

Perception of Teachers on Commercialization of Higher Education in India

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Abstract:

The paradigm shift in higher education from service to business is a growing concern today. The decade of 2000's has been associated with the processes of expansion, privatization and internationalization of Indian higher education. Teacher's perception is considered to be significant to evaluate the impact of policies and to suggest changes that may be fundamental to evolving a better education system in the country. The study was an endeavour to analyse the perceptions of teachers on commercialization of higher education in India. A questionnaire was designed and administered on 250 teachers of various higher education institutions in NCR Delhi, selected through purposive sampling. Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively by employing percentage analysis and content analysis, respectively. It was found that the teachers perceived higher education in India becoming a commercialized service. There is a need for the government to step in correcting systemic anomalies. If commercialization persists and continues to grow without a timely check anything and everything will be exploited and manipulated for profit in higher education.

Keywords: Commercialization of higher education, higher education in India, privatization of higher education, teacher perception.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, higher education was viewed as one that creates and diffuses knowledge. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge was considered wealth. Higher education was viewed as an instrument of personal development of individuals to have a better quality life and an instrument of production and economic growth; and thereby economic well-being of the people and societies (Schultz 1963; Becker 1964). The traditional functions of production and dissemination of knowledge are under threat. From the concept of a 'knowledge society', the thrust has shifted to 'knowledgebasedeconomy' that makes knowledge valuable and subject to commercial transactions. Marketing in education is right out front. Another global commercial strategy adopted by countries is the internationalization of higher education (Knight, 2003). The paradigm shift in higher education from service to business is a growing concern today. It has created a serious debate between 'fruit-bearing qualities' of education as opposed to its 'light-bearing qualities' (Joseph, 2004). Many educational institutions are becoming commercial enterprises. Commercialization of education may be liberally defined as "a process of private ownership and management of educational institutions whereby investments are made with the motive of earning profit" (NIEPA Report, 2006, p.10). Many changes have taken place in the Indian higher education system in the post – independence period that have been crucial to its growth and expansion. The decade of 2000's has been associated with the processes of expansion, privatization and internationalization of higher education. These have been reflected in policies of the various ruling governments, reduction in government funding, ownership and production of higher education by private players - both 'for- profit' and 'not for- profit' and the emergence of foreign providers of higher education. The economy in expenditure achieved by withdrawal of subsidies and raising fees in higher education and the frozen budgetary allocations for higher education clearly indicate a lack of political will (Tilak, 2005) to abstain from its constitutional obligation. In a predominantly public educational system, private institutions must be fit in clearly specified ways (Patnaik, 2007). Besides this, the public should have ready information related to the private

institutions so that they can make decisions. In addition to checking the general reputation and accreditation, parents and students should get the opportunity to visit the campuses of private institutions and universities, interact with faculty and students and attend a few classes (Stella and Gnanam, 2003). Further, there is a need to differentiate the wheat from the chaff as all public higher education institutions are not good and all private higher education institutions are not bad (Stella, 2008). The government can do this by designing appropriate policies and legislations, evolving an enabling regulatory framework and through judicial activism (World Bank 1994, Agarwal and Sharma 2004, Bhattacharya 2004, Gupta 2008). Teacher's perception is considered to be significant to evaluate the impact of policies and to suggest changes that may be fundamental to evolving a better education system in the country. The study was an endeavour to analyze the perceptions of teachers on commercialization of higher education in India. Research Questions Literature review served as the foundation for the appearance of the first reflections and questions in the investigator's mind. A number of research questions that emerged were as follows- How do teachers perceive the role and functioning of higher education in India? What are their views on the issues of access, equity and quality in higher education? Do they support privatization of higher education and its provision by foreign education providers? How do teachers perceive the role and the responsibility of the government in financing of higher education and that of the regulatory authorities in curtailing commercialization of higher education in India? Do they favour the introduction of legal framework to curb commercialization of higher education?

Objectives of Research

1. To find out the views and perceptions of teachers on commercialization of higher education in India.
2. To examine the suggestions provided by the teachers to curb commercialization of higher education in India.

Research Method

Descriptive research by employing survey method was undertaken to seek the perceptions of teachers on commercialization of higher education in India.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

250 teachers were selected through purposive sampling. This sample comprised of 34 teachers from central universities, 26 from state universities, 41 from deemed universities, 22 from private universities, 27 from government-aided institutions and 100 from self-financing institutions in NCR Delhi, teaching at graduate and post-graduate level in general and professional stream.

Tools

The researcher developed a questionnaire (consisting of closed and open-ended questions) for the teachers to seek their views and perceptions on commercialization of higher education in India. The questionnaire and its creation involved five steps that included preparation of the first version of the questionnaire (with 135 questions), its content validation by experts, preparation of the second version after including the changes suggested by the experts, pilot testing and ascertaining the reliability (through test-retest method) and finally elaboration of the definite version of the questionnaire (having 85 questions).

Statistical Treatment of Data

A bi-modal approach was employed. Firstly, data collected from the respondents on closed-ended questions was analyzed quantitatively, by calculating percentages. For the open-ended part of the questionnaire content analysis was employed through the use of qualitative coding that permitted some standardization as well as assessment of responses.

