

Higher Education in India

Present Challenges and Solutions

¹Vishnu Partheep Tej P

¹ Research Scholar and UGC-Junior Research Fellow

¹Department of Sociology,

¹Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract: *The paper attempts to discuss the evolution of Indian higher education through the ages. It gives a briefing about the higher educational structure in present day India. A plethora of problems related to the functioning of higher educational institutions have been discussed. Secondary data from various authentic government sources have been compiled to analyse the situation of higher education in India. The paper through its insights attempts to give a workable solution to the problems. Latest developments and government initiatives to reform the sector have been cited along with novel ideas to transform the higher education atmosphere in India*

Index Terms - *higher education, background, challenges, schemes, recommendations*

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, India has been one of the greatest global centres of higher learning. Universities at Nalanda and Taxila attracted talents from various parts of the country along with a sizeable number of foreigners. The likes of Hsuan Tsang who came to study Buddhism from China are well known of. However, events like destruction of libraries containing valuable information on humanities, philosophy and other social sciences by foreign invaders followed by vested interests of British rulers in promoting higher education, it went down a spiral path continuously.

After independence, steps were taken to reinvigorate the higher education atmosphere by setting up premier institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and state universities. A significant step was taken in the form of constituting the University Grants Commission (UGC) under the UGC act, 1956. However because of protectionism and inward looking attitude of India, holistic development of institutions could not be undertaken. From 1991 onwards since the beginning of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation there has been a considerable progress in this sphere of higher education. But present situation still needs to be bettered

II. CHALLENGES

- Problems with University Grants Commission:
 - politicization of education- recent events in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and Jadavpur university, West Bengal are examples
 - overburdened body- mandated with the function of improving higher education, regulating institutions of higher learning, constituting bodies for accreditation like All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India (MCI), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), etc
 - lack of representation of states which is against federal spirit (education became a concurrent subject after 42nd constitutional amendment, 1976)
- According to Times Higher Education survey, no Indian university features in the list of top 200 world universities. So much so to say the famed IITs, IIMs and other premier institutions are popular only in India. Their do not stand a chance compared to other world universities.
- The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is 25.2% which is far low compared to United States (85.8%) and China (43.4%). The same is reflected even in the falling proportion of students enrolling in PhD programmes in social sciences. This is due to the boom in service sector which has thrown up plenty of technical jobs. Students discontinue studies after their bachelor's degree or prefer to go for higher studies in technical areas due to better job prospects in IT sector.
- Low quality of research papers being produced. Most of the research journals are of predatory nature. The University Grants Commission recently removed many journals from the approved list. It is appalling to see the omission of even popular journals like Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)
- Gender imbalance also can be clearly felt in higher education in India. 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. Although the overall enrollment seems promising, certain fields have predominance of one gender. Eg. Nursing is crowded by women whereas civil engineering has large number of men. Also, women taking up employment after the completion of their courses are minimal. Most women prefer to function as home-maker after marriage with valuable degrees in their hands.
- Socially disadvantaged section view higher education as a luxury. They can't afford long years of study sans employment. As per All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students over the last four years is as under:-

Table 6.1: GER in Higher Education (18-23 years)

Year	SC Students	ST Students
2011-12	14.9	11.0
2012-13	16.0	11.1
2013-14	17.1	11.3
2014-15(Provisional)	18.5	13.3

Source: AISHE Report, 2015-16

7. Poor quality and inadequate infrastructural facilities is troubling the institutions. Most new Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs) proposed to be set up by the Government are being run in buildings of other institutions. For example, IIIT Srirangam functions from the campus of NIT (National Institute of Technology), Tiruchirapalli

Table 7.1: Percentage of Institutions having various Infrastructures

Infrastructure	University	College	Stand Alone Institutions
Playground	87	90	91
Auditorium	76	55	65
Theatre	42	19	19
Library	95	97	98
Laboratory	86	78	93
Conference hall	92	72	79
Health Centre	80	40	46
Gymnasium	74	34	28
Indoor stadium	49	29	28
Common room	82	87	89
Computer centre	90	83	91
Cafeteria	83	53	55
Guest house	84	37	44

