

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Higher Education in India has entered an era of transition. The era is an augmented one where creativity, agility and adaptability are important. In the last seven decades after independence, the Indian higher education has expanded rapidly but has not been able to improve its quality comparable to international levels. Quality apart, the higher education system is facing many issues and challenges like access, equity, finance, governance, and so on. These issues are of vital importance for the country as it is engaged in the pursuit of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society for the new millennium. To realise this, the higher education institutions have to perform multiple tasks like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing intelligent human resource capital/wealth coupled with a strong value base. Orientation of curriculum towards advancement of science and technology, values and ethics is of paramount importance. To achieve the mission of making Indian higher education globally competitive, there is an urgent need to review the financial resources, access and equity, quality, standards, curriculum, relevance, infrastructure, Information Technology (IT) applications, etc. If the felt needs are addressed effectively, the higher education landscape will change more than ever in the coming decades of the 21st century.

PRELUDE

Today, the Indian higher education has entered an era of transition. Changing student demographics, rapidly evolving stakeholder demands, and new technologies are requiring universities to reconsider abiding assumptions about location, types of programmes, time, and quality. In the coming years, new models of higher education that prefer tradition and stability will be supplemented, if not displaced, by new models that embrace organisational innovation, technology induction, accountability and adaptation.

Organisational change can embody deliberate choices that could potentially shape the purpose and direction of change. There can be structural changes about the organisational system and how it is organised to achieve their mission and goals. Many industries and social organisations, including higher education institutions, face challenges from both legacy and emerging markets. All of them play important roles in terms of fulfilling the social mission for higher education.

A dual transformation strategy may prove effective for addressing both legacy and emerging markets. According to this approach, operations act in parallel: one, to develop strategies that optimise the core organisation to become more responsive to the new profile of demands it faces; and two, to design and implement disruptive innovations that provide a basis for future growth and agility.

Ancient India always took pride in the humanistic and personality development oriented education with close proximity to the *guru* in learning and living. We always believed that education is what empowers an individual to realise one's true potential. The system consisted of creativity, discipline and intelligence. The learning environment was congenial for absorbing all the core values and goals of education although there were no certificates and degrees conferred on them at that time. However, the values remained intact with them throughout their lives. Gradually, over the years, the scenario changed with the advent of the Agricultural Revolution and later with the Industrial Revolution. Interestingly, there was a change in the philosophical outlook from idealism to pragmatism. There was an urgent need to sustain our culture and at the same time move forward in an exponential way to gain in both the domains and achieve top rankings in the global scenario.

In earlier days, the education system had a generalist focus where strength and speed were the most important talents and subsequently the focus changed towards a mix of generalist as well as specialist areas, and the talent required was mainly 'know-how' or practical knowledge. Later, during the industrial age, the focus was on specialists and the talent required was efficiency and optimisation. Our Indian education system today is transiting towards the information age and a knowledge economy. Our society is more focused on the line of re-skilling and is under the illusion that the education system is working and that students are ready for jobs. But many employers

find it hard to fill in the positions mainly due to want of required skills and preparation on the part of the students. The present era globally is the Augmented Era, where creativity, agility and adaptability are important. Our emphasis here should be on cognitive augmentation and innovation.

At present, the higher education system as a whole is faced with many issues and challenges like access, equity, quality, finance and management. Relevance and orientation of a curriculum, based on advancement of science and technology, values, ethics are of paramount importance. These issues are of vital importance for the country as it is engaged in the pursuit of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society for the new millennium. Higher education institutions have to perform multiple tasks like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing intelligent human resource capital/wealth coupled with a strong value base.

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE GOALS IN OUR HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The quality and excellence goals in higher education can be achieved through a multipronged approach at the macro and micro levels of the Indian higher education system.

