

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### Abstract

*Education is a social process. Education is regarded as one that contributes to social, political and cultural and economic transformation of a country. Education and training create assets in the form of knowledge and skills which increase the productive capacity of manpower and this is referred to as human capital. The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way. Higher education in India could only maintain a very small base of quality institutions. It is also facing a few important and significant challenges. It contributes to economic and social development of the country. The present study highlights the growth of higher education sector in India, its challenges and opportunities towards improvement of higher education in India. The study will be based on secondary data and information.*

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## Introduction

Higher education plays an important role in a country's economic growth because it is the quality education that produces successful business managers, superior doctors, skilled engineers and various other important officials who directly or indirectly help in the economic growth of a country as a whole. Stimac and Simic, (2012) stated that as education becomes increasingly important in terms of economic and social development, there is a growing pressure from different stakeholder on its performance. They quoted the labor market where adaptation of program curriculum required conquering the changing needs of the labor market, laws and regulations which are constantly being adjusted to better fit the international requirements. Increasing role of higher education in terms of economic and social development makes an obligation on the institutions for providing higher education to fulfill certain criteria of quality education.

It is important to remember that 'education' includes 'literacy', but it is not confined to literacy alone. It comprehends much more: It is the acquiring of knowledge or learning, together with the equipment, which provides the skill and the inclination for making profitable use of that knowledge. Since the acquiring of knowledge and improvement of the skill for its application are parts of a dynamic process, education is a lifelong exercise. Higher education is, therefore, never complete in a continuous evolving dynamic personality. If the process becomes static, it leads to stagnation, which must be avoided. A quality human capital comes from a quality education process. A carefully designed and well planned education system is critical to developing such human capital. Thus, institutions of higher learning play a very important role and the teaching and learning processes in institutions of higher learning should provide such knowledge and skills to future graduates. The importance of education, we must know that schools have become the most important means of transforming wealth of knowledge and skills from one generation to another. However, the role of institutions becomes more challenging in the modern world with innovations and technological developments. Investment in education and educational institutions should be viewed as an investment for economic prosperity.

## Objectives of the study:

1. To analyze the higher education system in India.

2. To study the challenges faced by higher education in India.
3. To provide suggestions for effective system of higher education.

### Research Methodology:

The study has been based on secondary data. This study relies on data from the authorized Indian statistical database - RBI Bulletin, Ministry of higher education Government of India, Working Papers, MHRD Annual reports, Economic Survey of India, and from the website of google.com and the Ministry of Human Resources development, Government of India.

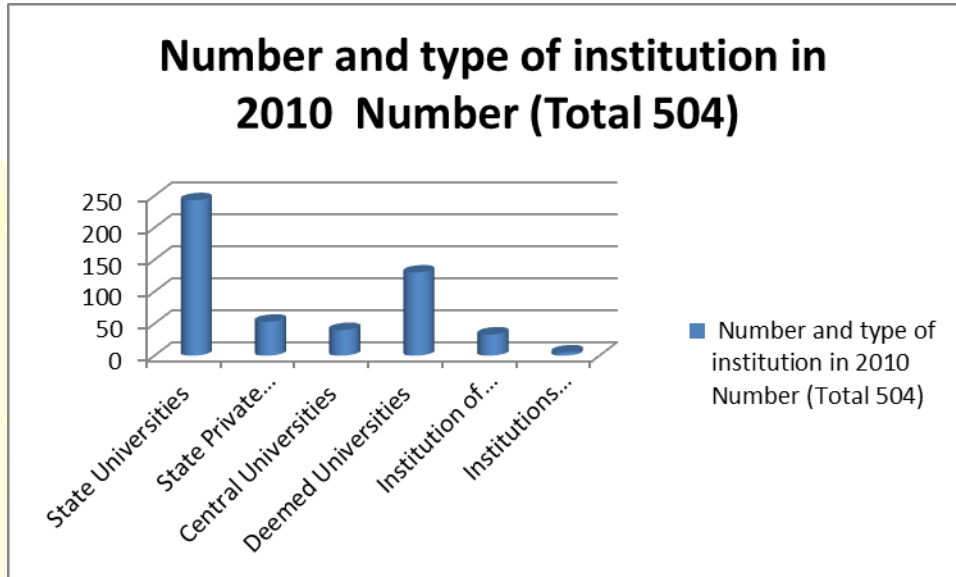
Every parent harbors a dream of providing the best education to his or her child. In India, a country with a middle class of over 300 million and another 400 million living below the poverty line, it is often the only ticket to prosperity. With such a high population, cultivating an educated workforce also offers many social and economic opportunities for the country as a whole. Because of its high social return on investment, education is a key issue for donors wanting to bring about social change in India. Compared to the graying population worldwide, today India has a young population. The country has entered a Demographic Dividend phase that is expected to last nearly 30 years, during which a productive labor force forms the largest population segment (Nilekani, 2008 and The Economist, 2013). According to several reports; India will have a surplus of 47 million workers by 2020, equal to the world's shortfall. This young workforce will be a remarkable human capital asset for India -- provided it is well educated and skilled. However, currently, only 19.4% of India's young population is enrolled in higher education (Ernst & Young, Nov. 2012).

