

Diversity, Inclusion and Student Success in Higher Education

Prof. R. Limbadri
VCM, TSCHE

India is a land of diversities! This diversity cuts across various sectors, populations, among institutions, within society, etc. It is important to study how public institutions respond to and accommodate such diversities. Among these, an important factor is the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Meant to serve 'public purpose', the HEIs are expected to cater to societal diversities and be inclusive. This is the broad theme of this Seminar and the discussions that follow. I believe the sessions aim at sharing innovative approaches in policy, procedure and implementation levels for enabling inclusion and strengthening diversity of students, faculty and staff.

➤ Barriers in Indian Higher Education

Higher education in India has undergone tremendous massification in the last couple of decades. There are nearly 800 universities, 12,000 stand-alone institutions and 40,000 colleges in India as of date. About 37.4 million students are enrolled in HEIs.

This brings us the questions:

- Is higher education able to serve the interests of the growing Indian population?
- Is it able to accommodate and include the 'last, lost and the least'?

Unfortunately, it is not so. Despite extensive expansion, there are multiple barriers in contemporary higher education processes. These barriers exist on lines of restricted access, with entry being limited to certain sections of populations.

I am happy that this Seminar is discussing all the issues that we are facing. For example,

- Is having quota enough?
- Does this help mainstream the ethnic population in higher education?
- Will the quota system alone help achieve the objective of being inclusive?
- Do scholarships serve the purpose?
- Does it help increase the access to HEIs?
- Is gender a barrier too? Are our HEIs inclusive towards differently abled population?
- How do our HEIs include the richness of the language diversity into its systems and processes?

These questions lead us to re-think the value of 'diversity and inclusion' in higher education. Being a nation, which is characterized by its diverse population and processes, its higher education should appropriately respond to it, by being inclusive, and reflective of the rich diversity its society possesses. There also exists a diversity of languages, cultures, choice of livelihoods, careers, knowledge systems, values, beliefs and practices. Higher education, by virtue of its function as public good, must essentially reflect the richness of

this diversity, by being socially inclusive. With this background, I would like to present some statistical facts presented by AISCHE, 2018-19

➤ **Growth in Institutional Capacity**

University and Colleges in India has witnessed tremendous increase in its institutional capacity during the post-independence period. The number of university level institutions has increased from 27 in 1950 to 507 in 2008 to 993 Universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions listed on AISHE web portal and out of them 962 Universities, 38179 Colleges and 9190 Stand Alone Institutions have responded during the survey. 298 Universities are affiliating i.e. having Colleges. 385 Universities are privately managed. 394 Universities are in rural area. 16 Universities are exclusively for women, 3 in Rajasthan, 2 in Tamil Nadu & 1 each in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

➤ **Progress in Access to Higher Education – AISCHE 2018-19**

- The enrolment in higher education has also increased significantly during this period.
- Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 37.4 million with 19.2 million male and 18.2 million female. Female constitute 48.6% of the total enrolment.
- Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 26.3%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 26.3% and for females, it is 26.4%. For Scheduled Castes, it is 23% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 17.2% as compared to the national GER of 26.3%.
- Distance enrolment constitutes about 10.62% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 44.15% are female students. ⌘ About 79.8% of the students are enrolled in Undergraduate level programme. 1,69,170 students are enrolled in Ph.D. that is less than 0.5% of the total student enrolment.
- Maximum numbers of Students are enrolled in B.A. programme followed by B.Sc. and B.Com. programmes. 10 Programmes out of approximately 187 cover 80.3% of the total students enrolled in higher education. ⌘ At Undergraduate level the highest number (35.9%) of students are enrolled in Arts/ Humanities/Social Sciences courses followed by Science (16.5%), Engineering and Technology (13.5%) and Commerce (14.1%).

➤ **Unequal Access**

- Scheduled Casts students constitute 14.9% and Scheduled Tribes students 5.5% of the total enrolment. 36.3% students belong to Other Backward Classes. 5.2% students belong to Muslim Minority and 2.3% from other Minority Communities.

This data recorded by AISCHE, 2018-19 shows disparities in access to higher education across the country. The enrolment ratio in higher education is higher in urban areas than the respective rural regions of the states. The GER for female is lower than their male counterparts.

The inequality in access is clearly observed across different income groups as well. Higher the income group higher is the enrolment ratio in higher education. The GER is lowest for agricultural labor in rural areas and for casual labor in the urban areas so far occupational groups are concerned. Others have highest GER among occupational groups both in rural and urban areas. The interaction of income and occupation shows that enrollment ratio increases with the upward movement across income group.