Strategies at Macro Level

Strategic Approach to Human Resource Development

The first step in envisaging the future education system is to lay the prime focus to the larger purpose of allocating the best leadership and resources towards fulfilling these goals. India needs a long-term human resource development strategy that can bring out the best in every individual and also help the country to meet its developmental goals. This should be in line with the development in Science and Technology that is taking place nationally and internationally.

- Universities and colleges of the future should be student-centered and interconnected. They should be deeply networked with the society around it, make its knowledge resources readily available and engage actively to bring about a change in the world.

- Universities of the future should be customised to bring about *on demand* education. These days, it is observed that a number of seats in many educational institutions are vacant. This is true even for engineering colleges. Cost may be one factor and also because many students even dropout from the courses after taking admission. The institutions and the faculty do not know the reasons for some of these issues, which means that there is no mentoring/counseling system in these institutions.
- All universities and colleges should have relevant curriculum and qualified, trained faculty.
- Universities of the future shall offer access to learning real time with flexible learning experiences.

Policy Reforms

Policy reforms and its implementation should happen simultaneously. Policies should be realistic and match the larger purpose of education. The young generation, if motivated enough, is a precious resource that we can tap for the future. It is imperative that we enrich and transform this resource into the currency of the 21st century – namely the socio-culturally and ethically developed knowledge worker. Sufficient academic and administrative autonomy has to be given to the institution that will take charge and be responsible for creating a quality educational system and institutions of excellence. The approach to education delivery must be such that it is sufficiently differentiated to be able to serve the needs of all kinds of students. Higher education institutions of the future should be able to meet the global challenges.

Expansion of Access

The higher education of the future should be able to expand the overall access to all those who are eligible. It also should be able to ensure equity through equitable access to the deprived socio-economic strata of the society as well. The number of universities and colleges has to be increased to improve the gross enrollment ratio. The youth needs to be able to access higher education and be motivated enough to pursue it, not only for the degree but also for knowledge that they can use practically. Youth has to be motivated for entering into the portals of higher education. Rural and underdeveloped regions have to be given appropriate remedial intervention. Provisions should be made to create access to good institutions and facilities to all students. It is important to provide more fellowship for women students. Hostel

facilities and creation of more infrastructure by the universities to bring more women students in the realm of higher education is the future. Provisions also should be made for the differently-abled student population to facilitate their participation.

India has the largest higher education system in the world by the number of institutions, but it ranks third in terms of enrolments with about 36.6 million students (AISHE 2017-18). During the last five years the GER has increased significantly. With a GER of 25.8 per cent, we still lag behind the world average and even below some of the developing nations. There are more than 78 per cent colleges in the private sector – aided and unaided taken together – but it caters to only 67.3 per cent of the total enrolments.

Besides low GER, the existing demand-supply gaps in higher education on the demand front, the rising population of the age-cohort, increased number of secondary education pass-outs, and increased social significance to higher education induce the pressure to raise the access to higher education. More and more private sector involvement is required in the future to rectify these difficulties.

In the Indian higher education system, about 86 per cent of the students are enrolled at the undergraduate level and only 12 per cent are enrolled at the postgraduate level. Surprisingly, diploma and certificate education have a meager one per cent enrollment as it is considered as an available provision for those who are not able to get the mainstream options. Unfortunately, for a nation aspiring to become a knowledge economy, a trivial one per cent enrolment in research is far from adequate. The future of higher education should focus on research and also on vocational courses. Distance education should be focused on more to enhance access to those who are unreached so far. Here are some statistics:

- The total number of teachers in the higher education system in India are 12,84,755 out of which about 58 per cent are male teachers and 42 per cent are female teachers. At an all-India level, there are merely 72 female teachers per 100 male teachers.
- The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in universities and colleges is 30, whereas PTR for universities and constituent units is 20.
- 34,400 students were awarded PhD degree during 2017 with 20,179 males and 14,221 females.