### Number and type of institution in 2010:

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Type of Institution	Number (Total 504)
State Universities	243
State Private Universities	53
Central Universities	40
Deemed Universities	130

Institution of National importance	33
Institutions established by State Legislative	5

Source: MHRD, Annual Report 2009-2010



The higher education system in India at present is at a transition stage. A stage where changes have taken place for good and more transformations in thoughts and processes are desired. Higher education system in any nation today seeks a relook. The world is being slowly but steadily turned into a global village. Synchronization and harmony among the global universities across the globe can create syncthroughout, wherein the nurturing of the young minds may be accustomed to the changes desired. Another aspect which is very important today is the concept of blended learning. It is just the next step to the previous idea of creating a harmonization of higher education across the globe. Students from all over the world will be benefitted from the expertise of the renowned academicians. The harmony may create a balance in learning and research thereafter.

The higher education system in India enrolls the second largest number of students in the world (after China), with nearly 22 million enrollees. The past two decades have been characterized by growth of 7.7 percent per annum, with enrollment numbers more than quadrupling over two decades, and the gross enrollment ratio (GER)<sup>1</sup> increasing from 12.3 to 18.1 percent in just the past five years (Agarwal, 2009; FYP, 2012). The 12th Five-Year Plan (FYP)

sets 25 percent GER as a goal for 2017, a target that would add ten million enrollees over the next five years (FYP, 2012), or an annualized growth rate of 7.8 percent. Hence, policymakers expect Indian higher education to continue to experience the same rapid growth through 2017 as in the recent past.

India's Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) for higher education had been crafted within the framework of NKC's policy recommendations. "The Eleventh Plan saw nine fold increases in the public spending on higher education which fuelled significant inclusive expansion in the public higher education sector. However, there has been no significant improvement in terms of quality of higher education delivery. The issues of skill gaps, skill shortages, and unemployable graduates still persist" (FICCI-E&Y, 2012). So we see that India's Higher Education sector has seen remarkable growth. In terms of the number of institutions in the higher education system, India holds the number one position. India has shown tremendous growth in the number of institutions and enrolment; however it still faces the challenges on several counts such as inequitable and low access to higher education, dearth of competent faculty, deficient infrastructure, and most importantly inadequate research. Another aspect of India's higher education woes is that problems are not taken care of at the grass-root level. The students are not engaged in the system. Right from their enrolment they face numerous problems which remain mostly unsaid. They do not get quality education because of the concept of rote learning being practiced. The syllabus remains orthodox which has little relevance in the present scenario. The revisions of the syllabi are not done in a regular manner. The pedagogy of the whole education system seems to be flawed. The overall evaluation system encourages rote learning and there is little value addition.

