THE CURRENT INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM – IS THERE NEED FOR REVAMPING?

Dr. Medha Gupte  
I/c Principal & Associate Professor, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s  
Hazarmal Somani College of Arts & Science and Jayaramdas College of Commerce & Management Studies, Mumbai, India  
Email: guptemj@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

Higher education plays an important part in the economic development of a country. The world is witnessing an academic revolution, where there is commodification of education. India offers a lucrative market, but her system faces a number of challenges. There has been quantitative expansion in higher education, with India ranking third in the world in terms of enrolment. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has increased from 8% to about 21%. Likewise there has been a spurt in the growth of institutions. However, the same cannot be said about quality imparted. Several challenges confront our system such as low GER as compared to other countries including China and Brazil, outdated syllabus, poor quality of education, dualism, resource crunch, inadequate infrastructure, faulty exam system and faculty crunch. Government has been initiating a number of policies from time to time with the objective of ensuring equitable, inclusive and accessible good quality education. The most prominent of them being RUSA, (Rashtriya Uchchattar Shikshan Abhiyan). The RUSA initiatives are built on plans which were first circulated in 2009 under UGC’s Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms. There is need for revamping of our system. Such need arises from the requirement of producing good citizens, building of knowledge base, bringing equity, creation of accountability and improving the employability of the youth. Several obstacles are bound to thwart the efforts. India has the advantage of possessing a universally acclaimed Brain Power and one of the youngest populations. Some deregulation along with implementation of proper policy measures will help India make her mark as a ‘Knowledge Superpower’.

Keywords: Equity; Accessibility; RUSA; GER; Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Higher education, as we all are aware plays an important part in the economic development of any country, in this era of globalization and liberalization, and India is no exception to this. The vital point to be remembered is that, it is only human development which can pave the way for overall economic growth and prosperity. While on one hand, education provides us with qualified and competent professionals, on the other; it makes available people with values which lead to both cultural as well as economic development of our nation.

In fact one can say that, since the past half century the world is witnessing an academic revolution, with a shift in the scope and opportunity. Today, higher education is an enterprise facing stiff competition and education a commodity which can be bought and sold in the market. India has a lucrative market which faces enormous challenges. Globalization has converted the world into a global village, characterized by competitiveness being considered as a decisive factor. In this paper an attempt has been made to briefly look into the current state of higher education in India, discuss the broad challenges confronting the higher education front, examine the need for revamping the system,
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
This study is based on the following objectives:
1. To briefly look into the current state of Indian higher education sector.
2. To examine the challenges confronting the system.
3. To discuss the need for revamping of the system.
4. To mention the measures adopted by the government.
5. To make a few recommendations which would augur well for the future.

Current State of Higher Education in India
Higher education can be defined as, a range of advanced courses and qualifications available for those interested in pursuing a professional career. It is concerned with making major decisions about your future in terms of the subject under study, the place where you want to study and the method by which you want to study.

Basically Indian Universities can be classified as

Unitary Universities: These are confined to a single campus and offer Under Graduation and Post-Graduation instructions.

Affiliating Universities: They are characterized by a central campus, comprising departments / schools imparting Post graduation instructions and Research. They have a number of colleges falling under the jurisdiction of the university. In addition, our system has two other types of University Institutions: Deemed-to-be Universities and Institutions of National Importance.

Deemed-to-be Universities (also popularly known as Deemed Universities) have been given the status of a University, by the University Grants Commission, with the approval of the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. The said status is accorded on the basis of the experience of teaching and specialization and excellence in a particular field.

The third category comprises Universities which facilitate Technical and Professional Courses at the Undergraduate Level.

One should also mention here institutes of National importance which are designated or established through acts of Parliament. They have the privilege to grant their own degrees, which generally is a monopoly of Universities.

Colleges in turn can be classified as:

Government Colleges: These colleges are managed by the State Governments.

Privately Managed Colleges: The management is constituted according to the statutes of the concerned University.

University Colleges: They are run and managed by the university itself.

Professional Colleges: Their field is mainly related to engineering, medicine and management.

Higher educational institutions can be classified into two categories:

Self-financing institutions and Institutions supported by a few corporate bodies.

Growth of Higher Education in India
One can foresee the growth of higher education in terms of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).
The Gross enrolment index measures the total number of students enrolled and is expressed as a percentage of the eligible population.

**Table 1.** Gross Enrolment Ratio In India – (GER)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GER in Higher Education (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The graph and the table clearly show that there has been a steady rise in the GER from 8% in 2001-02 to 2012-13

**Table 2.** Tertiary Level Enrolment Growth 2006-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No</th>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Central</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) State</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Planning Commission – Twelfth Five Year Plan
It is clear from above that there has been uneven growth of various higher educational institutions in India. The central government institutions grew at the highest rate of 81.5%, followed by private institutions at 70.5%. The lowest growth was in case of state universities which grew at 39.3%.

