



Higher education in India: A conceptual study

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Abstract

While there is much talk of Industrial Revolution 4.0, it is important to recognize that India first should endeavour to ensure a basic international standard expected in its Universities or Institutions operating at National, State and Regional level. India is at the crossroads of making a leap into a higher orbit and enter premier league of the world based on its strong human resources from a large population and seven decades of sustained efforts to (re)establish itself in various sectors of economic and intellectual activity. In India, higher education imparted by universities is facing challenges in terms of Access, Equity and Quality. The Indian Higher Education System has established itself as the largest system in the world in terms of number of institutions and third largest in terms of student enrollment (after china and USA). The present paper is a conceptual study of the Higher Education in India.

Keywords: education, services, institutions

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 (Yadav, 2018) [7].

Higher education in India: The context for change

The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population (British Council, 2014) [1].

Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with four broad challenges:

- **The supply-demand gap:** India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. 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.
- **The low quality of teaching and learning:** The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.
- **Constraints on research capacity and innovation:** With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.
- **Uneven growth and access to opportunity:** Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies.

The three central pillars of the government's plans for education reflect these realities: expansion, equity and excellence. Over the next five years, every aspect of higher education is being reorganised and remodelled: funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration and the way teaching and research are conducted. Emphasis will be placed on strengthening existing institutions. In arguably the biggest reform in the governance and funding of state universities, an ambitious programme is underway to devolve authority and budgets for higher education from federal government to the state governments.

The private sector, which currently accounts for 59% of all tertiary enrolment, continues to grow rapidly, providing most of the professional courses, particularly engineering and management. Many more providers are waiting for legislation which would allow them to enter the market. The private sector is expected to play a significant role in the future expansion of higher education in India (British Council, 2014) [1].

Table 1: Higher education institutions in India

Type and Number of Institution	Central	State	Private	Total
University and university-level institutions	152	316	191	659
Colleges	669	13,024	19,930	33,023
Diploma-awarding institutions	0	3,207	9,541	12,748
Percentage enrolment in 2012	2.6%	38.6%	58.9%	100%

(Source: 'Higher education in India: twelfth five year plan and beyond', Ernst and Young (2012))

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 (Kumar, 2013) [4].

Table 2: Summary of opportunities identified

Future opportunities	Rationale
Institutional collaborations in teaching and learning	Stated highest priority for international partnership. Increasing the quality of teaching and learning is central to government plans over next five years, including faculty exchange. Considerable scope and scale in state-funded institutions and the private sector.
Research collaboration in STEM	Top priority in research, mostly, but not exclusively, with the 'tier 1' institutions.. Research funding is likely to increase.
Research collaboration in the humanities, arts and social sciences	Supporting multi and inter-disciplinary research; emerging opportunities for professional courses. Pockets of excellence across different institution types (public/private, central/state-funded). Potential interest in wider south Asia networks.
Multi-dimensional, system-wide support for higher education reform	Emerging opportunities through state governments as devolved authority and budgets are made to states based on performance and outcomes.
Students and early stage researchers	UK to India mobility increasingly important and demanded by Indian institutions; capacity building to enhance employability skills and researcher skills; encourage greater pipeline into research careers, English.
Enterprise education, entrepreneurship, links with industry	Important for job creation and enhancing employability. Across institution types, particularly state and private institutions; potentially in partnership with state governments
Leadership and management	New roles for leaders and senior managers as reforms force more accountability and change which require strategic leadership and planning.
Vocational skills	Emerging interest in linking skills and HE sectors, increasing employability and access. Huge interest and need in developing skills market, particularly with private colleges, private universities and business
Digital learning technologies	Vital component to achieve expansion and increase access and quality. Blended learning and MOOCs have large potential. Collaboration in pedagogies and design.
Conferences, policy dialogues and networks	Support to system reform and emerging areas of mutual interest; provide forums for shared learning and relationship-building between the UK and India in HE. Across all institution types, central and state governments
Links with industry, establishing incubation centres and innovation units	Top priority for government: driving innovation, supporting technology transfer, encouraging impact-driven research. All institution types; utilise private institutions for links with industry.

(British Council, 2014) [1]

Regulatory bodies and research councils for the higher education in India

Under the department of higher education there are several regulatory bodies and research councils which are responsible for the higher education in India (Sharma, 2015) [5].

Regulatory Bodies

- University Grant Commission (UGC)
- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- Council of Architecture (COA)

Research Councils

- Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR)
- Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR)
- Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR)
- National Council of Rural Institute (NCRI)
- Project of History of Indian Science Philosophy and Culture (PHISPC) (Sharma, 2015) [5].

Challenges in higher education in India

It is our 73rd year of independence still our education system has not been developed fully. We are not able to list a single university in top 100 universities of the world. Various

governments changed during these six decades. They tried to boost the education system and implemented various education policies but they were not sufficient to put an example for the universe. UGC is continuously working and focusing on quality education in higher education sector. Still we are facing lot of problems and challenges in our education system. Some of the basic challenges in higher education system in India are discussed below (Sheikh, 2017) [6]:

- **Enrolment:** The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other 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.
- **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.
- **Quality:** Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today. However, Government is continuously focusing on the quality education. Still Large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world.
- **Infrastructure:** Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. There are large number of colleges which are functioning on second or third floor of the building on ground or first floor there exists readymade hosieries or photocopy shops.
- **Political interference:** Most of the educational Institutions are owned by the political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the Universities. They are using the innocent students for their selfish means. Students organise campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.
- **Faculty:** Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain wellqualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. Large numbers of NET / PhD candidates are unemployed even there are lot of vacancies in higher education, these deserving candidates are then applying in other departments which is a biggest blow to the higher education system.
- **Accreditation:** 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”.
- **Research and Innovation:** there are very nominal scholars in our country whose writing is cited by famous western authors. There is inadequate focus on

research in higher education institutes. There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as, limited numbers of quality faculty to advice students. 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. So, this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

- **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 (Kumar 2015) (Sheikh, 2017) [6].