The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a central government sponsored programme that targets state higher education. It allows for state sovereignty. RUSA utilizes particular strategies to address issues of expansion, excellence & equity. Nevertheless, public higher education in India is facing serious problems. Former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, evaluated the higher education system in 2007 as follows:

*"Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair. In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrolments are abysmally low; almost two thirds of our universities*

*and 90% of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters. I am concerned that university appointments have been politicised and have become subject to caste and communal considerations”.*

*“For India to maintain its economic growth in a global marketplace fueled by the knowledge economy, it needs to nearly double its number of students in higher education by 2012. Fifty-one Percent of India’s population is under the age of 25. Without proper access to education the country’s demographic dividend could turn into a demographic disaster”.*

## **Education system in India**

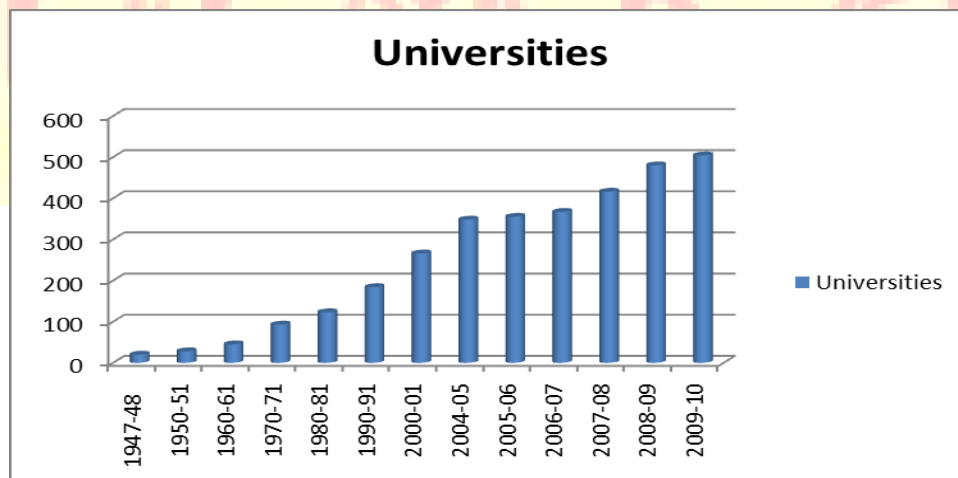
Education is a social process. The form and content of education of any age and society are products of society-education dialectics. Education, particularly higher education, as the instrument of the individual, societal and economic transformation in India became well recognized in the second half of the twentieth century. Since independence in 1947, there have been large investments in higher education, with the concomitant increase in the number of students who opt for higher education. The transformation of Indian education system from the ancient *gurukul* system to today’s virtual learning system is a reflection of the changing social context. The new social realities, particularly the interplay between democratization of education, emergence of knowledge society and globalization, greatly influence the educational processes in all societies (UNESCO, 2002).

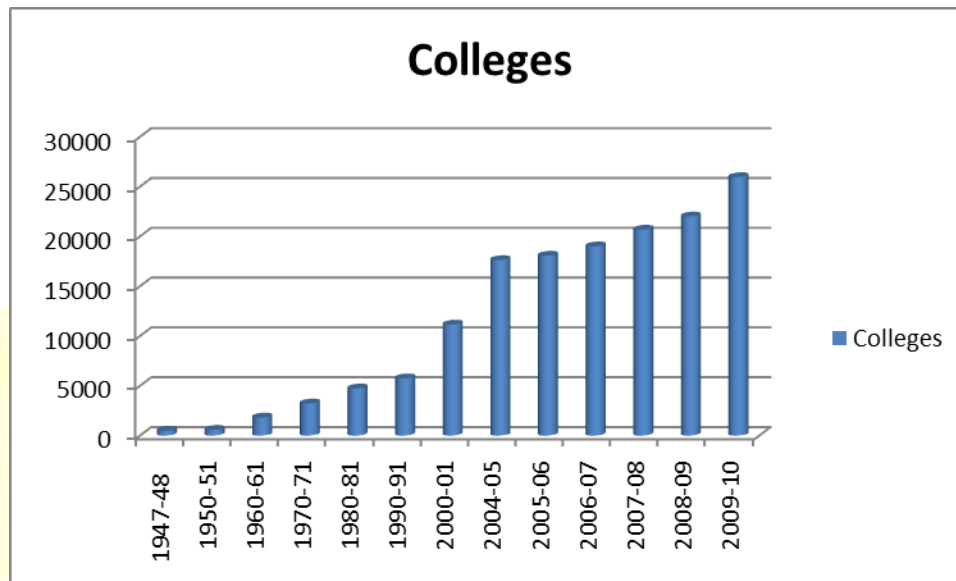
For a long period, India did not have an organized way of educating its population. The *gurukul* system was prevalent in India in ancient times, which rendered access to education very difficult for the common person. The organized system of education is a British legacy, introduced by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a progressive quantitative expansion of the system in the early part of the twentieth century, and at the time of independence in 1947; there were approximately 21 universities and 500 colleges in the country. Although the increase in the number of higher education institutions and student enrolment seems to be impressive, it is no different from the experience of other nations. Unlike in other countries, however in India, its impact is nullified due to the growing population.

