Current scenario of Higher Education in India: Challenges and Opportunities

[1]Arti and [2] Dr. AmbalikaSinha,
[1]Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology, Allahabad, India.
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology, Allahabad, India.

Abstract

Higher education is the foundation of any country. It helps in developing the human being in all aspects by providing adequate knowledge and specialized skills. It converts human being into useful human resource which is very essential for the overall development of the country. Higher education is as crucial as primary and secondary education because it prepares human being for employment opportunities. India is in transition phase in higher education sector. It has imposed some threatening issues, challenges and opportunities.

This paper focuses on the present scenario of higher education in India. It also aims to identify various issues like accessibility of higher education to all groups of the society, quality of higher education etc. Secondary data is used to provide statistics of higher education and to give overview of the existing scenario of higher education sector. This study also identifies challenges and suggests effective measures to overcome the obstacles in higher education sector.

Keyword: Higher education, accessibility, Challenges, opportunities.

Introduction-

The importance of Higher Education can be clearly understand by former United States president barrack Obama in following words, “Higher Education cannot be a luxury reserved just for a privileged few. It is an economic necessity for every family. And every family should be able to afford it.” Higher education is a long-term social investment to support the social structure, cultural growth, economic development, equality and justice.In the 21st century, the higher education is a powerful tool which can be utilized to build knowledge based society.

Objective of the study-

1. To analyze the current status of higher education in India.
2. To illustrate the problems faced by the higher education system in India.
3. To analyze the challenges and opportunities in higher education system.

4. To suggest effective measures to overcome challenges faced by the higher education in India.

Higher education: Concepts and Meaning-

The term Higher Education is vague in nature because it is used in variety of way by different people, different country and in different point of time. So, there is no clear cut definition for defining higher education. At international level, after school education can be divided into Higher Education and Further Education and combined, it is known as Tertiary Education. Higher Education qualification infers Higher Diplomas, Foundation Degrees to Honours Degrees. These courses take a minimum of 3 years to maximum of 4 years to complete. On the other hand, Further Education refers to degrees above graduation like, Post Graduate or Master and Doctorate degrees. In short, Tertiary Education means colleges and university level education. The Post Higher Secondary Education is known as Higher Education in India.

Current scenario of Higher Education-

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China.University Grants Commission is the main governing body at the tertiary level, which implements its standards, advises the government, and helps to coordinate between the centre and the state.Certification for higher learning is controlled by 15 autonomous institutions set by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Universities and its constituent colleges are the main institutes for providing higher education in India.

The report of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for year 2015-16 classifies and representsvarious facets of the institutes of Higher education in India. It comprises entire Higher Education Institutions in the country. Institutions are categorized in 3 broad Categories; University, College and Stand-Alone Institutions. There are 799 Universities, 39071 colleges and 11923 Stand Alone Institutions. 277 Universities are privately managed. 307 Universities are located in ruralArea. 14 Universities are exclusively for women, 4 in Rajasthan, 2 in Tamil Nadu &1 each in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttarkhand and West Bengal. In addition to 1 Central Open University, 13 State Open Universities and 1 State Private Open University, there are 118 Dual mode Universities, which offer education through distance mode also and the maximum (19) of themare located in Tamil Nadu. There are 459 General, 101 Technical, 64 Agriculture & Allied, 50 Medical, 20Law, 11 Sanskrit and 7 Language Universities. The top 8 States in terms of highest number of colleges in India are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh. Bangalore district tops in terms of number of colleges with 970 colleges followed by Jaipur with 616 colleges. Top 50 districts have about 34% of colleges. 60% Colleges are located in Rural Area. 11.1% Colleges are exclusively for Women. Only 1.7% Colleges run Ph.D. programme and 33% Colleges run Post Graduate Level programmes. 78% Colleges are privately managed; 64% Private-unaided and 14% Private aided. Andhra Pradesh &Telangana have more than 80% Private-unaided colleges and Tamil Nadu has 76% Private-unaided Colleges, whereas, Bihar has 13% and Assam has only 10% Private-unaided colleges.

