ABSTRACT

Education plays a remarkable role in the economic development of any country. Over the last decade, despite the fact that there has been remarkable progress in Indian higher education system, there are a number of problems plaguing our system and one of them is that of inequalities, more specifically between rural and urban systems of higher education.

There are a number of problems facing rural higher education. They include inadequate quality institutions, low Gross Enrolment Ratio, high level of dropouts, high cost of education, lack of equity, too much political intervention and bureaucratic inertia, absence of stringent enforcement measures, inadequate infrastructure and absence of competent and qualified faculty.

The gross disparity is evident when we compare the urban and rural higher education. While the GER in case of urban higher education is slightly higher than the minimum prescribed as a pre-requisite for socio-economic development, the rural areas portray a dismal picture. The gross enrolment is even worse in case of females.

With majority of our population living in rural areas, remedial measures have to be introduced on a priority basis. These could include improving the quality of education, creation of social and economic awareness to tackle dropouts, supplementing public funding and promotion of research. The task is difficult but not impossible. With the right policy mix surely the higher education could look forward to better and more equitable prospects.

Keywords: GER; Quality of Institutions; Dropouts

INTRODUCTION

Education is indispensable for the development and prosperity of both the society and nation. It provides skills and development for effective employment in the future. India’s higher education has exhibited remarkable development over the last decade, to become one of the largest systems in the world. However, there are a number of problems plaguing our system of higher education and one of them is inequalities. This Paper attempts to look into the problems facing education in the rural areas, briefly touches on the current system of rural higher education, looks into the problem of rural dropouts and suggests remedial measures to counter the same.

Problems Facing Rural Higher Education

Let us first look into the problems characterizing our rural higher education:

One, of the most important problems of rural higher education in India is lack of adequate quality institutions. There exist a lot of disparities between the rural and urban areas. In the villages a number
of colleges are situated in remote, backward and hilly areas. In addition there is almost total absence of technical higher educational institutions.

Two, providing access to higher education is one of the major problems confronting our system. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), measures the access level by taking the ratio of persons of all age groups enrolled in various programs, to the total population in the age group between 18 and 23. The Gross enrolment Ratio in the rural areas is much lower than that in the urban areas. This is evidenced by the fact that while 3.7% of males and 1.6% of females are graduates in the rural areas, 15% males and 8% females have graduation degrees in their urban counterparts.

Three, the most important problems is that of Dropouts. The dropout rate refers to the percentage of students failing to complete a particular school or college course. It simply means leaving a school, college, university or group for practical reasons, necessities or disillusionment with the system by an individual, without completing the prescribed course of study.

In India as the school dropout is above average very few children seek higher education. Even during college life factors such as burden of family, poor infrastructural facilities, lack of monetary support and wrong attitude towards higher education results in high dropout rates.

Four, there is the problem of equity. On one hand GER is low for the overall population, while on the other there are widespread disparities such as rural-urban disparity, occupation disparity, gender disparity, inter- state disparity etc. In India, according to our Constitution each and every individual has the basic right to education. However, due to regional disparity in economic development and also on account of uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, higher education facilities are not equally available to all sections of society.

Five, there are severe quality constraints in rural education. According to the NASSCOM Report of 2005 just 15% of graduates of general education and 25-30% of technical education are employable. This could be attributed to the following factors:

a) Quality norms cannot be maintained by these institutions; Indian system in the rural areas lags way behind in terms of quality. Criteria have to be laid down to evaluate the quality. Individual institutions find it difficult to maintain the norms.

b) Absence of stringent enforcement process. It is very easy to lay down different policy decisions. What is more important, however, is that they have to be enforced and India lacks a stringent enforcement process.

c) Political interference and corruption hamper this process. There is too much political interference and bureaucratic inertia in Indian higher education system. These act as impediments to the process.

Six, an important obstacle is the high cost of education. The problem is worse in case of technical education where it is only a dream for the rural people mainly dependent on agriculture. The lower middle class families cannot even afford ordinary education.

