

Issues and Challenges in Higher Education: An Overview

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Abstract: *It is the higher education which contributes significantly in the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of any nation. India is going to become the educational hub of the World, so there is biggest need to identify issues and challenges in higher education. Although there have been lot of issues and challenges to higher education system of India but equally have lot of opportunities to overcome these challenges and to make higher education system much better. To resolve the issues and challenges in higher education, there is utmost need of transparency and accountability in the role of colleges and universities. In this research paper an effort has been made to present the development and current scenario of higher education in India by analyzing the various data collected from official website of HRD ministry of India & UGC, related research papers, books, newspapers, and journals. This paper also aims to highlight the key issues and challenges in higher education system like gross enrolment ratio, faculty positions, method of teaching, infrastructure, and issues related to inclusion education, quality education, research and innovation. Looking into the present scenario, issues and challenges in higher education I recommend some points to further meet the challenges.*

Key Words: *Higher Education, Issues, Challenges, Gross Enrolment ratio.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

National development is much dependent on higher education. The vision of higher education is to realize country's human resources potential to its fullest, higher education has expanded remarkably after independence in many aspects such as its institutional capacity, enrolment, teacher-student ratio etc. India's higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of number of institutions. With the expansion of higher education there arises some issues related to access, equity and quality related concerns in higher education in India. At the launch of first five year plan in the year 1950-51, there were in India only 28 universities, 695 colleges and 174000 students. Today we have 574 universities, 35539 colleges and more than twenty million students. In spite of this large education system the condition of higher education in the country is very poor. Presently gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education in country is 18%, while GER of China is 25%, for UK 59%, and 95% for USA. The biggest challenge before us is to include those remaining people in higher education in India. In this research paper an effort has been made to focus on that aspect of higher education and some other challenges.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

In the light of issues discussed earlier and the available literature of higher education in India the following specific objectives are framed:

- i. To analyze the present scenario and development of higher education in India.
- ii. To highlight the key issues and challenges faced by higher education in India.
- iii. To suggest measures to overcome issues and challenges in higher education.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The present paper holds an immediate significance of creating awareness of many issues of concern to be taken care of by the stakeholders in the national as well as the global levels. The study is unique in the sense that it brings about better understanding of the present scenario in the higher education system in the country. Present study highlights the issues and challenges in higher education in India. Policy planners, administrators, higher education institutions and researchers will find the insights of the present study of use for various purposes.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The present paper is descriptive study to examine the issues and challenges of Indian higher education system based on secondary data. The data has been collected and furnished from official website of HRD ministry of India, UGC, related research papers, books, newspapers and journals.

4.1 PRESENT SCENARIO AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

After independence Indian government has provided facility of educational services to the people of country. In India, education has been a joint responsibility of central and state governments. Higher education In India, higher education has grown significantly. The department of higher education lies within the Ministry of Education. There has been a phenomenal growth in the higher education system and virtual explosion in the number of Universities and colleges. Table-1 depicts the growth of higher education with certain capacity indicators.

Table 1: Higher Education Institutions and their intake Capacity

Capacity Indicators	1950	1991	2004	2006	2009	2011	2012	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
No. of University level Institutions	25	177	320	367	467	659	573	711	750	795	851	1047
No. of Colleges	700	7,346	16,885	18,064	25,951	33,023	35539	40760	41435	42338	41012	41935
No. of Teachers (in lakhs)	1.5	2.72	4.57	4.88	5.88	9.34	9.51	12.61	14.38	14.70	12.84	14.16
No. of students enrolled (In lakhs)	2.1	49	99.5	112	136	259	200	265.85	284.84	294.27	366.42	373.99

Source: Annual Reports of UGC

Table-1 shows that in the year 1950 the country had just 25 university-level institutions and this figure has gone up to 1047 in 2019, more than 41 fold increase. Similarly, the growth of degree colleges during this period has been even larger, more than 59 times. The number of colleges has gone up from 700 to 41,935. The growth of number of teachers during 1950 to 2019 has gone up to 14.16 lakhs. The students’ enrolment ratio has gone up to more than 178 times. The number of registered students has gone up from 2.1 lakhs to 373.99 lakhs. The phenomenal increase in enrolment of this order would not have been possible without the growth in number of higher education institutions, both universities and colleges. Further University level institutions widely differ in terms of their structure and coverage. This could be sub-divided into six broad categories: central universities, state universities, deemed universities, institutions of national importance, established under central legislation, institutions established under state legislation and private universities.