22% of the Colleges are having enrolment less than 100 and only 4.3% Colleges have enrolment more than 3000. Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 34.6 million with 18.6 million boys and 16 million girls. Girls constitute 46.2% of the total enrolment.Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 24.5%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 25.4% and for females, it is 23.5%. For Scheduled Castes, it is 19.9% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 14.2% as compared to the national GER of 24.5%.About 79.3% of the students are enrolled in Undergraduate level programme. 1,26,451 students are enrolled in Ph.D. that is less than 0.4% of the total student enrolment. The estimated total number of teachers is 15,18,813. Out of which more than half about 61% are male teachers and 39% are female teachers.At all-India level there are merely 64 female teachers per 100 male teachers. Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Universities and Colleges is 21 if regular enrolment is considered. The share of Ph.D. student is highest in State Public University (33%) followed by Institute of National Importance (22%), Central University (14%) and Deemed University-Private (12%). Number of female students is lowest in Institutes of National Importance followed by State Private Open Universities, Deemed University- Government. The University Grant Commission of India provide loan grant in the country, but it is also responsible for coordinating, formulating and maintaining the standards in institutions of higher education. Apart from the UGC here are various professional councils that are responsible for recognizing courses, promoting professional institutes and providing grants to undergraduate programmes. They are All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Distance Education Council (DEC), Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), Bar Council of India (BCI), National Council forTeacher Education (NCTE) Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), Medical Council ofIndia (MCI), Pharmacy Council of India (PCI), Indian Nursing Council (INC), DentistCouncil of India (DCI), Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) and the CentralCouncil of Indian Medicine (CCIM) are the statutory professional councils of India.

Major concerns and suggestive measures in Higher education in India-

1. **Lack of Innovation**– The course curriculum of many of the colleges / universities is not up to date. It is not able to impart new knowledge and skills to the students. Due to this, they are lacking in employability skills.

   Measures- Educational efforts can be extended only when the students after becoming successful will create and add value in the society and contribute back to their institutions or start new institutes of global standards themselves. All institutions of higher education should regularly revise their syllabus by concerning experts from different areas for focusing on the knowledge expansion. Workshops, seminar, conferences, symposium should be conducted by the colleges and faculty should be engaged in trainings programmes for the regular up gradation of their knowledge and skills.A feedback system from the students should also be used in the colleges and universities to measure and appraise the teacher's role in the institutional developmental process.

2. **Investment in education** – The Union Budget 2017-18 has set an expenditure of Rs 79,685.95 crore for the education sector for financial year 2017-18. Of the total expenditure, Rs 46,356.25 is for the school sector and the rest for the higher education. A total of Rs 497 crore has been allocated for the e-learning portfolio of higher education in 2017-18.If we assess the expenses on education as a percentage to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Indiais still lagging behind some nations of the world.

   Measures- Private sector can be proved instrumental in filling gap in the investment in education.

3. **Pupil-Teacher ratio –** In India, the Pupil-Teacher ratio is very high as comparedto the other countries in the world. For example, in the developed countries this ratio is 11.4.While in the case of India; it is 21.0 which is significant high. India is facing shortage of faculty in higher education sector.

   Measures- There is a need to recruit new teachers and also focusing on updating their quality of skills and knowledge through training.

4. **Infrastructure development**–India is failing to provide adequate infrastructural facilities to run upcoming colleges and universities. It is the one of the main reason of low capability utilization.

   Measures- Non political private sector participation is essential in the establishment of quality physical infrastructure for quality higher education. These infrastructure facilities include college building, adequate library, spacious classrooms for conducting classes and presentation, furniture, boys and girl hostels, transport facilities, sport facilities, commercial buildings, laboratories etc.

5. **Competing with world** -The average quality of India's higher education has been falling gradually behind the world average. There is need that different-different successful models of education in other countries should be studied and apply their best suitable model in our education system.

   Measures- For competing globally with other countries, we need to raise our standards and set new benchmarks. It would provide benefits to Higher education system for setting adequate objectives, reengineering etc. We should focus on establishing world level research facilities, recruit proficient and insightful academicians in institutions to lead in economic progress. It is essential to convert the younger workforce into industrious ones and this can be achieved by providing quality higher education in whole country. There is need to replace old technologies which are outdated and less output giving. For making edge in this competitive environment, we should focus on effective use of new technologies for providing education.

6. **Public Private Partnership model –**Government is burdened to provide infrastructure facilities. Public Private Partnership (PPP) model can be proved useful to minimize the burden of the government in providing infrastructure facilities.

   Measures- Collaborations between the higher education institutions and corporate would help the students in getting experience of industrial activities through training and internships, organizing

joint research and development, projects etc. This will make students more employable and it will also improve quality of education.