**Challenges Confronting Indian Higher Education**

While India has been making rapid strides on the economic front, possessing one of the largest young populations, she faces broad challenges on the higher education front. Let us discuss them:

One, the Gross enrolment Ratio is just about 20% which is low as compared to countries like China and Brazil. In fact higher education is the privilege of only a few. The system is characterized by a large number of dropouts at the elementary level. There is uneven access to higher education and disparities in enrolment across geographies. The problem is graver in the rural areas. The government aims at increasing the ratio to 30% by 2020.

Two, our education system is dualistic in character. There exists the problem of disparities in the quality of higher education which is provided to different citizens of our country. Apart from high dropout rates majority of our children go to educational institutions lacking the minimum basic facilities.

Quality imparted in most educational institutions is a contentious issue. Barring a few world class institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), the quality of our institutions is below par.

Three, our syllabus is outdated. The syllabi of several universities exhibit academic backwardness. As the subjects studied are neither job-oriented nor life-oriented, students are unemployable and consequently are without jobs. The university system has its own limitations as it is dominated by rigid rules and regulations.

The system has outdated curricula and pedagogy, based on the same old ‘chalk and talk’ method. There is absence of accountability and separation of teaching and research. There are constraints on research capacity and innovation, as India is devoid of high quality research and weak ecosystem for innovation.

Four there is inadequate Infrastructure in a majority of our institutions. Most of them have overcrowded classrooms, lack adequate library facilities and possess ill-equipped laboratories. There is absence of regular power supply, making internet access and use of computers difficult.

Five with the unprecedented growth of Universities, Colleges and Students, there is massification of higher education. This has created severe resource crunch and resulted in deterioration of the quality of education available to most Indian students.

The existence of too many regulatory bodies, bureaucracy, increasing political and social pressures, has had unfavorable repercussions on the system.

Six, there exists faculty crunch. Availability of dedicated, qualified and competent faculty is a major hurdle, more so in the elite institutions. There is absence of accountability and no measure of correlation between teaching and research. In the absence of incentives good teachers quit the profession and shift to the corporate sector in search for better pastures.

Absence of privatization is connected to political linkages. Indian universities and colleges are dominated by political lobbies. Private institutions have emerged in the fields of engineering, medicine, management, computer and law. Once private institutions of higher education are established with foreign recognition, it would have an effect on Indian university education system. Importance should be given to merit, capability and right attitude rather than earning degree in the traditional way just for the sake of it.

Finally, we possess an obsolete examination system. The system emphasizes rote learning and is a test of memory. The system is like a manufacturing house producing graduates year after year. Holding
only the annual examinations at the end of every academic year will only give weightage to memorizing rather than fostering and honing innate creative skills.

**Need For Revamping the Higher Education System**

Higher education is an important sector making important economic and social contribution. It aims at educating, training, undertaking research and providing service to the community. The global economy is undergoing transformation in several fields including higher education. Education helps advance human thinking, enrich human lives, increase human capacity and put forth new thoughts and ideas. All this calls for revamping the education sector to achieve the following goals:

Firstly, to help produce individuals who would be responsible citizens and form part of competent labor force. In other words it would help in producing an intelligent human resource pool which would help balance both need and demand.

Secondly, to help in build knowledge base information society for the 21st century. This would help in disseminating knowledge through teaching – learning methods, research and innovation.

Thirdly, higher education is essential for social and economic development. Revamping will help in applying knowledge for finding solutions to economic problems.

Fourthly, the challenge is to bring equity in higher education across the length and breadth of the country. Poverty leads to high dropout rates even at primary and secondary school levels, lower status of women, lack of easy access, lack of implementation of existing programs, inadequate use of resources, absence of political will and financial constraints. Adoption of a long term policy, with emphasis on removal of rural urban and gender disparities, is the need of the hour.

Fifthly, it would help in creation of greater accountability, as timely assessment and evaluation with the help of parameters will help bring relevant learning which can be applicable in real life.

Sixthly revamping is needed for skill development. It is essential to ensure that skill formation takes place in a demand driven manner. The curriculum for skill development needs to be reoriented on a continuing basis, so as to meet the demands of the employers and industry and align it with self-employment opportunities.

Finally, it must be remembered that attention has to be focused on improving the employability of graduates. This would include working on skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity as finally the progress of any nation largely depends on its higher education system.

**Measures Adopted By the Government To Improve The System**

The twelfth five year plan adopts a holistic approach to the issues of expansion, equity and access, while simultaneously aiming at maintaining a minimum academic quality and providing the opportunity to pursue higher education to all sections of society, particularly the downtrodden.

It is proposed to convert large and reputed colleges with adequate infrastructural facilities offering variety of programs into full-fledged universities. Likewise many colleges that are affiliated to degree granting institutions can be converted into campuses.

In order to broader access ‘learner centric’ approach needs to be adopted. To achieve this, measures would include regular revision of curricula, introduction of comprehensive and continuous study evaluation, a grade point system and new marking and grading schemes.