- 23.89 lakh degrees have been awarded to BA students which is highest; B.Sc. is the second highest with 11.52 lakh degrees, followed by BCom with 9.39 lakh degrees.
- At postgraduate level, the number of MA pass students is the maximum followed by M.Sc. and MBA.
- The highest number of students (23.89 lakh) have graduated in Arts' courses
- At PhD level, maximum numbers of students out-turn is in the Science stream followed by Engineering and Technology. On the other hand, at the PG level, maximum students out-turn is observed in Social Science and Management streams comes at number two.

Equity

The issues related to inequality have four dimensions in India:

- a) Gender disparity
- b) Geographical inequality among states
- c) Inequality based on ethnic groups
- d) Inequality based on economic classes

Great disparity is found in the unemployment rate across gender and ethnic groups. The vision statements of Ministry of Human Resource Development highlight the role of consumers and policy makers for affirmative action. The most prominent policy for promoting access to higher education has been reservation. This has to be supplemented with remedial education, provision for scholarships, special hostels, meals, and other schemes.

Efficiency

In the future, higher education should be seen as one of the sources to increase private and social rates of return, thereby justifying the efficiency resulting from pursuing higher education. Inclusion of employment rate may also be considered as a parameter for efficiency.

Quality

There is a dire need for improving the quality of higher education. The higher education system must provide for accountability to society

and create accountability within. An expansion of higher education that provides students with choices and creates competition among institutions is going to be vital in enhancing accountability.

Financing

The responsibility of financing higher education is shared by both the public and private sectors. In public sector, it is the joint responsibility of central and state governments for state government institutions. About 80 per cent of the financing is by the state government. Even in the state government, about 82 per cent funding is for routine expenditure: administration and maintenance etc., and therefore hardly any fund is spent for capacity building. The central government spending is lop-sided towards central universities and centers of excellence, which serve hardly three per cent of total higher education students in the country. This needs some review. The total public expenditure on higher education is only a fraction of the GDP. The private expenditure is increased about 12-13 times during the last decade. This has resulted in an increase of tuition fees at the graduate and postgraduate levels.

Strategies at Micro Level

Recognising the Requirements

Higher education institutions should be able to perform multiple roles to make an impact on the knowledge economy. The Indian education system has to address itself to global challenges and should match with world class institutions.

Quality

The focus should be on enhancing the quality of educational institutions overall in general. In order to facilitate the growth of excellence in institution with potential, the expansion should be open for:

- development of multi skills and transforming learning pattern;
- appreciation of ICT in Quality Framework;
- improvement of external assessment system;
- development of internal quality assurance system; and
- performance based quality assessment approach

Curriculum Development

There is need for starting interdisciplinary and integrated courses at undergraduate and post graduate levels with flexibility in criteria of a course and a system of credit that enables horizontal and vertical mobility. The curriculum should be revamped to reflect the need for national development with international benchmark.

- Offer flexible curriculum as per the needs and interests of the students. Following a rigid curriculum does not help the students to improve the learning outcome nor the management of the institution. It is observed that student enrollment is overwhelmingly large in the market driven disciplines.
- Universities should primarily focus on academic work – visioning and planning for the development of students and the institution’s brand image.
- Curriculum should be socially, economically and academically relevant and the faculty should be trained adequately on a continuous basis.
- There should be a think tank consisting of senior academicians, industry experts, researchers who can deal with the key issues and emerging ideas. They should be able to develop innovative yet practical ways by which the management can transform the way they deliver their services. Bureaucratic way of functioning of Academic Council and Boards of Studies should change.
- To close the skill gap, higher education institutions need to work more closely with the industry and other social, economic and research organisations to promote job-skill alignment, combining labour market data with industry input to define the skills likely to be needed for tomorrow’s jobs.
- Exponential changes in technology, industry demands, fresh workforce skills, incompetent faculty, and inadequate government funding are fresh challenges to universities and higher education institutions.
- Students must become entrepreneurial, lifelong learners, designing their own educational path based on their career interests, objectives and schedules.
- A ‘University of the Future’ should be able to provide a variety of degrees and shorter qualifications like postgraduate diplomas and certificates. One needs to top up the skills from time to time according to the career needs and personal development.

