HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: PRESENT SCENARIO, MAJOR CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

Dr. Madan Lal Singla*

Abstract

Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of higher education institutions since independence and emerged the largest in the world. The number of universities degree awarding institutions has increased around 26 times from 27 in 1951 to 712 in 2014 and number of colleges has also registered manifold increase of around 64 times with just 578 in 1951 growing to 36671 in 2014. There is a tremendeous increase in the enrollment of male students from 3.5 lacs in1951 to 163 lacs in 2013 and of female students from 0.5 lacs in 1951 to 133 lacs in 2013 pursuing their higher studies in India. Government of India is not able to achieve higher success in the implemented projects of education and still gross enrollment ratio (GER) is very low (21.1%) as compared to advanced countries despite the facts that opportunities for higher education have been increased recently due to the private participation. It is a challenge of providing access to India's expanding population of young people and rapidly growing middle class. India also faces a serious quality problem, given that only a tiny proportion of the higher education sector can meet international standards. However, due to widespread poverty, the higher education is still a dream mainly for deprived class in India. Total expenditure on higher education in 2012-13 was just 0.89% of county' GDP which is not sufficient to meet the goal of higher education in India. The unconditional co-operation in curriculum development, implementation of innovative practices, use of new technologies, exchange of experts and promotion of collaborative research are the need of the hour. The present paper is an attempt to study the present scenario and challenges facing Indian higher education sector as well as to suggest the ways to make the sector globally competitive.

Keywords: Higher Education, Present Scenario, Challenges, Gross Enrollment Ratio

* Associate Professor in Commerce, Maharaja Agrasen College, Jagadhri (Haryana)

Introduction

Higher education is of vital importance for a country, as it is a powerful tool to build knowledge-based society of the 21st Century. After independence, education for all was the mission of the government. The unhealthy practice of discriminations was removed by the 86th Constitutional Amendments and education has been made compulsory for the age group 6 to 14. The significant gap between the rate of urban and rural literacy is being bridged and the UGC was set up in the year 1953 to regulate the processes of educational development in the country. However, the efforts of upgrading the standards of Indian education are not meeting with success due to hurdles in accessibility, poverty and other factors. India is just spending 4.29% of country's GDP on education. Due to widespread poverty the government of India is not able to achieve higher success in the implemented projects of education. Primary as well as higher education is given equal importance in the XIth plan considering the importance of education sector in the development. An initiative of the UGC under XIIth Plan is structured to remedy the fundamental lapse in the Indian higher education system. The plan mandates that the autonomous colleges show promise will be identified as "colleges with potential for excellence" and upgraded into universities. To this end, the UGC has allotted over Rs 1, 84,740 crore.

However, higher education in India has experienced phenomenal expansion since independence. Till the recent past it was believed that premier education is not available in India, but the current development in the educational sector has led to the belief that quality education is indeed available in India. Indian education has now gained world recognition. Research done in the past has highlighted loopholes in the curriculum and methodologies and amendments like changes in the syllabus, introduction of new courses and dynamic methodologies with modern infrastructures and teachers with adequate training were made available. Due to all this, today, many students from foreign countries like South Africa, China, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, UK and USA are eyeing the country for gaining higher qualifications as the country amazes outsiders with its vast pool of talent. India has produced scientists, engineers, doctors, teachers and managers who are in great demand all over the world. This unbelievable progress in the educational scenario also includes low costs and higher quality of higher education in the learner friendly environment in India as compared to the western countries.

Higher Education System of India

Education in India is matter of prime concern for the Government of India. There are different stages in Indian education system. The basic divisions in the academics include primary, secondary, senior secondary and higher education. Elementary education is till standard 8 while secondary and senior secondary education consists two years each. After completing senior secondary, a student takes a decision to pursue his higher education. The University Grants Commission (UGC) coordinates, determines and maintains the standards of higher education at various levels. There are many professional bodies mentioned below, which are responsible for accreditations of the courses, as well as providing grants to the higher education instituitions:

- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR)
- Distance Education Council (DEC)
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
- Bar Council of India (BCI)
- Medical Council of India (MCI)
- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)
- Indian Nursing Council (INC)
- Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH)
- Pharmacy Council of India (PCI)
- Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)
- Dentist Council of India (DCI)

Objectives of the Study

Higher education is of vital importance for the development of a country as it is a powerful tool to build knowledge based society. India faces a serious quality problem in higher education and enrollment ratio is still very low as compared to advanced countries mainly due to widespread poverty in the country. Hence, the present study entitled: "Higher Education in India: Present Scenario, Major Challenges and Way Forward" has been selected.