7. **Affordable education –**To insure that every student get quality higher education, we have to make education affordable. The fee structure in government sponsored and owned institutions are low-costand affordable in India. But in private institutions it is quite high and not affordable for poor students.

   Measures- To resolve this issue, institutions have to keep in mind that no deserving student may get unable to take admission just because of high fee. Scholarships should be provided to them.

8. **Students studying in abroad –**India have the largest no. of higher education institutions in the world still Indian students prefer to pursue their higher education in foreign countries and no. of enrolments is increasing. The various factors which persuade Indian students to take admission in abroad are (a) wealth and aspirations (b) better quality of education (c) more industry exposure and experiences gained (d) social status.

   Measures- We should identify these issues while building our educational institutions so that this trend can be changed.

9. **Ethics in education –**Education ethics has a very significant and effectual role. An alarming trend in respect of repayment of loans by students can be seen. If the students fail to repay the educational loans, the non-performing assets of the banks will raise and due to this, banks would be cynical in sanctioning educational loans.

   Measures- To reduce default of education loans, the College Alumni Association of students has to actively inculcate ethics and values among students. Ethics should be included as a course curriculum in higher educational system to help students to be a good human. Students should be equipped with ethics and values as well as skills and knowledge.

10. **Quality education –**There is need to emphasis on improving student assessment system. The existing student assessment system is insufficient to judge the different degrees of excellence attained by the students and to increase the skill level among the students.

    Measures- Instead of traditional lecture methods, we should also use case studies, group discussions, presentations, projects, assignments, seminars, curriculum related quiz etc. to make the teaching and learning process more valuable, student-oriented, attractive and activity oriented. The teaching learning process has to be planned based on the scientific active learning and should encourage the students to develop curiosity about the things. This would create self confidence and learning in students.

11. **Review of teacher's performance** -Not only the performance of students but also the performance of the teachers should be evaluated in terms of their updated subject knowledge, their ability to teach and work effectively and to act as mentors for the students. High quality teaching is vital in

improving student outcomes and reducing gaps in student achievement. The Teacher Performance Appraisal System provides teachers with significantassessments that reassure professional learning and growth. Teachers should actively join in the departmental activities so as to contribute in the College improvement plans.

Measures− There should be a system for scientific assessment of the teachers. For promotion of activities such as sharing mutual experience and help in creating amiable atmosphere, there should be experience sharing sessions or activities among Intra College and inter-college teachers. This will provide a learning experience to all the partaking teachers. Measurement of the performance after training by monitoring and suitable quantification techniques is also required at each stage.

12. **Strengthening performance reviews / appraisals –** The parameters which propel students to take admission in any institution are admission rates, placements, college reputation, absenteeism, dropout rates, studentunrest, college ranking, entrance tests level, previous results, novel and upgraded teaching method, library and infrastructure, academic monitoring, working of various student development associations, extra-curricular activities to encourage creative and logical thinking in students etc.

    Measures- Performance reviews must be taken. The factors should be worked out, against which the performance of students and teachers is to be evaluated. The space would include the students, faculty, departments and the college.

13. **Developing research culture** -For making an impact in the global competitive market, it is important that in every higher education institution, the research culture should be promoted. Institutions should have particular structures to promote research.

    Measures− There is a need to make research efforts not only in technical field but also in interdisciplinary areas.

Conclusion-

Study reveals that the higher education system is not capable to respond to society's changing needs. Today, India is one of the fastest developing countries of the world. To maintain that growth there is need to increase the quality of higher education in India. To attain the future necessities there is an crucial need to reanalyze Financial Resources, Access and Equity, Quality Standards, Relevance and at the end the Responsiveness.DP Singh, Vice President and Head HR, IBM India/ South Asia said, "Skill is emerging as the new currency across businesses globally and in India. Today's rapidly evolving economic environment makes up-skilling an imperative across job profiles and sectors. India is stuck by both a skill gap and a higher education sector struggling to keep up. That is why it is critical to take proactive measures to transform the higher education system to create a new model that better aligns with industry imperatives." Technical advancement, ever changing skills requirements and obsolete curriculum are challenges for India's higher education system in its efforts to equip students with employability skills. India should

consider providing students with essential skills by partnering with industry, adopting new learning technologies for quality and better output and delivering experience-based, applied learning.

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