The details are outlined in RUSA 2013 - (Rashtriya Uchchattar Shikshan Abhiyan). The RUSA initiatives are built on plans which were first circulated in 2009 under UGC’s Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms.

To be eligible for funding under RUSA states have to fulfill certain conditions such as:
1. Creation of State Higher Education Council

2. Introduction of accreditation agencies, a commitment of contribution of something to RUSA funds and introduction of academic reforms as outlined in UGC Action Plan of 2009.
   
   A. Building Blocks of RUSA Academic Reforms
   B. Semester system
   C. Choice based Credit system
   D. Curriculum Development
   E. New Admission Procedures
      i. There would be two semesters of five to six months in duration.
      ii. Credit based workload of learners
      iii. Comprehensive and continuous assessment
      iv. Use of grades
      v. Flexibility of curriculum and options for student probing
      vi. Regular curriculum updates

Under RUSA a semester must include at least 90 teaching days spread over 18 weeks.

The RUSA document further asks for change in instructional methodology with reduced emphasis on lecturing and increased opportunity for student interaction. Instruction would thus be divided into three components namely lectures, tutorials and practicals (week) with both internal and external evaluation.

Internal would include essays, tutorial, presentation lab work and term papers. Semester end exam would assess skills and knowledge of students. Grading would be based on cumulative grade points. Curriculum development would be an ongoing process involving all faculties and would be carried out every three years.

The admission process requires objectivity and transparent procedures to ensure access, inclusion, equity and quality. Assessment would include both internals and term end evaluation.

In this context one can cite the example of our own university namely University of Mumbai. The University of Mumbai has introduced the Credit based Semester Grading System since the academic year 2011-12, and marks are assigned for class participation. Thus students are encouraged to participate in classroom discussion. The college grants complete flexibility to the teachers in their mode of teaching, provided it does not violate the norms and create indiscipline in the class room. Many Professors conduct class room discussions during the course of their lectures on topic related matters. Apart from relieving the students from the mundane traditional chalk board method of listening to a lecture of 48 minutes, it encourages student-centric learning.

Earlier the marking scheme was 60: 40 for each of the two semesters; with 40 marks assigned for internals – divided as class test of 20 marks, 20 marks assigned for projects/assignments and 10 marks that is 5 marks each for class interaction and attendance. The semester end examination would carry 60 marks.

Future of Indian Higher Education

Indian higher education as seen so far has witnessed rapid expansion in recent years. But as discussed, the system has several shortcomings and faces huge challenges in meeting the expectations of the future generations. Let us discuss the challenges and opportunities.

Challenges: The revamping of Indian higher education faces the following challenges
1. To ensure equitable and accessible quality education. Right to education is a fundamental right in India. At present a lot of disparities exist. If we wish to make our system effective it is necessary to make higher education equitable and inclusive. In addition, our system is characterized by islands of excellence existing along with oceans of mediocrity. Quality enhancement has to occur if India is to make her mark in the knowledge economy.

2. To foster competition. The process of Globalization and Liberalization has brought education to the forefront, with institutions both Indian and foreign vying with each other for the best talent, India cannot remain a silent spectator. She has to foster competition to enable our institutions to compete with the very best in the world.

3. Enhance public finance provision for higher education. Education in India falls under the concurrent list and this therefore a state supported service. The challenge confronting financing of higher education is how to find diverse sources of funding, while allocating greater public finance to meet the goals of access, equity and quality of higher education.

4. A uniform Regulatory Framework for generating standards and quality. At present there are too many regulatory bodies present in India hampering the higher education procedures. These need to be minimized to ensure autonomy without endangering quality.

Opportunities- The Indian government has emphasized future opportunities:

1. Encourage institutional collaboration in teaching and learning as there is considerable scope for state funding and private institutions;
2. Research funding in STEM – (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education). Apart from these disciplines being essential for student success, they are deeply related to the real world and make possible effective learning. This research funding is likely to increase;
3. Greater research collaborations are needed in neglected areas of humanities, arts and social sciences;
4. Measures have to be implemented to enhance the employability skills and research activities;
5. There is need for initiating steps to ensure strategic leadership and planning;
6. Efforts are required for development of skill market. India sadly lacks dedicated professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers. In addition there is scarcity of semi-skilled people like plumbers, electricians and mechanics to fulfill the requirements of the society;
7. Top priority should be given to innovative growth and more particularly those driven by the government. The need of the hour is provision of funds in a larger number of institutions. They have to be channelized through a body that guarantees cohesive and integrated planning at the state level.

CONCLUSION
As has been discussed higher education plays a pivotal role in India’s development process. She is no doubt plagued with a number of problems. But she has several opportunities in the form of young population, hardworking and ambitious youngsters, huge demand for quality education, emerging middle class and rich parents willing to spend on education and some high quality institutions.

India as we know is universally acclaimed for her Brainpower. We have to make the most of it by working on our weaknesses and taking a few bold initiatives which will enable us to become a Knowledge Superpower in the near future.

REFERENCE