Methodology

Data since 1951 has been collected mainly from the official website and annual reports of MHRD and UGC to know the changing position and present scenario of higher education in India. Further, reports of conferences, seminars, workshops as well as various studies conducted

in this field have also been taken into consideration to find out the major challenges facing Indian higher education sector and way forward to make the sector globally competitive.

Present Scenario of Higher Education in India

Table-1: Growth of Institutions, Enrollment and Expenditure at Higher Education Level in India during the period 1951 to 2014

Year	Colleges	Universities	Enrollment of Students in Lacs		Expenditure as % age of GDP on Edn.
			Male	Female	
1951	578	27	3.5	0.5	0.64
1961	1819	45	8	2	1.48
1971	3277	82	26	7	2.11
1981	6963	110	35	13	2.98
1991	5748	184	34	15	3.84
2001	10152	254	54	32	4.28
2011	32974	621	155	120	4.05 (0.85)*
2012	34852	642	162	130	4.18(0.82)*
2013*	35829	665	163	133	4.29(0.89)*
2014*	36671	712	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available

*Amount in Bracket is of expenditure on Higher Education in India as % of GDP and statistics of 2013&2014 are Provisional as per MHRD Report 2013-14.

Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of higher education institutions since independence and emerged the third largest in the world. The statistics in the

table-1 indicate that the number of universities/degree awarding institutions has increased around 26 times from 27 in 1951 to 712 in 2014. The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase of around 64 times with just 578 in 1951 growing to 36671 in 2014. Given statistics indicate tremendous increase in the enrollment of male students from 3.5 lacs in1951 to 163 lacs in 2013 and of female students from 0.5 lacs in 1951 to 133 lacs in 2013 pursuing their higher studies in India. The statistics given in the table-2 show that enrollment of male students is around 17% & 7% more than the enrollment of female students in UG & PG courses respectively during the period 2012-13. Further, 88% students have taken admission in regular course to pursue their higher education while 12% students opted distance learning during the period 2012-13. Talking about enrollment by stages, the report of UGC in 2012 says that 86 per cent students complete their Graduation, while only 12 per cent opt for Post-Graduate programmes and only 1 per cent opts for research thus making it clear that the students either do not have zeal for pursuing post graduation and research or have better career option available after graduation. The rest 1 per cent go for diploma or certificate courses.

Table-2 Enrollment of Students in Higher Education Institutions in India

2012-13(Provisonal) ***(In Thousands)***

Name of the Course	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
U.G.	*12723*	*10815*	*23538*
P. G.	*1744*	*1631*	*3374*
Ph.D	*50*	*34*	*84*
M. Phil	*16*	*19*	*35*
Total	***16329***	***13301***	***29629***

The statistics given in the following table-3 indicate the detailed position of higher education institutions in India during the year 2013-14.

Table-3: Higher Education Institutions in India during 2013-14(Provisional)

Univesities and Colleges	Number	Diploma Level Institutions	Number
Central Universities	42	Diploma Level Technical	
State Public University	310	PGDM	3541
Deemed University	127	Diploma Level Nursing	392
State Private University	143	Diploma Level Teacher	2674
Central Open University	1	Training	
State Open University	13	Institute under Ministries	4706
Institution of National Importance	68		
Institutions under State			132
Legislature Act	5		
Other Institutions	3		
Colleges	36671		
Total	**37383**	**Total**	**11445**

Further, Statistics given in the table-4 show that 32.55% of students are studying in Arts stream, 11.17 % in Science, 11.42% in Commerce and 13.27% in the field of Engineering during the period 2012-13. The statistics also show that enrollment percentage of female students in B.Tech. & B.E. degree course is almost half (4.46% & 4.06%) as compared to the enrollment percentage of male students i.e. 9.10% & 8.07% respectively. While statistics of enrollment percentage given in the table-4 reveal that female students prefer more to take admission in traditional courses like B.A., B Sc., & M.A., M Sc., M Com. as compared to male students.

