

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA (HEI)

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INTRODUCTION

Higher Education in India can be traced from the time when students use to attain the gurukul or madarasa (the islamic learning community) to gain knowledge. The system took major change after independence and today, higher education in India starts after the higher secondary or 12th standard. While it takes 3 years for completing a degree and pass in the programme or to have B.A., B.Sc or B.Com pass or honors degree from a college in India, pursuing an engineering course would take four years and five years with six months of additional compulsory internship) for completing a degree in medicine or law. Postgraduate courses generally are of two years duration. But there are some courses like Master of Computer Application (MCA) which are of three years duration. For those who cannot afford to attend regular classes for various preoccupations can pursue correspondence courses from various Open Universities and distance learning institutes in India

The growth in the number of institutions has been remarkable and excellent. Today India stands to be the third largest country in the world in number of higher educational institutions with an advantage of English being the primary language. In terms of number of students coming out from these institutions has been large but the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is found to be very low. Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam projected in vision 2020 said that “India is a strong democratic country” by “Building upon the contribution of each individual citizen”. The education commission set up in 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. D S Kothari, has recommended that Government should spend at least 6% of its GDP on education.⁽¹⁾

The system though has grown big but its standards and appeal internationally has not been in par. The IIM, which is identified to be the one of the top institutions of India does not even have the authority to award a degree it only grants a diploma which is equivalent to a degree. According to the London Times of Higher Education 2009, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) world university ranking no Indian University features among the top 100.⁽²⁾

The country lacks the critical mass in higher education. Its Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is a mere 11 per cent compared to China's 20 per cent, the USA's 83 per cent and South Korea's 91 per cent. This means that in comparison to India, China has double the number of students pursuing higher education. The Eleventh Five Year Plan envisages increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 15 per cent of the population in the age cohort group of 18-24 years by 2011-12. This requires a substantial increase in the number of institutions and consequently would require an adequate number of teachers for imparting education. Failure to redress the faculty shortage would hamper the achievement of the targets for increase in GER set out by the Government. ⁽²⁾

Former President Pratibha Patil said that India aspires to increase enrolment in higher education. She added that the country intends to raise GER in higher education to 30 percent by the year 2020, which means almost tripling the enrolment from the present 14 million to about 40 million. Thus the President had made the announcement at the sixth convocation of the Mizoram University, held on September 24, 2010. Patil also said that higher education has been accorded priority in our country. ⁽³⁾

Further, she added that universities of the country, existing and the new ones, will be responsible for achieving this target. The overall scenario of higher education in India does not match with the global Quality standards. Hence, there is enough justification for an increased assessment of the Quality of the country's educational institutions. Traditionally, these institutions assumed that Quality could be determined by their internal resources, viz., faculty with an impressive set of degrees and experience detailed at the end of the institute's admission brochure, number of books and journals in the library, an ultra-modern campus, and size of the endowment, etc., or by its definable and assessable outputs, viz., efficient use of resources, producing uniquely educated, highly satisfied and employable graduates. ⁽⁴⁾

FACTS AND FIGURES ⁽⁵⁾

There were **20** Universities and **500** Colleges at the time of independence.

At present, Universities and university-level institutions - **504**

State Universities - **243**

State Private Universities - **53**

Central Universities - **40**

Deemed Universities - **130**

Institutions of national importance established under Acts of Parliament - **33**

Institutions established under various State legislations – **5**

In addition, there are **25,951** Colleges, including around **2,565** Women Colleges.

Out of **25,951** Colleges,

7,362 Colleges (28%) have been recognized under Section 2(f) and

5,997 Colleges (23%) under Section 12-B of the UGC Act,

1956.

Total number of students enrolled:

Universities and Colleges **136.42 lakhs**

-**16.69 lakhs** (12.24%) in University Departments and

- **119.73 lakhs** (87.76%) in affiliated colleges

CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION

This falls into four broad categories: the low quality of teaching and learning; the supply-demand gap; uneven growth and access to opportunity; and constraints on research capacity and innovation.

The low quality of teaching and learning

Arguably, the greatest challenge facing higher education in India is the chronic shortage of faculty. Various reports estimate that 30-40% of faculty positions are unfilled [31]. Most faculties have had no training in teaching. Other issues in teaching and learning which compound the problems include:

- Most of the institution still follows the outdated, rigid curricula and the absence of employer engagement in course content and skills development.
- Very few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.
- Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.
- High student: teacher ratio, due to the lack of teaching staff and pressure to enroll more students.
- Separation of research and teaching; lack of early stage research experience.
- An ineffective quality assurance system and a complete lack of accountability by institutions to the state and central government, students and other stakeholders.

This has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across south Asia 32, and an insufficient basis for movement to higher levels of study and research. These problems are endemic across higher education institutions in India, including many of the 'top tier' institutions, but particularly so in affiliated colleges and state universities.

The supply-demand gap

Despite an average growth rate of over 7% in the last decade, India's GER in higher education is very low. By some estimates, even if India succeeds in its target of 30% GER by 2020, 100 million qualified students will still not have places at university. India needs to drastically increase the number of places at universities and enrolment through distance learning programmes. Over the last decade, the diversity of courses offered by universities and colleges has narrowed, resulting in saturated markets for engineers, technology graduates and MBAs.