Seven, there is absence of adequate infrastructure. This is a major hurdle. Most of the rural institutions are devoid of proper classrooms, lighting facility, frequent power disturbances, drinking water, ill-stocked libraries and under-equipped laboratories.

Eight, there exists the problem of faculty. The quality of teaching depends on the quality of teaching faculty. One of the requisite conditions for quality education is the existence of adequate ad qualified faculty. Quality teachers always prefer better colleges in terms of better input, standard teacher-student ratio, better physical facilities, etc. This dissuades competent and qualified faculty from seeking employment in rural areas.
Status of Higher Education in Rural Areas

Higher education as we have seen is the backbone of modern society as it is empowered with the building up of the future generations. The urban-centric nature of our education system can be seen from the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.59</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
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<td>Males</td>
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<td><strong>14.42</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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<td>Females</td>
<td>Females</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10.57</strong></td>
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Graph 1

The graph and preceding table shows that the general enrolment Ratio is 12.59, the GER is higher in case of males, as compared to females.

Graph 2

The second Graph portrays a dismal picture. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in the rural areas is a poor 7.51, while in case of males it is 9.28, the situation is much worse in case of females standing at 5.67.
The situation in the urban areas is much better. The GER in urban areas is 23.79, with the ratio being 24.77 for males and 22.56 for females. The picture clearly portrays the inequality that exists between the urban areas and the rural areas when it comes to higher education.

Remedial Measures

With the entry of Globalization along with Liberalization and Privatization there is urgent need for making available various policies, programs and facilities in higher education and this requires giving equal attention to the rural areas. It is therefore essential that we take a feed-back from the rural students, about the awareness and utilization of facilities introduced from time to time, as also to check the status of the availability of these facilities in the institutions where they are enrolled.

As seen earlier Indian system of higher education has increased by leaps and bounds, but unfortunately it has not been accompanied by improvement in the quality imparted. The situation is worse in the rural areas. All plans for expansion must lay emphasis on improving the quality of education. In this context, one can mention the need for establishing high quality higher educational institutions with respect to general education, Professional education and agricultural colleges in the rural areas. Care must be taken to develop skills of teachers for improving teaching learning transaction, creating a conducive academic environment, improving infrastructure, and introducing technology enabled learning wherever possible.

Financial Paucity is an important impediment affecting higher education in general and rural education in particular. Education is essentially a merit good. With increasing demand for higher education the government may not be in a position to cater to all the needs. Therefore, steps have to be taken to supplement government efforts. Keeping in mind the humble background of rural students efforts have to be made to provide education available at subsidized rates. This will help in addressing two crucial issues namely assess and equity.

The most important task is that of tackling the problem of rural dropouts. This calls for creation of a social awareness of the advantages of seeking and completing higher education and its repercussions on the future generations. A sense of awakening has to be generated, where the rural population is made to realize the significance of female education and the resulting employment prospects. This will help us in tackling the two basic problems of poverty and population explosion.

Research plays an important role in the economic development of any country and rural higher education is no exception to the rule. Providing for comprehensive study and innovation, is a necessary ingredient of progress of a nation. Therefore the need arises for the establishment of research centers in the rural areas.
CONCLUSION

Thus though there has been massive expansion of higher education in India, it has not been able to cope with the task of catering to India’s teeming millions. Today rural higher education is characterized by low enrolment, poor completion rates leading to large scale dropouts. According to UNESCO a minimum GER of 20% is required for rapid socio-economic development. While the urban sector fulfills this condition, it is woefully short in the rural areas, where majority of Indian population resides. Therefore special efforts have to be made to address this problem.

There has been growth in the number of educational institutions, but the gap in rural-urban disparities, regional disparities, inadequate infrastructure etc seem to be widening. Thus a number of problems are inflicting our system of higher education. Resolving these issues is a Herculean but not an impossible task. Various Committees have been appointed in India to look into India’s system of Higher Education. If we start implementing these recommendations, a way can be initiated for moving higher education in the correct direction with the passing time.

REFERENCE