Source: AISHE Report, 2015-16

8. Strict theoretical orientation and limited practical approach is the characteristic of Indian higher education. It is 'examination' and not 'education' which is of prime importance. Such undue importance to examination is creating a generation with competitive mind-set sans sportive spirit. Cut-throat competition is resulting in a rat-race where people lack innovation
9. Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Universities and Colleges is 21 if regular enrolment is considered. High student teacher ratio affecting the learning outcomes negatively
- 10.

Table 9.1: PTR for Regular Enrolment

Year	University and colleges	University and its constituent units
2011-12	21	16
2012-13	21	16
2013-14	21	16
2014-15	22	15
2015-16	21	16

Source: AISHE Report, 2015-16

11. Few linkages between foreign universities and domestic institutions and meagre presence of foreign students on Indian university campuses have diminished Indian education status in the academic world. Most of the student who come for abroad studied to India comprise of mainly South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries and some countries from the middle-east. There is a limited presence of students from the western countries or other developed countries of the world.
- 12.

Table 10.1: Country-wise and level wise foreign students (based on actual response)

Country name	Certificate			Integrated			Grand total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Nepal	1		1	40	37	77	6403	3171	9574
Afghanistan		2	2	43	3	46	3972	432	4404
Bhutan	1	1	2	54	39	93	1677	1248	2925
Nigeria		4	4	4	6	10	1458	632	2090
Sudan				10	3	13	1869	190	2059
Malaysia	1	3	4				705	1196	1901
UAE				10	2	12	672	807	1479
Iran				2		2	722	737	1459
Yemen	18		18				1164	74	1238
Sri Lanka	8	3	11	1	7	8	511	678	1189
Iraq							981	136	1117
Bangladesh	1	1	2	9	3	12	811	289	1100

Source: AISHE Report, 2015-16

13. Insufficient government institutions for higher learning and higher fee structure in private institutions making education unaffordable for the poor. Higher education has become a lucrative enterprise for private universities. They reserve most seats for payment seats by conducting their own entrance examinations. Students with strong economic background 'buy' seats in these institutions which offer guaranteed job after the completion of the course. The system is completely contrary to a society founded on the basis of achieved status and not ascribed economic status.