➤ **Diversity is clearly distinct in the following groups of society and in their living areas.**

- The share of enrolment is higher in urban areas than rural areas. Although share of population in urban areas is lower than that of rural areas. Thus, students from urban areas are overrepresented in higher education.
- Similarly, male students are overrepresented than that of female.
- Further, the share of others is highest among social groups. In fact, others are overrepresented in higher education while SC, STs and OBC are underrepresented. The lowest percentage of STs goes to higher education.
- Agricultural labor and other labor in rural areas are underrepresented in higher education in comparison to their population share.
- Self Employed and Casual labor in urban areas are underrepresented in higher education. Others in both rural and urban are highly overrepresented in higher education.
- The share in enrolment by income group shows clear pattern of higher share of enrolment in higher income. It should be noted that nearly half of total students are concentrated in the topmost income group.
- As far as Institutional diversity is concerned, there are two categories of institutions; institutions with public character and private unaided institutions. The public institutions comprise of nearly three quarter of total enrollment. The enrolment for female is higher than male in public institutions.
- SCs and STs among social groups have highest percentage of enrolment in publicly financed institutions. However, OBCs have higher percentage of enrolment in private unaided than others.
- Among the religious groups, highest percentage of Christian student goes to private unaided institutions. However highest percent of Buddhists students are enrolled in public institutions. Sikhs (84.79) also have quite higher percentage of students in public institutions.
- The enrolment across income group depicts highest enrolment in private unaided institutions for topmost income groups. Higher percentage of female than male goes to public institutions for bottom most and topmost income group. This means that their higher percentage of student goes to private institution. But in the remaining case percentage of female in private unaided institution is higher.
- The percentage of SC and ST among social group is higher in public institutions than others and OBC for every income group. However, this percentage is lower as we move upward across income group.

- Thus, improvement in income leads to higher enrolment private unaided institutions for these students. However, percentage of student in private unaided institutions is higher for OBC than others.
- Among the occupational groups other labor in rural areas and others in urban areas have highest percentage of students in private unaided institutions. Casual labors in urban areas have highest percentage of students in publicly funded institutions. The percentage of students in private unaided institutions has increased considerably after 1995.

➤ **Language Diversity**

Here four types of languages have been considered; Hindi, English, state language and others. the present share of English is highest in enrolment in higher education. This is followed by Hindi and state language. The gender wise disaggregation shows nearly similar percentage of male and female use the different languages as a medium of instruction. Thus, there is no inequality in medium of instruction in higher education across gender. However, regional inequality is clearly observed in terms of medium of instruction. Lower percentage of students use Hindi and state language as a medium of instruction in their education. In fact, share of student using English as a medium of instruction is nearly double of that in rural areas.

The inequality is observed across social group. Higher percentage of others uses English as a medium of instruction. They are followed OBC, SC and ST. however; SC and ST mostly use Hindi or state language as a medium of instruction. It should be noted that English is mostly used as a medium of instruction for every social group. This pattern is observed among religious groups. English is the dominant medium of instruction for every religious group. However, it is the Christian where highest share of English as medium of instruction is observed.

To support these diversities and arrive at an all-inclusive society, efforts should be the commitment on part of the HEI leadership and higher education policies which promotes inclusion and diversity at all levels and contexts. We need to therefore, think of nurturing diversity by including it in higher education through a range of options such as:

- Universities to be more inclusive, not only by mainstreaming the indigenous population, but also in being diverse in terms of programmes, teaching processes, curricula and pedagogies.
- Diversity in institutions of higher education is important not only for improving the economic and educational opportunities for students, but also for the social, academic, and societal benefits that diversity presents for all students and communities.
- HEIs have the primary responsibility to educate a ‘diverse’ student population, coming from a diverse society.
- Inclusion also means challenging the systemic and structural forms of exclusion in higher education. It is also imperative for a 21st century HEI to nurture students who value ‘social diversity’.

- Inclusion in higher education also entails inclusion in pedagogies, curricula and teaching and learning processes. New and inclusive forms of pedagogy and teaching modalities can be devised which reflects diverse ways of knowing and knowledge production, decolonization of concepts, meaning, curricula etc.
- Diverse learning environments and pedagogies also help students sharpen their critical thinking and analytical skills and prepare them for success in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, while helping break down stereotypes and reduce bias.
- Existing in a diverse social context, HEIs are susceptible to social hierarchies, marginalization and discrimination. A commitment on part of the universities is therefore, needed to value diversity and inclusiveness for the collective prosperity of the society. It is also the responsibility of an HEI to foster social justice by restructuring institutional arrangements.
- The curricula should be representative of the diverse local contexts and realities, in ways that makes the students (from different backgrounds, contexts and knowledge cultures) more ‘engaged with the society at large.

Our democracy today is faced with critical challenges like increasing political, educational and economic inequalities and inequities, deepening mistrust in democratic institutions, practices and values, intolerance, alienation and rejection of cultural diversity. It is in this context that the role of public institutions and HEIs, gains much pertinence. HEIs need to acknowledge and respect the heterogeneity which exists in the society and ensure it does not homogenize or assimilate the differences while including the wide range of students.

Having the responsibility of nurturing future citizens of the country, higher education is expected to play an important role in cementing the values of democracy by furthering inclusion and appreciating diversity and helping build democratic societies.