Quantitative expansion resulted in the increase in expenditure on higher education. Higher education costs in India have gone up significantly in recent years. Full costs are recovered for most of the professional programmes whether these are offered in private or public institutions. While fee levels may continue to be low in central universities that form a very small part of higher education in India, the fee levels are quite high in many state universities.

All India Growth of institutions			
Year	Universities	Colleges	Total
1947-48	20	496	516
1950-51	28	578	606
1960-61	45	1819	1864
1970-71	93	3227	3320
1980-81	123	4738	4861
1990-91	184	5748	5932
2000-01	266	11146	11412
2004-05	348	17625	17973
2005-06	355	18064	18419
2006-07	367	19000	19367
2007-08	416	20677	21093
2008-09	480	22000	22480
2009-10	504	25951	26455

*Source: UGC and Higher Education in India, Annual Reports (Universities include central, state, private, deemed and also institution of national importance established both by the central and state legislatures). Ref [6-7]*





In the year 1950-51 the total no of universities were 28 and colleges were 578 and their total was 606. In the year 1960-61 the total no of universities were increased to 45 and colleges were 1819 and their total was 1864. In the year 1970-71 the total no of universities were increased to 93 and colleges were 3227 and their total was 3320. In the year 1980-81 the total no of universities were increased to 123 and colleges were 4738 and their total was 4861. In the year 1990-91 the total no of universities were increased to 184 and colleges were 5748 and their total was 5932. In the year 2000-01 the total no of universities were increased to 266 and colleges were 11466 and their total was 11412. In the year 2004-05 the total no of universities were increased to 348 and colleges were 17625 and their total was 17973. In the year 2006-07 the total no of universities were increased to 367 and colleges were 19000 and their total was 19367. In the year 2008-09 the total no of universities were increased to 480 and colleges were 22000 and their total was 22480. In the year 2009-10 the total no of universities were increased to 504 and colleges were 25951 and their total was 26455.

**National Knowledge Commission (2006)** recommended to the Government of India to create around 1500 universities nationwide that would enable India to attain a gross enrolment ratio of at least 15 per cent by 2015. It also recommended the creation of 50 National Universities that can provide education of the highest standard. As exemplars for the rest of the nation, these



universities shall train students in a variety of disciplines, including humanities, social sciences, basic sciences, commerce and professional subjects, at both the undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

The Indian government initiative “Education for All” was initiated after the Millennium and realized in April 2009, when a clause was added to the Indian constitution, giving each child between the ages of 6 and 14 the right to education. At present, governmental and state efforts in the educational sector focus on problems at the primary and secondary level, and not at the higher education level. The government allocated only 4% of the gross domestic product to education in 2012, which included all education – primary, secondary, and higher education. Changes in the higher education sector are, therefore, highly left to private initiatives.