III. SOLUTIONS

1. Increasing government spending on education including primary, secondary and tertiary to at least 6% of the GDP as suggested by TSR Subramaniam committee on new education policy will bring the expenditure on education in India on par with other fast developing countries.
2. University Grants Commission is the main body at the tertiary level which enforces its standards, advises the government and helps coordinate between the centre and the states. But the body has been an impediment in development of higher education in India. Comprehensive amendments to the UGC act, 1956 to suit the present times have been proposed. Recently the changes have been implemented as well. The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) which is set to replace UGC is guided by the following principles:
 - a. Less government and more governance: Downsizing the scope of the Regulation. No more interference in the management issues of the educational institutions
 - b. Separation of grant functions: The grant functions would be done by the Ministry, and the HECI would focus only on academic matters.
 - c. End of inspection raj: Regulation is done through transparent public disclosures, merit-based decision making on matters regarding standards and quality in higher education.
 - d. Focus on academic quality: HECI is tasked with the mandate of improving academic standards with specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, promote use of educational technology etc. Will develop norms for setting standards for opening and closure of institutions, provide for greater flexibility and autonomy to institutions, lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the institutional level irrespective of University started under any Law (including State Law)
 - e. Powers to enforce: The Regulator will have powers to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards and will have the power to order closure of substandard and bogus institutions. Non-compliance could result in fines or jail sentence.
3. Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a holistic Centrally Sponsored Scheme introduced in 2013 for development of higher education in India. The government, recently, has rightly approved the continuation of the scheme till 2020.
4. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) is a methodology adopted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, to rank institutions of higher education in India. Faculty in the universities which perform poorly in this framework must be held accountable just like teachers are held in government primary schools.
5. Subject experts should be at the helm of affairs of universities instead of political appointees.
6. Public Private Partnership models like the following may be utilised to bridge the infrastructure gap in the universities:
 - a. Build Operate Transfer (BOT)
 - b. Hybrid annuity model
 - c. Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC)
7. Making employment in universities an attractive career option by increasing wages and perks comparable to IT industry. This has been achieved in a sense in recent times with the implementation of 7th Pay Commission recommendations.
8. Retention of students in universities by increasing the scholarships funds like Junior Research Fellowship, Rajiv Gandhi fellowship for SCs and STs, Maulana Azad fellowship for minorities, Indira Gandhi fellowship for single girl child, Ishaan Uday scheme for students from the North-east, etc.
9. Inviting foreign faculty to teach at Indian universities to expand the horizons of academics through schemes like GIAN (Global Initiative for Academic Network)
10. Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), is a Web portal where Massive Open On-line Courses (MOOCs) will be available on all kinds of subjects can be encouraged in higher education as well.
11. Usage of technology for verifying authenticity of research papers and field studies should be done on a war-footing to eliminate widely prevalent plagiaristic practices and weeding out of predatory journals. Turnitin software has been announced by the Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD) in this regard. Recently the following announcement by the Union minister has been made:

Highlights of UGC's draft legislation on plagiarism for students and teachers-

 - a. Researchers will lose their registration and teachers their jobs, if their works are found to be plagiarised.
 - b. Graded punishment has been prescribed based on the severity of offences.
 - c. For students-If the plagiarized content is found to be 10-40 per cent, then the researcher has to re-submit his revised thesis. If 40-60 per cent of the content is plagiarised, the student will be deprived of submitting the revised thesis for one year. And if the plagiarized content goes above 60 per cent, the registration of the student will be cancelled permanently.
 - d. For teachers-In case of 10-40 per cent plagiarism, the teacher will have to withdraw the manuscript. The teacher will be debarred to supervise Masters/Ph.d. or M.Phil students for 2 years, and will be denied to a single annual increment in case of 40-60 per cent plagiarism. If it's above 60 per cent, the teacher will be suspended or dismissed.
12. As most students pursuing higher education degrees opt for employment other than research, vocational education needs to be integrated into the institutional framework of universities. Exit doors at every stage of education with suitable employment opportunities for reassuring students of a secure future.
13. Other innovative schemes have also been introduced by the government for developing higher education and also the overall research environment. They are:
 - a. TARE (Teacher Associates for Research Excellence) Mobility Scheme- It aims to activate the latent and unused R&D capacity in colleges and state universities that lack S&T infrastructure and culture. The TARE scheme will allow undertaking of part-

time research by the faculty working in a regular capacity in State Universities or Colleges by integrating them in Academic Institutions such as IITs, IISc, IISERs, National labs, etc. located in the same city where the faculty member is working.

- b. AWSAR (Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research- The scheme aims to encourage popular science writing through newspapers, magazines, blogs, social media, etc. by young PhD Scholars and Post-Doctoral Fellows during the course of their higher studies and research pursuits. AWSAR carries monetary incentive of Rs. 10,000/- each for 100 best entries from PhD scholars and 20 from Post-Doctoral Fellows in a year along with a Certificate of Appreciation besides getting the story published/projected in mass media
- c. Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAJRA) Faculty Scheme- The scheme has been launched by SERB with an aim to connect the Indian academic and research and development (R&D) systems to the best of global science and scientists for a sustained international collaborative research.

REFERENCES

- [1] All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report, 2015-16
- [2] www.thehindu.com
- [3] www.wikipedia.com
- [4] www.mhrd.gov.in

