

Growth and Challenges of Higher Education in India

Anju Gupta
DAV College, Faridabad
Email: anjugupta78300@gmail.com

Abstract

In the last 30 years, higher education in India has witnessed rapid and impressive growth. The increase in the number of institutions is, however disproportionate to the quality of education that is being dispersed. Unplanned over-expansion is often criticized as one of the biggest downfalls of Indian higher education. A large number of institutions suffer from subpar quality and a lack of funding. Indian higher education is in need of radical reforms. A focus on enforcing higher standards of transparency, strengthening of the vocational courses is the need of hour. This paper aims to highlight the challenges faced by higher education in India. By throwing the light on the growth patterns of higher education, this paper also gives the suggestions to improve the quality of higher education.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Challenges, Growth*

Introduction

India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. Unlike China, however, India has the advantage of English being the primary language of higher education and research. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth in higher education as compared to 20 per cent in China (Dr. J.D Singh, 2011). However, in terms of the number of institutions, India is the largest higher education system in the world with 38877 institutions (900 universities and 37977 colleges). The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission (India), which enforces its standards at central and state level. The vision of higher education in India is to realize the country's human resources potential to its fullest with equity and inclusion, the nation has embarked upon initiating a number of development-linked strategies to promote higher education. As a result of which the higher education sector, in recent decades, has witnessed a tremendous growth in many aspects such as its institutional capacity, enrolment, teacher-student ratio, etc. The rapid expansion of the higher education system as a whole has brought several pertinent issues related to equity, efficiency, excellence and access to higher education in the country. Though contributions of private unaided colleges and universities in meeting the demand for higher education are appreciable, the mushrooming growth of these institutions has resulted in the largest system of higher education with the weakest quality

The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates 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 four years. The involvement of private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in the field. Today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector. This has accelerated establishment of institutes which have originated over the last decade making India home to the largest number of Higher Education institutions in the world, with student enrolments at the second highest (Shaguri, 2013).

Objectives of Study

- To discuss the Structure of higher education in India.
- To analyse the growth of higher education in India.
- To examine the various problems faced by higher education in India
- To give the suggestions to improve the quality of higher education in India.

Research Methodology

The study is based on secondary data collected from the published and unpublished records, reports and contributions of several institutions, organizations and individuals in India. Specifically, the secondary sources include Annual Reports of UGC, Planning Commission, and Education Department of Ministry of Human Resource Development

Structure of Higher Education in India

In India the institutional framework consists of Universities established by an Act of Parliament (Central Universities) or of a State Legislature (State Universities), Deemed Universities (institutions which have been accorded the status of a university with authority to award their own degrees through central government notification), Institutes of National Importance (prestigious institutions awarded the said status by Parliament), and Institutions established by State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated with the University (both government-aided and unaided). Universities and its constituent colleges are the main institutes of higher education in India.

The education may be of the nature of General, Vocational, Professional or Technical education. Technical education includes 65 centrally funded institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institute of Science (IIS), etc. along with number of engineering colleges set up by State Governments. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) approves and regulates these institutions in engineering/technology, architecture, hotel management & catering technology, management studies, computer applications and applied arts & crafts. Vocational Education is another stream of higher education in India. For this a network of public and private polytechnics and vocational institutions exists and they are controlled and supervised by the Councils specializing in respective discipline.

India has also developed an Open University system to encourage distance learning. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was the pioneer and now there are 14 open universities in India. The Distance Education Council of India (DEC), New Delhi regulates these universities, maintains the standards, encourages and organizes the activities of Open

and Distance learning (ODL) in the country. Higher education sector has expanded due to distance mode of education supported by new information and communication technology (ICT) as it costs 66 per cent less and the students need not leave their homes or profession. The internet and satellite technology are being put to use to further the cause of distance education.