### **Challenges of Higher Education in India**

The shortage of skilled man-power is a cause for concern in most streams of higher education in India. Experts acknowledge that the present higher education system in India is not equipped to address this problem without some changes in the basic structure. The challenges today for the higher education in India are:

1. Too less universities and colleges to sustain the huge population of India, more universities are needed to improve the gross enrolment ratio (GER): The most important challenge today for Indian higher education sector is to establish many new universities and colleges.
2. The quality of higher education in India is bad.
3. It is difficult for common people of India to assess the echelons of higher education in India.
4. The higher education in India is not governed and regulated in an independent manner.
5. The funding and investment in higher education needs to be redefined.
6. Location hindrance: most of the premier institutes are located in big cities and already developed places. If the quest is to reach the deprived sections of the society and those who are marginalized, then the new higher education institutions should be set up in remote places of India.

7. Entering of Foreign players: With the Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010 (The Hindu, 2012), the entry of the foreign universities will be very easy in the present domestic setup. More intense competitions from the quality players in the higher education are envisaged.
8. Popularity of regular class teaching going down and correspondence studies becoming popular. It has been reported by IGNOU that there are 30 lakh students presently enrolled in it.
9. The outmoded teaching method that is still followed in most parts of the country does not in any way help to enhance the education system.
10. There has been a drastic decline in research standards which really hampers the quality education in India.
11. The wide spread geographic, income, ethnic and gender imbalances.
12. The higher education in India in many ways does not serve the purpose for which it has been started. In general education itself has become so profitable a business that quality is lost in the increase of professional institution.

Though, it is soothing to see such numbers in open learning environment, but the regular teaching is losing sheen is a point to ponder over. The problem of students not turning up in the classrooms for regular lectures stems from the same fact that they are not aligned and engaged with the things taught. The problem of rote learning surfaces here. The pedagogy, therefore, needs to be changed at the earliest to suit the requirements of the current environment, so that the student is able to relate it with the same. This can be done only when there is a system of continuous evaluation based on internal assessment throughout the year and not on the basis of an annual examination which tests only the retention and memorizing skills of the students. Continuity should not only be practiced for evaluation of the student but also for the development of curriculum which is again very critical and important. Curriculum should be based on the dynamics of the environment which is ever changing. There are few things which require revision almost annually and some learning are almost always constant, the need is to know and recognize the same to aid in proper development of the curricula which again requires sincere efforts.

The major challenges facing India in the higher education sector are a lack of trained faculty; underfunded research facilities, libraries, and information technology systems; low quality research; and politicization of staffing appointments. In addition, there are widespread regional, rural-urban, and gender disparities in student enrollment.

### Opportunities in Higher Education in India:

- Development of humanistic resources for the realization of social, economic, cultural consequences of universities internationalization.
- Improve linguistic skills, computer competency and intercultural experience.
- Improve employability of students through recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad.
- Academic exchange of knowledge and ideas.
- Revision of textbooks and representation of courses which correspond to the content of global community knowledge and international problems.
- Scientific and cultural cooperation by the students unions and scientific boards of universities.
- Use of the comparative studies to present the content of existing educational programs.
- Emphasis on inter-cultural skills for planning in higher education.
- Inform students with abilities and skills in the international arena.
- Exchange experiences among colleges and universities.
- Enrichment of university environments for educational and research activities according to the global standards.
- The planning of educational programs according to the time needed through regional and international cooperation among colleges and universities.
- The acceptance of more numbers of scientific boards.
- Preparation of facilities for scientific boards to use new technologies.
- The protection of researchers, scientific boards and young managers in higher education.
- The effective cooperation in planning, executing, accessing of the international research projects.

## Conclusion

There is an earnest call from all quarters to reform the education system in India. This is due to serious quality deficiencies in our system. We need to look into the issues and challenges looming over the higher education and the impending issues and challenges are too many. Therefore concrete and defining measures have to be undertaken to enhance the quality of education that encompasses skills. We need to bring in a greater transparency and accountability. This will enable us to reflect on the purpose of higher education and the role of colleges and universities in imparting quality education.

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