Table-4: % Enrollment in Different Programme in Higher Education in India (2012-13)

Name of Programme	Male	Female	Total
B.A Arts	28.22	37.84	32.55
B.Com	11.51	11.30	11.42
B Sc.	10.41	12.09	11.17

B. Tech.	9.10	4.46	7.01
B.E.	8.07	4.06	6.26
LLB	0.86	0.48	0.69
M.A.	3.45	5.42	4.34
M Sc.	1.59	2.31	1.91
MBA	2.25	1.44	1.88
M.Com.	0.77	1.16	0.94
Others	23.77	19.44	21.83

However, statistics given in table-5 show an increasing trend in GER from 8.1% in 2001-02 to 20.8% in 2011-12 & 21.1% in 2012-13. The enrollment ratio has also shown a good improvement in case of SC (Scheduled Castes) and ST (Scheduled Castes) students, where the ratio has improved to 15.1% and 11% respectively. But GER in India is still very low as compared to advanced countries as indicated in the table-6 showing international position of India. GER of China in tertiary was 26.7% and while it was 61.7% in Germany, 76.1% in Russia, 61.9% in U.K and 94.3% in USA during the year 2011-12. However, statistics show a significant improvement in the field of higher education compared to developing countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Low GER i.e. around 49.1%, low pass percentage and dropout of around 12% at senior secondary level are some of the factors responsible for low enrollment ratio in higher education. Further, the growth of higher education has led to higher investment in this sector. But total expenditure on higher education in 2012-13 was Rs. 83559.23 crores i.e. just 0.89% of county's total GDP which is not sufficient despite a continuous increase since 1951 as given

statistics indicate. However, a number of private colleges and universities cropped up recently and thus, have increased the opportunities for higher education mainly in professional courses.

Table-5: Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in India (In %age)

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
2001-02	9.3	6.7	8.1
2010-11	20.8	17.9	19.4
2011-12	22.1	19.4	20.8
2012-13 (Provisional)	22.3	19.8	21.1

Table-6: International Position of Enrollment and Expenditure on Education (2011-12)

Name of Country	Expenditure as % age of GDP on Education	Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education/Tertiary (in %age)
India	4.18	20.8
Pakistan	2.13	9.5
Shri Lanka	1.72	17
China	Not Available	26.7
Germany	Not Available	61.7
Russia	Not Available	76.1
U.K.	Not Available	61.9
USA	Not Available	94.3

Everyone recognises that India has a serious higher education problem as India's higher education system, with more than 29 million students, only educates around 21.1 per cent of the age group, even well under China's 26.7 per cent. Thus, it is a challenge of providing access to India's expanding population of young people and rapidly growing middle class. India also faces a serious quality problem, given that only a tiny proportion of the higher education sector like

IITs, IIMs, BITS, IIITs. and perhaps some top rated undergraduate colleges meet the international standards.

However, as soon as India signed GATs, foreign universities also started to enter the country and now there are more than 100 western universities established in the country. But, we are still waiting for renowned foreign universities to show interest in India. Similarly, India is in the process of setting her universities in the foreign lands. If top western foreign universities like Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford etc. enter in Indian education system by build full-fledged branch campuses on their own, it naturally enables Indian students to get world class quality higher education and save foreign currency as well. It will also force our Indian higher education institutes to promote new ideas on higher education system, curriculum, teaching methods and research to compete with these top western universities and thus, helps to make the Indian higher education globally competitive and as per industry demands.

Major Challenges Facing Higher Education Sector in India and Way Forward

Today, higher education sector in India as a whole has achieved much but there are also many issues of concern. These pertain to access, equity, quality and relevance, resources, and planning and management of educational programmes. All of these are on the agenda of both the central and state governments and civil society is also getting more conscious about its proactive role. India has tremendously enhanced the capacity but lags in quality and given inadequate autonomy to the universities. We are in the 21st century with a mid-20th century regulatory framework. Everyone has seen countries like China, Korea and Singapore, transform from developing to advanced economies in a decade due to strategic planning and a larger vision that correlated economic development to transformation in the education sector, mainly in higher education and research, to become globally competitive. In this context, the FICCI Higher Education Committee has endeavored to create the 'Vision 2030' for Higher Education in India. The Vision is aspirational and futuristic, looking at India as a globally dominant economy, with a high quality higher education sector that leads and fulfills the needs of society. We have sought to get away from current constraints and challenges looking a new at what we could be by 2030, focusing on the genius and capability of our people and our civilisational ethos, and meeting our rightful destiny as a global leader.

There is a necessity to educate the masses to accelerate the growth process of Indian economy. India needs to make the system of education innovative and futuristic in order to respond to the

changing demands of the modern society. Thus, methods of teaching through lectures will have to be supplemented with the methods that will lay stress on self study, personal interaction between teachers and students and informative sessions of seminars and workshops. However, India has proved its tremendous potential by its performance in nuclear and space domains. The recent development in communication technologies have helped to cross the barriers of time and distance. But the success story of the post independent India turns out bleak when the question of quality is raised. Higher education has been finding it difficult to meet the challenges of unplanned expansion, educated unemployment, uneven growth, commercialization of education, financial crises, teacher burnout and the digital divide of quantity versus quality, equity versus excellence, and creativity versus conformity which are posing continuous threats to higher education in India. The student of today learning a specific content of information will find to his amazement that he is not prepared to face the life which he has to live for the next five decades because the knowledge furnished with, has become outdated long back. In the context of multinational entering into the field of education, quality assurance has become a necessity. India will have to make necessary changes in the education policy to prepare the students for adjustments to continuing change. The impact of continued change will be visible in the content of the curriculum, its form and the process of decision making that shapes it.