Analysis and Interpretation

Institutional Related Information provided by Teachers

83 percent of the higher education institutions (HEI's) own their building. 76.5 percent faculty was of the view that the institution provided hostel accommodation to students. All the institutions provide on – campus medical aid to both the students and employees. The courses offered by the HEI's are recognized by the concerned regulatory bodies. The private universities, deemed universities and most of the self-financing institutions are located in urban areas of NCR Delhi indicating that students from rural areas have little access to these institutions. 84 per cent of the faculty in the sampled higher education institutions is full- time employed, 12 percent are working on contractual basis and the remaining 3 percent are part- time faculty. A very significant majority (74 percent) of the faculty were lecturers and assistant professors. Teaching faculty in public universities and governmentaided perceived the adequacy of classrooms, well equipped laboratories and library. However, faculty in private universities and self-financing institutions differed in their views. They opined that the library was well- equipped but not upgraded regularly. They expressed the need to subscribe a variety of national and international journals by the institution and make online access to research database available to faculty and the students. Regarding academic and co-curricular activities all teachers held a consensus view of reducing the class size, making the curriculum more pragmatic and realistic. They said that guest lectures by experts and co-curricular activities were organized for students. All the teachers were satisfied with the information provided in the prospectus of the university/ college. According to them, admissions are carried out systematically through entrance tests or on the basis of merit to various courses in their institution. 26 percent teachers in self-financing institutions admitted that capitation fee is charged from students at the time of admission against management/paid seat while 39 percent revealed that these institutions charge fine for indiscipline, late coming and other minor reasons. In some of these institutions, money is collected before conducting practical examinations without giving any sound justification. The major source of revenue for the higher education institutions is from tuition fees. The fee and other charges related information provided by teachers highlighted that students were paying tuition fees between Rs.35, 000- Rs. 7, 00,000 per year in a state private and deemed university. The central and state universities charge Rs. 4,500- Rs. 53,000 per year for the same courses. The fee for professional courses is much higher than general courses at both graduate and post graduate level in all the HEI's. The price of prospectus is another source of revenue generation. It was found to be between Rs. 100- Rs.500 for central universities and between Rs. 500- Rs.1100 for the other HEI's. Scholarships to students from economically weaker sections of the society and meritorious students are provided by the higher education institutions according to 76.87 percent and 88.30 percent teachers, respectively. Regarding professional development of teachers, their remuneration and other benefits it was found that the public universities support their faculty for professional development by encouraging them to participate in career advancement programmes, sponsoring their participation fee for the same, offering study leave and seed money for research. They are transparent in their functioning in terms of remuneration and other benefits for the teaching faculty. However, this is not the case for teachers working in private universities and self- financing institutions 88 per cent of teachers in self-financing institutions reported that the institution does not sponsor participation fees for workshops, seminars and conferences, while 41 per cent are not allowed to attend the same, on duty. 76 percent teachers in self-financing institutions and 29.26 percent in private universities are not earning salary as per the UGC and Sixth Pay Commission norms. Besides this, many are not offered an appointment letter at the time of joining, a salary slips every month or even entitled to travel allowance for official work. Other malpractices in these private institutions as revealed by teachers include payment of lesser salary that does not match the amount they sign in the official records, in appropriate remuneration amount for invigilation during university examinations that is not as per university approved rates/ norms and payment of salary in cash rather than by cheque or being transferred to bank account.

Views and Perceptions of Teachers on Commercialization of Higher Education

71.20 percent teachers perceived that the entire thrust of higher education is gradually shifting towards producing students who can meet the demands of the global market. 50.80 percent were of the view that money has gained dominance over merit in seeking admission to a course in a higher education institution. 62.80 percent agreed that privatization has improved access to higher education in India but at the same time 75.20 percent of them expressed that it has paved way for commercialization. 51.60 per cent teachers felt that that the private universities and colleges are not transparent in their functioning and compromise in academic quality. This is because the regulatory framework in India is weak and inefficient. 71.20 percent teachers viewed that the government is not adequately financing higher education in India. 87.60 percent teachers have asserted that a rational fee regulation mechanism should be put in place by the government to be followed by all the higher education institutions in India. Besides this, teachers favoured the enactment of laws to check commercialization of higher education in India and the establishment of National and State Educational Tribunals

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

“The important thing for the government is not to do things which individuals are doing already, and to do them a little better or a little worse; but to do those things which at present are not done at all” (J.M Keynes quoted in Agarwal, 2009, p.402). The role of the state in higher education has to be redefined. Mere expansion in institutions and intake capacity shall not necessarily make higher education inclusive. There is a need for careful planning, enhanced financing and evolving an enabling policy framework to make higher education accessible, equitable and qualitative. Private providers of higher education have been roped in a big way. However, as the research findings suggest, many private institutions are not transparent in their functioning, seldom deliver quality and operate for profit. Despite being the third largest higher education system in the world, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education for India is at around 12.4 per cent. The government needs to step in correcting systemic anomalies. Expansion of quality public higher education institutions has to take place especially in rural and educationally backward area to remove regional

disparities. Private institutions need to be regulated so that quality is not diluted. They should in no way lead to exclusion. Appropriate measures need to be devised by the government to curb the growing commercialization of higher education in India. If commercialization persists and continues to grow without a timely check anything and everything will be exploited and manipulated for profit in higher education.

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