Growth of Higher Education in India

Higher education in India has witnessed a tremendous increase in its institutional capacity. The growth of higher education can be traced with the following capacity indicators in (Table 1). In the year 1950 there were only 25 university level institutions which increased to 177 in 1991. At present this number has gone to 900 nearly 5 times increase than 1991. The growth in higher education can also be seen with the increase number of colleges from 700 in 1950 to 37977 in 2017. But the average number of colleges per lakh population is 28 which are very low. There is also an increase in number of teachers from 15,000 in 1950 to 12,84,755 in 2017. In 2017-18 the teacher student ratio is 25 and average enrolment of students per college is 698.

TABLE – I
INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Capacity Indicators	1950	1991	2004	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012	2017
No. of university level institutions	25	177	320	367	467	534	659	700	900
No. of colleges	700	7346	16885	18064	25951	32987	33023	35500	37977
No. of teachers (in thousands)	15	272	457	488	588	821	--	--	1284
No. of students enrolled (in millions)	0.1	4.9	9.95	11.2	13.6	--	25.9	26	36

Source: UGC Annual Reports

The university level institutions widely differ in terms of their structure and coverage. In Table 2 universities sub-divided into six broad groups include central, state;

private, deemed and also institutes of national importance established both by central and state legislatures.

TABLE-II
UNIVERSITY-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Type	2002	2006	2007	2009	2010	2012	2017
Central Universities	18	20	25	40	41	44	46
State Universities	178	217	231	234	257	306	367
Institutions Deemed to be Universities	52	102	102	128	130	129	123
Institutions of National Importance	17	18	38	44	44	67	101
Private Universities	6	10	21	21	61	154	263
Total	271	367	417	467	533	700	900

Source: UGC Annual Reports

In above table 2 there were only 18 central universities in 2002 which has increased to 46 in 2017. In the last decade there has been a drastic change in number of private universities from 6 in 2002 to 263 in 2017. This is due to the privatisation policy adopted by HRD ministry to reach the higher education to the large masses But the number of deemed universities has decreased from 130 in 2010 to 123 in 2017. This is because Ministry of HRD has derecognized some deemed universities due to major irregularities found in their educational system and put them under scan. As per the Tondon Committee report these educational centres were functioning in contravention of the UGC Act in different parts of the country like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar etc.

Higher education in India includes various stages like graduation, post graduation, diploma/ certificates and research. Hence it is significant to analyse stage wise enrolment at the level of higher education. Table 3 shows the stage wise enrolment of students in higher education indicating that the enrolment in all stages has increased considerably in last few years.

TABLE-III
STAGE-WISE ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (IN THOUSANDS)

Stage	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2011-12	2017-18
Graduate (Bachelor's)	10,326	11,034	11,908	12,658	17,456	29,016
Post-Graduate (Master's)	1,094	1,146	1,490	1,680	2,492	4,114
Research (Doctoral)	74	82	95	1,17	1,61	195
Diploma/Certificate	118	114	148	167	218	312

Source: UGC Annual Reports

The above table shows that at each level the student's enrolment has increased from the last ten years. The number of graduates has increased nearly threefold from 2007 to 2017. The number of researchers has gone up from 74 in 2007 to 195 in 2017. These researchers include both PhD and M.Phil students. In 2017-18 the average enrolment of students per college is 698, which is very low. There are various reasons for low average like lack of infrastructure, space, teachers, lack of hostels and another amenities etc. One drawback of privatisation is that the higher education has become so expensive that a major section of society is not able to afford it.

Critical Issues in Higher Education

The Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (Chair: Dr. Satyanarayan Jatiya) submitted its report on 'Issues and challenges before higher educational sector in India' on February 8, 2017. The report examined the challenges of higher education in India after studying the higher education institutions in Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Patiala, Thiruvananthapuram, Udaipur, Chennai, Vishakhapatnam, Bhopal and Indore. The Committee also interacted with public sector banks regarding the education loan facilities being provided to students for higher education.