Over the last two decades, India has remarkably transformed its higher education system. With well-planned expansion it has created widespread access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all levels. India has not only bettered its enrollment numbers but has dramatically enhanced its learning outcomes. India has also undertaken large-scale reforms to better pupil teacher ratio by making teaching an attractive career path, expanding capacity for doctoral students at universities and delinking educational qualifications from teaching eligibility. As a result, today, India's 70 million student population is a force to reckon with. Among them are potential researchers, academics, entrepreneurs and executives of the future. Our universities today don't face a shortage of academics ready to be recruited as faculty, just as our industries find adequate talent. Despite these strides of progress, India's higher education institutions are not yet the best in the world as per QS World University Rankings, an annual listing of the world's top universities for 2014, had no Indian institutes in the top 200. Yet, India's post-secondary education system is increasingly recognised as being the best for the world. However, the promise of excellence and equity has made Indian higher education system

worthy of emulating, certainly in the developing world that faces the same challenges as India did in the decades prior to its higher education reforms. A total of 20 Indian universities including 6 top IITs are ranked among the BRICS top 200 as per 2014 QS University Rankings in BRICS countries. The nations of developed world is also under tremendous pressure to provide higher education in cost-effective ways as India has emerged as a regional hub of education as well as role model for delivering high-quality education to vast numbers at low cost and attracts global learners from all over the world.

T.V. Mohandas Pai Chairman, FICCI Higher Education Committee said in FICCI Higher Education Summit 2013 held in New Delhi that by 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world. With nearly 140 million people in the college-going age group, one in every four graduates in the world will be a product of the Indian higher education system. By 2030, the already existing challenges for Indian higher education i.e. access, equity and quality will only be greatly exacerbated unless we significantly transform our higher education model. Needless to say, 2030 calls for a new vision and a new aspiration to articulate an ambitious vision for higher education reform and lay out a roadmap to achieving it. Further, they said that as always, a potential danger in advocating for reform is that the discourse of reform often gets mired in correcting for what is wrong than on aspiring for what is right, and in doing so, gets bogged down by the past than focus on the future. Thus as the thing is to move forward, instead of looking back, India need to look ahead and in 2030, we want to be pioneers of a higher education model that is not just the best in the world, but the best for the world, delivering social, economic and intellectual value par excellence. In order to realize the goals we envision for 2030, a transformative and innovative approach would be required across all the levers of higher education: from curricula and pedagogy to the use of technology to partnerships, governance and funding. Making rapid progress over the next two decades would require a committed and concerted effort from all stakeholders involved i.e. academia, industry, and Government.

Therefore, the higher education of India needs mechanisms to improve the quality of education provided through universities and other degree awarding institutions. The mechanism should pay attention on refining, diversifying, and upgrading higher education and research programme. Hence, It is high time the UGC on the one hand has to encourage private participation in awarding quality and inexpensive higher degrees in the multi-disciplinary domains to attract even more foreign students and on the other hand, the establishing world class schools of higher

education will prevent the students from being attracted by foreign institutions. The unconditional co-operation in curriculum development, preparation of instructional materials, implementation of innovative practices, use of new technologies, exchange of experts and promotion of collaborative research are the need of the hour.

The private sector, which currently accounts for 59% of all tertiary enrollment, continues to grow rapidly, providing most of the professional courses, particularly engineering, medical and management. Many more providers are waiting for legislation which would allow them to enter the market. The private sector is expected to play a significant role in the future expansion of higher education in India There are some worthy examples of quality private institutes such as BITS, Jindal Global Univesity, Manipal University etc. Even HEIs like Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Ashoka University which cater to only social science students are also attracting serious scholars and researchers. However, over the past decade, to cater to the huge supply-demand gap, people mostly business background who didn't know how to create an environment for education, and had no aspirations to be in education had started to create private colleges and universities with the sole motive of profit earning even through illegal 'capitation fees' also. High-quality people who are not part of the "system" find it difficult to establish private universities as the regulatory environment is absolutely draconian when it comes to the private sector. Thus, India needs to make sure that private universities are encouraged, and that the legislation to create them is enabling. Private universities, like government-owned universities, are to provide little more autonomy in designing their course curriculum to cope with changing environment globally. All of this needs to be looked at immediately.