Although all states and union territories have university level institutions, their distribution is far from being uniform. University Grants Commission (UGC) determines coordination, maintain standards, and release grants. Professional council for technical education (AICTE), Distance Education Council (DEC), are responsible for recognition of courses, promotion of professional institutions and providing grants to undergraduate programmes and various awards. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an autonomous institution established by UGC in 1994 to access and accredit institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, based on prescribed criteria.

4.2 KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES BEFORE HIGHER EDUCATION

The role of higher education in the emerging scenario of knowledge economy is very crucial and multifaceted for any country in general and India in particular. There are many basic problems faced by higher education system in India. These include issue related to gross enrolment ratio (GER), faculty positions, more concentrated on theories and rather than practical knowledge, traditional methods of teaching, inclusion education, Privatization, quality related issues, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, research development issues, faculty shortage issues. The rapid expansion of higher education system in India has brought several pertinent issues. In the present scenario following are the main issues and challenges before our higher education system.

i. Gross Enrolment ratio

Over the years, considerable progress has been made in higher education in the country. In the XI Plan, India moved from an “elite” system of higher education to a “mass” system when the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) crossed the threshold of 15%. However, our GER at 19.4% still remains below the world average of 29% (as of 2010). Low GER is the biggest challenge before us. The data collected from Vision

document of RUSA reveals that GER of India is 19.4%, China (25%), USA (95%), UK (59%), Russia (76%) and Brazil (26%).

ii. Faculty Positions

The faculty forms the backbone of any good educational institution. State Universities and colleges in most cases suffer from acute faculty shortages both in terms of poor student- faculty ratios as well as a large proportion of faculty positions (out of those sanctioned) remaining vacant. As far as student teacher ratio is concerned the UGC has recommended it to be 15:1 for undergraduate and 12:1 for post-graduate courses. According to a report published in IANS around 25% posts are vacant in IIMS, 35% in central universities, 35.1% in other central education institutions coming up under Human Resource development (HRD) Ministry.

iii. Traditional Methods of Teaching

Professors still stick to those older methods of teaching like board, marker. They don't like to make use of audio visual aids in teaching. Also they are not up to date with the information available and what global industry demands.

iv. Inadequate Facilities and Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure or facilities in higher education institutions in India is also a big issue. Even many private universities are running courses without classrooms. Internet and Wi-Fi facility is still out of reach of many students.

v. Issues Related To Inclusion Education

Inclusive education is an important goal of the XII plan. One of the biggest challenges in higher education is that of inequality in educational development, with a large section of population remaining illiterate and a large number of children not getting even primary education. This has not only excluded a large section of population from contributing to the development of the country fully, but it has also prevented them from utilizing the benefits of whatever developments have taken place for the benefit of society. The problem of unequal distribution of educational development is quite complicated. It is not equally distributed across the country. Many regions and many segments of population appear to be left out, providing clinching evidence of disparities and imbalances which needs to be corrected as soon as possible. Prominent among such disparities are as follows:

a. Inter-Caste Variations

The data collected from Vision document of Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) depicts that, with national average of GER (18-23 years age group) 18%, Scheduled Castes have GER of 12.2 %, Scheduled Tribes 9.7%, and Other Backward Classes 18.7%.

b. Rural-Urban Disparities

Out of every 10 persons in India, 7 live in villages. This is what makes rural-urban disparity in higher education still more disquieting. According to NSSO data (2009-10) GER on rural areas is merely 13.9%, as compared with 32.5% in urban areas.

c. Inter-State Disparities

GER across states is not uniform. After going through the data collected from vision document of RUSA, some interesting observations were made. The very fact Gujarat, despite being a state with high growth indicators, has a GER (21.3) only close to middle. All the southern states, with the exception of Kerela, lie above the meridian GER. Kerela despite 99% literacy and good performance in education has a low GER of just 21.9%. Out of 7 north-eastern states, 6 are below the average GER of 19. The hilly states like Himachal Pradesh (26.0) and Utrakhand (27.8) show fairly high GER.

d. Inter-Religious Group Differences

As per the data collected from vision document of RUSA, it was also found that there exist inter-religious group differences. The GER of Hindu is 20%, Muslim (11.30%), Christian (31.30%), Sikh (23.10%), Jain (54.60%) and Buddhism (17.90%).

e. Gender Disparities

In rural areas, GER for females is 8.3% as compare to 13.7% of males. Similarly in urban areas, GER for females is 13.7% as compare to 29.6% of males.

f. Disparity Among Occupation Groups

In rural areas GER for the self-employed nonagricultural is 13.8%, agricultural labour (7.0%), other labour (8.6%), self-employed in agriculture (15.8%) and others (33.5%).

