversified and manifold stretching from contemporary curriculum development, quality assurance and accreditation and ethical value propositions to policy planning and governance. In a technology driven society knowledge rewrites the fate of a nation and so does higher education. One of the major reasons for India's performance for being not that encouraging was due to suboptimal investment on higher education in the recent past. With unprecedented growth of knowledge typically in the area of information and communication followed by globalization shrinking the world into a global village, competitiveness has become a decisive force of growth.

This necessitates massive investment on higher education so that availability of internationally acceptable highly skilled manpower can be ensured. But, this drive for internationalization of higher education is a highly ticklish and delicate move and should not be accomplished at the cost of identity of the nation as rightly quoted "Internationalization of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization.

Access and Equity: Education is one of the most potential weapons to fight against socio-economic maladies like poverty and inequality. Education is equally key to enhance India's competitiveness in the global economy especially in view of interdependence and integration of Indian economy with world economy posing many challenges like maintaining international quality in higher education and acceptability and sustainability of skilled manpower. This seems to be more important for a country like India which is the second largest system of higher education, next only to USA, Therefore, ensuring access to quality education for all, in particular for the poor and rural population, is key to the economic and social development of India.

Looking at the ground reality, it gives a dismal picture of the state of higher education in India. Through broadening the international dimension of educational services to greater and expanding meaningful collaborations with internationally acclaimed global players in higher education, e-learning vis-à-vis ICT can really make higher education easily accessible, affordable and qualitative leading to the upliftment of the socio-economic status of the people. But in India ICT aided e-learning is in an embryonic state due to immature growth of ICT sector. Although the growth of e-learning is gradually growing, much remains to do to ensure its visibility particularly in view of its projected global market size of exceeding \$52.6 billion by 2010. Moreover, the apprehension of ineffectiveness and dilution in quality of education owing to a shift from conventional mode of imparting higher education to online modules seems to be a major obstacle on the way of accommodating required changes in the system.

Quality and Accreditation: The world economy is changing and so is the higher education. The availability of knowledge, ensuring quality, to the economy at large happens to be a strong determinant of national competitiveness and quality of human resources in a country. The economic progress cannot be sustainable in absence of a higher education system equipped with stringent quality assurance processes. Quality is a critical factor in influencing the educational outcome of the educational institute on one hand and employability of the graduates on the other. In today's contemporary world the interests of many stakeholders like students, parents, future employers, the State and funding bodies need to be taken care of while developing a strategy leading to quality in higher education, (Barnett 1992, Staropoli, 1991). The academic freedom and flexibility granted to educational institutes like universities make the adoption of quality control exercise a complex and difficult one (Largosen, 2004, Colling and Harvey, 1995). This necessitates developing a stringent monitoring mechanism to maintain and improve the standards of education. In this regard, India has established National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), similar policies adopted by many developed nations like UK, Canada to promote quality in education. The overall quality assurance framework followed by NAAC has all the basic elements of quality assurance like accreditation, assessment and academic audit. Further, the methods adopted by NAAC like institutional self-study report, on-site visits, face-to-face interaction with faculty and students leave a fair degree of consequential impacts on the educational institutions to adhere to quality norms and standards. However, ensuring quality in a complex, diverse and one of the largest educational systems of the world requires a high degree of accountability both from the institutions and National agencies level. Truly, the complexity in the entire value chain of ensuring quality is more visible in the functional domain of the teacher and the student. Since the participatory role played by students in academic discourse gets seriously affected by not granting due freedom to them and the teachers on the other hand fail to bring the fruits of hard core applied research and consulting to the class room for effecting better and meaningful learning for want of right kind of academic environment coupled with assistance and incentives.