Online initiatives to promote higher education in India

Online Education system is more likely to be meaningful to learners when it is Learner centered, easily accessible, clearly organized, well written and has a facilitated learning environment. India is second most populous country in the world and has a great responsibility of educating its masses with diverse backgrounds. Many initiatives have been taken by the Indian government to provide and support concept of open education. Initially, the objective was to provide open resources in terms of repositories, libraries, educational media files, e-books, etc. These were made accessible for everybody.

Some of the efforts in this direction started as National Digital Repository of IGNOU, SAKSHAT providing e-content, SHISHYA for XI-XII Standards by CBSE Board, and VIDYAVAHINI integrating IT into the curriculum of rural schools by providing interactive training and developmental communication. Most of these initiatives started with establishing dedicated department to make education reachable to many learners as much as possible. Some of the common names in this path are, Education and Research Network (ERNET) connecting various colleges and schools by providing network connectivity; EDUSAT, a satellite launched for education in India, Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), use the power of television to act as means of educational knowledge dissemination; Information and Library Network Centre (INFLIBNET) autonomous Inter-University Centre for connecting university libraries. Different initiatives have been taken to promote higher Education in India. Some of these worth mentioning initiatives are as follows (Ganai, 2019) [2].

Review of literature

Ganai (2019) [2] contends that the world has realized that the economic success of the states is directly determined by their education systems. Education is a Nation's Strength. A developed nation is inevitably uneducated nation. Since independence, India as developing nation is continuously progressing in the education field. Although there have been lot of challenges to higher education system of India but equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and to make higher education system much better. India need well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. The current study aims

to highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities and challenges in online Programme in higher education system in India. Online education changes all components of teaching and learning in higher education (Ganai, 2019) [2].

Yadav (2018) [7] feels that 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 (Yadav, 2018) [7].

Manish Yadav (2018) [7] propagates that 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 (Yadav, 2018) [7].

Kulkarni (2018) [3] opines that for both developed and emerging economies, knowledge and innovation will increasingly drive competitive advantage, according to a great deal of analysis conducted by the OECD and other Institutions. Higher Education is a key component of future competitive advantage in the knowledge and innovation spheres. This paper will examine the challenges and opportunities for the Indian Higher Education Sector, as it grapples with meeting the needs of a changing economy, and providing access and opportunity for millions of its population. Drawing on a variety of data sources and benchmarking India against a number of nations around the world, this paper contends that India needs to further significantly reform its Higher Education sector in areas of quality, efficiency, accessibility, internationalisation and in meeting labour force needs (Kulkarni, 2018) [3].

Sheikh (2017) [6] express that the world has realized that the economic success of the states is directly determined by their education systems. Education is a Nation's Strength. A developed nation is inevitably an educated nation. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Since independence, India as a developing nation is contentiously progressing in the education field. Although there have been lot of challenges to higher education system of India but equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and to make higher education system much better. 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. India need well skilled and highly educated people who can drive our economy forward. 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. The current study aims to

highlight the challenges and to point out the opportunities in higher education system in India (Sheikh, 2017) [6].

Sharma (2015) [5] propounds that higher education system plays an important role for the country's overall development which includes industrial, social, economic etc. Indian higher education system is third largest in the world. The role of Indian higher educational institutes such as colleges and universities in the present time is to provide quality based education in the field of education, research etc to empower youth for self-sustainability (Sharma, 2015) [5].

Key reforms in India planned in the next five years

The central government operates a five-year planning cycle. The twelfth five-year plan (2013-17) for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion (British Council, 2014) [1].

Excellence

Priority issues include improvements in teaching and learning, and a focus on learning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching; more international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and consortia.

Equity

Further initiatives targeted at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities.

Expansion

Scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects; enabling flexible and skills-based learning; ensuring a more even spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment (British Council, 2014) [1].

Suggestions for improving the higher education system

- The following suggestions are proposed to improve the Higher Education system in India through online programme.
- There is a need to implement innovative and transformational approach form primary to higher education level to make Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive.
- Higher educational institutes need to improve quality and reputation.
- There should be a good infrastructure of colleges and universities which may attract the students.
- Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes and also generates linkage between national research laboratories and research centers of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research.
- There is a need to focus on the graduate students by providing them such courses in which they can achieve excellence, gain deeper knowledge of subject so that

they will get jobs after recruitment in the companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to the higher education.

- Universities and colleges in both public private must be away from the political affiliations,
- Favoritism, money making process should be out of education system etc.
- There should be a multidisciplinary approach in higher education so that student's knowledge may not be restricted only up to his own subjects (Ganai, 2019) ^[2].

Conclusion

The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population (British Council, 2014) ^[1]. Not all colleges/universities and classrooms in our education institutions are healthy and conducive enough to promote excellence in learning. We need a better governance of education systems that is efficient, accountable, transparent and flexible so that they can respond more effectively to the diverse and continually changing needs of learners and community.

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