Uneven growth and access to opportunity

Despite efforts to spread the location of higher education institutions more evenly across the country, there is wide variation, particularly between urban and rural areas, but also between states. There are still significant multi-dimensional inequalities in enrolment rates between rural and urban populations, rich and poor, minority and mainstream communities, men and women and people with disabilities. 'Inclusive growth' is a priority for reform in Indian education. With the growth in the middle classes, Indian universities must prepare themselves for considerable changes in student profile.

Constraints on research capacity and innovation

India does not have enough high quality researchers. The number of students taking PhDs and entering research posts is very low: 4,500 PhDs are awarded per year in science and engineering, compared to 30,000 in China and 25,000 in the US 34. There is systemic segregation of teaching and research; most teaching-focused universities (the vast majority) do not provide students with research experience or the skills which would prepare them for research careers.

Despite a growing reputation for 'frugal innovation' 35, mainly driven from the private sector, the ecosystem for innovation in Indian research institutions is weak. The causes, among others, stem from a lack of multidisciplinary working, no development for faculty and students in areas to stimulate innovation and few links with industry. These constraints reveal themselves in the failure of Indian institutions to make their mark in the world global rankings.

Key reforms planned

The higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion.

Excellence

Priority issues include improvements in teaching and learning, and a focus on learning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching; more international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links

between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and consortia.

Equity

Further initiatives targeted at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities.

Expansion

Scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects; enabling flexible and skills-based learning; ensuring a more even spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment.

Underpinning these reforms are:

- An emphasis on leveraging technology: a huge investment in ICTs and internet access under a ‘meta university framework’, which enables multi-disciplinary collaboration and development of technology-enhanced learning and teaching, including MOOCs and online courses
- A national mission for ‘teachers and teaching’
- Further support for multi-disciplinary research
- Further support to vocational education institutes
- A strengthened accreditation system along with more autonomy for states and universities
- Improving the quality of teaching and doubling the number of faculty
- Doubling of investment in R&D to 2% over five years
- Significant investment in ICT in terms of infrastructure and content development
- A shift to a credit-based and internationally recognised assessment system
- Strengthening the capacity of existing institutions, establishing 20 ‘innovation and research universities’ and 50 centres of excellence, training and research in science, technology, social sciences and humanities
- A review which could pave the way for for-profit private education in some areas
- The introduction of schemes to target underprivileged and underrepresented students

- Support for further internationalisation through a broad range of initiatives, including increased international research collaboration, international programmes for faculty development and attracting foreign faculty to India.⁽⁶⁾

Apart from the above challenges the major challenge faced by the HEI in India is the problem with the present regulatory frame work.

- Problem of coordination – gaps and overlaps in functioning
- Non-transparent processes
- Judicial interventions
- Regulatory system fails to maintain standards despite formidable entry barriers;

A characteristic weakness of regulatory regimes in India is that they concentrate on motives and intentions rather than on likely outcomes. While the legislatures have often designed regulation badly, the courts have compounded these fallacies. In *State of Andhra Pradesh vs. J.B. Education Society* the Supreme Court held that the consent of the State government is necessary before starting an engineering college and the AICTE cannot grant approval without this consent. But the grounds on which this determination was made is astonishing. The Court held that “the State authorities alone can decide about educational facilities and the needs of the locality. If there are more colleges in a particular area the state would not be justified in granting permission to one more college in that locality”.⁽⁶⁾ There may be good reasons to involve state governments in granting permissions, but this argument is premised on faulty logic. The court’s assumption is competition will not be good for the locality, both in terms of price and quality is questionable. Agglomeration of institutions in a locality is often a good thing for education as in the case of Cambridge, Massachusetts etc. As one commentator correctly observes, “In case there is no government money involved, except for usual zoning considerations, why should the state exclude more colleges from coming up in a locality? This ruling is symptomatic of the rather odd character of our regulations.”

With this, the Supreme Court has done away with the concept of educational centres. Many areas like Boston in the USA have grown as educational centres and provide many common facilities and an academic environment conducive to higher education. According to J D Singh in a article (2004), agglomeration of educational institutions has been well accepted worldwide and the State of Haryana has declared setting up of an ‘Education City’ in the State. Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu in India are examples in this context where many private colleges have found a base in a region and are doing well⁽⁷⁾.

In addition to this, the UGC Act section 3.1.2(a) suggests that an additional institution will be permitted only if the Commission is satisfied that the existing institutions in the state are not adequate to serve the needs of the state. If this suggestion is followed rigidly no quality competition would take place between institutions. Thus, India needs a regulatory system which promotes the growth of competition as a means to enhance institutional quality. An independent regulator has to be the cornerstone of such a system.

The GRE of higher education in India is roughly 6 per cent. This need to be doubled in the next decade. This involves crores of rupees investment. Since the Government will not be able to meet this requirement, all other sources of funds need to be tapped as well. Hence there is a serious mismatch of demand and supply. The size of demand and its projected growth, clearly indicate the need for new institutions imparting quality education in subject areas of contemporary relevance and job opportunities. Quality can be ensured only if there is sufficient competition among institutes to attract talented students and provide choices and innovative subject combinations. Unfortunately, the Indian regulatory regime tends to shunt supply rather than increase it.

All these issues with the regulatory frame work can be put into the following points.

- Problem of coordination – gaps and overlaps in functioning
- Non-transparent processes
- Judicial interventions
- Regulatory system fails to maintain standards despite formidable entry barriers;

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