Public Private Partnerships: As India has entered an era of high economic growth with growth becoming multispectral it faces manpower deficiencies. There is no denying the fact that high level of knowledge and manpower development can promote economic prosperity and international recognition vis-à-vis potential skilled labor force and other tangible socio-economic benefits. Therefore, financing higher education has come to the centre stage of debate and discussions among the policy makers across the globe. The origin of debate much relates to public and private funding of higher education. The reasons for such a transitional change of

treating education and technical education in particular not as a merit good but as a private good may be many, but factors like growing awareness of people to pay for qualitative education leading to better earning capacity in turn ensures a better tomorrow and the low price elasticity of enrolments which removes the fear factor of the private operators of losing a sizeable market owing to relatively higher course fee are most important. But, private operators should not be given free hand to operate on the ground that private participation reduces the burden on government budgets, and helps ensure that the costs of higher education are borne by those to whom the benefits accrue. However, by encouraging private participation accessibility of higher education to a diversified demography in a resource constrained economy can be expanded. The need of the hour is to develop a strong, viable regulatory mechanism to grant permission to private or cross-border institutions to operate for ensuring and expanding qualitative higher education. Therefore, public private partnerships built on the expertise of each other through appropriate allocation of resources, risks and rewards can really play crucial role in nation's strategic development of higher education. This makes the role of the Government more pivotal so that privatization with the high order of commercialization does not dilute the basic objective and quality of higher education. As such private higher education systems must have to be subjected to strict administrative and financial regulations.

Governance: Higher education systems especially in developing countries are undergoing radical changes in recent times both to ensure quality and social accountability. The challenges are manifold. With the haunt of globalization, achieving the goal of excellence at various spheres like student performance and competitiveness, faculty qualification and promotion of research seems to be the toughest challenge. What is key to achieve excellence in this context is 'good governance' which is instrumental in specifying the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in such a manner that is consistent with achieving quality higher education. Good governance may not be the sufficient condition for achieving high quality but it is certainly a necessary condition to empower any higher education system to thrive towards excellence and deliver the best. Academic governance relies much on special attributes like initiative, innovation and creativity with substantial academic autonomy. Government monitoring and appraisal of performance pertaining to government funding to the institutions in particular seem more pertinent in view of incidence of misuse of funds and low educational outcomes. Accountability is also required in internal administration of the institutes apart from the stipulation from external agencies.

Suggestions and Recommendations: With the advent of globalization it has become imperative to reorient our education system to the global realities rather than continuing with the age old inward looking policies. Developed as well as developing countries like USA, UK and China are now reshaping their education policies with massive thrust on sustainable qualitative higher education along with spirit of dynamism and competitiveness. India in this context requires a comprehensive reforms package to harness optimum potential of its human resources crucial in achieving its socio-economic objectives.

Some suggestions are:

a) While access to qualitative professional higher education needs to be further expanded at the same time equity must be ensured by extending financial and academic support to poor and marginalized sections of the society.

- b) In order to increase access ICTs aided teaching and learning modules should be developed.
- c) Sufficient training program for faculty members should be conducted to adopt new skills and expertise to develop learning systems relevant and contemporary to the requirements of the 21st century.
- d) Quality assurance is key to sustainability of any system. As such, higher education system involving all its stakeholders with appropriate regulatory mechanism should create conditions congenial enough for promotion of research, innovative and creative thoughts aiming to ensure high quality.
- e) International university networks and partnerships should be developed to promote high quality research and develop internationally competitive curricula and teaching practices and dissemination of innovative ideas.
- f) Academic freedom both for teachers and students should be provided to realize academic excellence.
- g) Concerted efforts both at government and private level must be made to attract the best of the talents with a sound compensation package along with perks and amenities.

Conclusion: Knowledge is power and therefore has remained one of the most important driving forces of sustaining human existence. For any economy to achieve exponential economic growth, it is essential to gear up skill based activities through a potential, vibrant and dynamic higher education system. Over the years, trade, investment, mobility of people and the economy have grown significantly and so the need of revamping the higher education system replacing the age old and non-relevant practices. Looking at the deficiencies in most of the key areas of higher education system of India like accessibility, quality, financing and governance, a strategic paradigm shift in the policy framework and overall functioning is needed to meet growing expectations and societal needs.

References

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