The key observations of the Committee are as follows:

- **Shortage of resources:** Bulk of the enrolment in higher education is handled by state universities and their affiliated colleges. However, these state universities receive very small amounts of grants in comparison. Nearly 65% of the University Grants Commission (UGC) budget is utilised by the central universities and their colleges while state universities and their affiliated colleges get only the remaining 35%.
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- **Teachers vacancies:** According to UGC, the total number of sanctioned teaching posts in various Central Universities are 16,699 for professors, 4,731 for associate professors, and 9,585 for assistant professors. Out of the total sanctioned teaching posts, 5,925 (35%) professor posts, 2,183 (46%) associate professor posts and 2,459 (26%) assistant professor posts are vacant.
- **Less attractive:** Young students don't find the teaching profession attractive; or the recruitment process is long and involves too many procedural formalities. The recruitment process should start well before a post is vacated. In addition, to make the profession of teaching more lucrative, faculty should be encouraged to undertake consultancy projects and be provided financial support for start-ups.
- **Lack of Accountability and performance of teachers:** At present, there is no mechanism for ensuring the accountability and performance of professors in universities and colleges. This is unlike foreign universities where the performance of college faculty is evaluated by their peers and students
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- **Lack of employable skills:** Lack of employable skills in students of technical education has been observed. Skill gaps in different sectors and offering courses has been identified.

Suggestions for Improving Quality of Higher Education

There are some suggestions and Expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students for improving quality of higher education.

- **Accreditation of institutions:** The accreditation of higher educational institutions needs to be at core of the regulatory arrangement in higher education. Further, quality assurance agencies should guarantee basic minimum standards of technical education to meet the industry demand for quality manpower. The National Board of Accreditation should act as a catalyst towards quality enhancement and quality assurance of higher technical education. Credit rating agencies, reputed industry associations, media houses and professional bodies should be encouraged to carry forward the process of rating of Indian universities and institutions. A robust rating system will give rise to healthy competition amongst universities and help improve their performance.
- **Student-Centred Education and Dynamic Methods:** Methods of higher education should be improved. New teaching learning methods should be adopted like power point presentations, group discussions, dynamic sessions of workshops, seminars etc. Education should be appropriate to the needs of

learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. Methods of distance education will have to be employed on a vast scale

- **Examination Reforms:** Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning must be implemented.
- **International Cooperation:** With the increased development of transport and communication, the global village is witnessing a growing emphasis on international cooperation and action to find satisfactory solutions to problems that have global dimensions and higher education is one of them.
- **Uniform International Syllabus :** Indian India must aspire for the international standard in education Indian Universities should adopt world class education so it can offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal it must adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.
- **Personality Development:** Finally, education must be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunities for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. One can excel only by grooming his personality which should be developed by education system
- **Digital Libraries:** University and college libraries must be fully digitalised.. Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. A library must have online access and conducive for serious study.
- **Industry and Academia Connection:** Industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line: In with requirements. Skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability of academia to understand and make sure good jobs
- **Incentives to Teachers and Researchers:** Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation. .
- **Performance Audit:** A system of performance audit of professors based on the feedback given by their students and colleagues should be set up. Other inputs like research papers, publications by teachers should be added in the performance audit in due course of time.

- **Employability skills:** These skills should be enhanced to bridge the gap between education and employability. Some strategies in this regard can include: (i) Industry Institute Student Training Support, (ii) Industrial Challenge Open Forum, (iii) Long Term Student Industry Placement Scheme, and (iv) Industrial Finishing Schools.
- **Recruitment process:** The vacant posts of teachers in colleges and universities should be filled timely. The recruitment process should start before post gets vacant.
- **Public Private Partnership:** PPP is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. Governments can ensure PPP through an appropriate policy. University Grants Commission and Ministry of HRD should play a major role in developing a purposeful interface between the Universities, Industries and National Research Laboratories (NRLs) as a step towards PPP. 65% of UGC funds are utilised by central universities. Therefore state universities should mobilise its funding through other means like endowment funds, contributions from industry, alumni etc

Conclusion:

The present study revealed the current scenario of higher education in India. The various issues related to demand –supply gap, enrolment, privatization, etc indicate that the situation of higher education is not satisfactory. Whether the number of universities and colleges has increased over a decade yet the Indian higher education system is far behind the international standards. Indian economy is facing various challenges regarding higher education which need to overcome through appropriate policy formulation and their effective implementation.

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