Last but not the least, despite of growth in education institutions and enrollment, the numbers are not sufficient enough to cater to the education needs of increasing young population of the country as India faces severe problems of capacity in its educational system in part because of under investment over many decades. More than a third of Indians remain illiterate after 68 years of independence. India's complex legal arrangements of reservation in higher education to the members of various disadvantaged population groups, often setting aside up to half of the seats for such groups places further stress on the system.

Conclusion

In the concluding words, it has been observed that during the period 2012-13, enrollment ratio of 21.1% in higher education is very low despite the facts that India has observed a good improvement in the enrollment ratio since 2002 when it was merely 8.1%. There is also a good improvement in enrollment ratio of SC and ST category students, where the ratio has improved to 15.1% and 11% respectively. Although India has shown good improvement in the number of institutes and number of students enroled in the past decade but it is still not consistent with the global ratios for GER. The average GER ratio worldwide is considered to be 30% and India is lagging behind in it. India needs to bring improvement in the education system and enhance the intake capacity in higher education by encouraging private participation and increasing the percentage share of country's GDP for higher education which was just 0.89% in 2012-13. It will automatically increase the number of students being enroled in the education arena.

However, India has a massive and talented population which could be converted into the biggest resource on earth through education and right platform to build a better and stronger India for the coming generations which truly stands for modernity and prosperity. Education is the sole hope for progress and survival and the nation and government understands this fact well. Still sincere endeavors are not being done by the government to improve the state of education in the country.

Over and above, as quality society can be produced only through quality education. Indian economy is facing various challenges regarding higher education, which need to overcome through appropriate policy formation and their effective implementation. We need job led growth and for this, institutions must concentrate on giving away quality education to the students and look into constantly updating the syllabus in order to help students adapt with the changing market scenario. Further, curriculum should also include vocational skills development program, employability enhancement & soft skills development programs, entrepreneurship development modules and industry interface related modules such as internships, industry visits, etc. with effective monitoring system to ensure continual improvement in the same.

Special emphasis must be given to communication and presentation skills, especially for students coming from rural background or remote locations and for students studying in vernacular

languages, so that they can perform well in the corporate world, across the globe. Institutions should also inculcate multitasking abilities amongst students like foreign languages, advanced IT knowledge so that they can perform better in the chosen field.

Further, to make the Indian higher education sector globally competitive, it is necessary to formulate new education policy more transparent and less regulatory which helps to provide more autonomy to the universities and other prestigious higher education institutes in designing their course curriculum to cope with changing environment globally. Due consideration may also be given on the suggestions given below in the new education policy of India:

- Increase the involvement of faculty in designing curricula, and decisions relating to pedagogy and examinations.
- Introduce reforms in the selection process of faculty members, based on the requirements of institutions.
- Develop a system of rewarding the best performing faculty members by providing performance-linked monetary and non-monetary benefits.
- Give adequate weightage to industry experience while recruiting faculty especially for professional institutes to encourage industry professionals to take up faculty positions as well as develop a mechanism to encourage industry professionals to take up part-time faculty assignments.
- Ease norms for top-tier institutions to hire the best talent from overseas.
- Introduce evaluation of faculty members' performance through regular student feedback and peer review mainly in technical and professional institutes.

References

Agarwal, P (2006): 'Higher Education in India: The Need for Change',working paper No 180, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.

Bhatia, K.&Dash,M.K.(2010). National Knowledge Commission –A Step towards India's Higher Education Reforms. In International Research Journal of Finance and Economics (53). Retrieved from http://www.eurojournals.com/irjfe_53_04.pdf.

Gupta, D. &Gupta, N.(2012), Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges. In Journal of Education and Practice, IISTE. Retrieved from www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/download/1146/1067.

Powar, K.B.(2012).Expanding domains in Indian higher education. New Delhi: Association of Indian Universities.

Singh, Shreyasi. (2013) "Challenges and Solutions in Indian Higher Education." The Diplomat (02 October) (http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/challenges-and-solutions-in-indian-higher-education/) accessed on 25 July 2015.

Annual Report (2013-14), Retrieved from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites /upload_files/mhrd/files/AR 2013-14.pdf.

Sharad Jaipuria (2014)**,** Higher Education in India: An introspection, The Times of India, July 21,.

Lynne Heslop, Senior Education Adviser at the British Council India, Understanding India: The future of higher education and opportunities for international cooperation-British Council, Feb., 2014.

Higher education in India, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

University Grants Commission (UGC) (various years): Annual Reports, UGC.