Teaching-Learning Evaluation

- One should be able to study in multiple modes between on-campus, blended or wholly online to suit the students' needs. Staff development should be institution specific as per the needs of the individuals and the institution, which should include the lifestyle, work and other activities.
- Refresher courses and orientation programs should be need based and should be offered by the institution itself or through an academic staff college of repute.
- Staff development should be institution specific as per the needs of the individuals and the institution.
- Integrate with online instructions like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) should be effectively utilised.
- Talent and screening processes should be refigured.
- Emerging educational technology solutions provide new ways for assessing the rigour of a candidate's educational track record.
- Introduction of college score card rating system that evaluates affordability, access and student outcomes should be initiated.
- Classroom environment should be learner-friendly with flexible arrangements for discussions and interactions.
- Setting up of departments for differently-abled students in universities, which will evolve through its center for studies and research on inclusive processes, and special schemes for persons with different abilities.

Research and Development

Current issues facing the research in higher education institutions include quality, relevance, ownership, funding, international networking, etc. An ever growing number of nations have now given priority to developing their knowledge base through higher education, research and innovation and commit the necessary resources to this goal. In India too we need to focus on:

- developing conducive policies and procedures for research in universities;
- providing the necessary infrastructure;
- training, retaining and attracting highly-skilled human capital;

- increase investment in research and higher education;
- encouraging industry-institution collaboration; and
- commercialisation of research.

Research should be closely linked to teaching and learning. We need to develop a framework for combining the strength of the university laboratories and other scientific laboratories for undergraduate and postgraduate science education. Industry—institution—society interface need to be strengthened for research and development.

Infrastructure Development

- Higher education institutions should have better physical infrastructure facilities, well equipped classrooms with modern facilities, ICT facilities, audio-visual equipment and quality seating arrangements.
- In view of the rising cost of books, journals and laboratory equipment, there is an urgent need to make adequate provision for capacity building of the institution, classrooms and laboratories in the universities and colleges.
- To succeed in an era of exponential change, educational institutions also need to take advantage of digital technology – both for academics and administration.
- Universities and colleges should be places for collaboration and entrepreneurship consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVISIONING THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

For preparing Indian higher education for the future, it has to align itself to global challenges through channelising teaching, research and extension activities while maintaining a balance between demand and supply. Higher education needs to be viewed as a long term social and economic investment for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. The globalised era necessitates the stress on competitiveness. This can be achieved only by bringing about quality and excellence in higher education by adopting certain recommendations like:

- Implementing an innovative and transformational approach to make the Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive.

- Focusing on branding and reputation.
- Creating state-of-the-art infrastructure in universities and colleges to make them captivating, comfortable and conducive for students.
- Promoting collaboration between the Indian higher education institutes and top international institutes for better quality and collaborative research.
- Providing a mix of courses which can help students gain deeper knowledge of subjects as well as help them in employability and entrepreneurship.
- Refraining universities and colleges from political affiliations.
- Adopting multi-disciplinary approach to higher education so that students gain knowledge of other disciplines along with one's own subjects.

CONCLUSION

Education is a process by which a person's body, mind and character are formed and strengthened. It is bringing of head, heart and mind together and thus enabling a person to develop an all-round personality, identifying the best in him/her. Higher education in India has expanded rapidly in the last seven decades, but the quality is not in comparison with other countries. It does not enable our population to contribute towards the nation's development.

India is a country with huge human resource potential. It is important to utilise this potential effectively. Opportunities are available, but to make use of them and enable others to have access to these opportunities is a matter of great concern. In order to sustain the rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education. To achieve the mission, there is an urgent need to review the financial resources, access and equity, quality, standards, curriculum, relevance, infrastructure, Information Technology (IT) applications etc. Best practices and innovation opportunities need to be provided. If the felt needs are addressed effectively, the higher education landscape will change more than ever in the coming decades of the 21st century.

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