In urban areas GER for self-employed is 28.4%, regular wages/salaried (34.4%), casual labour (10.8%) and 70% for others.

vi. Quality Related Issues

Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and a dynamic concept. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today. As per Times Higher Education Rankings 2020, the top ranked Indian institutions are IISc Bengaluru (16), IIT Kharagpur (32), IIT Bombay (34), IIT Delhi (38), IIT Roorkee (58), IIT Indore (61), IIT Madras (63). The scope for improvement in terms of quality and excellence is apparent.

vii. Research and Innovation

Research and higher education are complementary to each other. Higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centers. There are only few scholars in our country whose writing is cited by famous western authors. There are limited numbers of quality faculty to advise students. Researches are done only to get a degree and less focus is given on the quality research work. So, this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS - SUGGESTIONS:

i. Gross Enrolment Ratio

Although the GER has increased over the years but following initiatives should be taken:

- Starting variety of courses according to demand of present scenario.
- Opening new colleges & universities.
- Upgrading colleges to universities.

ii. Faculty Positions

There exists a huge reservoir of qualified potential faculty (nearly 80,000 Ph.D. and 1, 00,000 NET qualified candidates) who can be tapped. Universities must strive to achieve for filling up existing vacancies and creating new posts if required. Since the classes are overcrowded so 1:15 teacher-pupil ratio should be ensured by recruiting more faculties.

iii. Traditional Method Of Teaching

To make teaching- learning more interesting and effective, the teachers should be encouraged to use modern technologies like LCD projector/ power point presentations in their teaching learning process. The teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skill to use latest technologies by organizing workshops in higher education institutions.

iv. Inadequate Facility And Infrastructure

Infrastructural facilities in the higher education institutions should be enhanced. Initiatives in terms of opening more number of girls' hostels, disabled friendly infrastructure like ramps, tactile pathways should be taken in higher education institutions.

v. Initiatives For Overcoming The Disparities

In order to overcome the disparities in higher education following measures can be taken:

- Orientation programs about scope and importance of higher education should be organized for students at senior secondary level in schools irrespective of area, caste religion, gender, occupational groups.
- More vocational courses should be started in higher education institutions.

vi. Quality In Higher Education

To maintain the quality in higher education following initiatives should be taken:

- Since the classes are overcrowded so 1:15 teacher-pupil ratio should be ensured by recruiting more faculties.
- Workload and involvement of teachers in non-academic activities should be minimized.
- To upgrade the knowledge, research should be given prime importance. So adequate steps should be taken to provide conducive environment for research to students and teachers in higher education institutions.
- Enhanced learning opportunities should be provided to the students according to their scholastic needs and aspirations.
- To provide latest knowledge of the field to the students, curriculum in higher education should be revised at regular interval of time.
- As the number of colleges affiliated per university are more, leading to the burden on the universities. It may be minimized by opening new universities.

vii. Research And Innovation

To upgrade the knowledge, research should be given prime importance. Government must promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutes and top International institutes and also generates linkage between national research laboratories and research centers of top institutions for better quality and collaborative research.

viii. Conclusion

In concluding words, we can say that over the period of time, growth have been take place in higher education in terms of institutions, enrolments etc. but it is not sufficient. Indian economy is facing various challenges regarding higher education, which need to overcome through appropriate policy formation and their effective implementation. No doubt India is facing various challenges in higher education but to tackle these challenges and to boost higher education is utmost important. India is a country of huge human resource potential, to utilize this potential properly is the issue which needed to discuss. Our higher education system has not been able to change its organizational structure and form. Nor has it been possible to maintain uniform standards of education. It is necessary to have reforms in higher education. To reach and achieve the future requirements there is an urgent need to relook at the financial resources, access and equity, quality standards, relevance and infrastructure in higher education system.

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