

Higher Education in India: Challenges and Government's Initiatives

Aditi Nath

Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India.

*Corresponding author: aditinath1@gmail.com

Abstract

Higher Education stands as one of the pillars of success of any nation. So it becomes necessary to understand the pros and cons of Higher Education system of any country. Therefore, the present paper purports to finding out the specific challenges which is evident in the Higher Education system of India and Government's initiatives to fight the existing challenges. Secondary data was used to infer the current scenario of Higher Education in India. It was found that the contribution of National Knowledge Commission (NKC), University Grants Commission (UGC), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) is enormous in addressing various aspects of Higher Education in India. In spite of many efforts by the Govt. of India to harness the education system, there is a huge gap between the policies initiated and their implementation which is demanding innovate approaches and models to ensure quality education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Challenges, Government's Initiatives.

Knowledge or education has always been important but perhaps never more so in man's history than today. In a science-based world, education and research are crucial to the entire developmental process of not only mankind him/herself but also a country of his/her residence, its welfare, progress and security. In the quest for development, primary education is an absolute essential factor as it creates the foundation for the development. On contrary higher education acts as an important element, for it provides the cutting edge. And universities are the core of higher education. Islands of excellence in professional educational institutions, such as IITs and IIMs, are valuable complements for scanty but cannot be substitutes for universities, which provide educational opportunities for people at large. There is no conflict in stating that higher education has made a significant contribution to economic development, social progress and political democracy in independent India. It is a source of dynamism

for the economy, social opportunities for people and fostered the vibrant democracy in our polity. It has provided a beginning for the creation of a knowledge-society. But it would be a mistake to focus on its strengths alone. It has weaknesses that are a cause for serious concern.

Classification of Education

The Indian education system has been classified in different segments at different times and it has been perceived by the general public accordingly. But in 2014, a noble initiative has been taken up by Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, in the form of InSCED. Indian Standard Classification on Education (InSCED) has been developed for the first time as part of national framework for the storage, exchange and dissemination of statistical and administrative data on educational activities in India will be known as InSCED 2014. According to InSCED 2014, the levels A to E pertains to School Education and the level F to L pertains to Higher Education and level M, N and O pertains to Certificate courses, in-Service Training and Adult Education respectively.

Table 1.1: Indian Standard Classification of Education

Level A to E (School Education)	Level F to L (Higher Education)	Level M, N, O (Certificate Courses, In-Service Training, Adult Education)
Pre Primary	F. Under Graduate	M. Certificate
B. Primary	G. Post Graduate	N. In-service training
Upper Primary	H. M.Phil	O. Adult Education
Secondary	Ph.D.	
Senior Secondary	Diploma	
	Post Graduate Diploma including Advanced Diploma	
	Integrated	

Source: MHRD, InSCED, 2014

Class wise classification of education levels

Table 1.2. Class wise classifications

Level A to E (School Education)	Class
Pre-Primary	Class Nursery to Kindergarten
Primary	Class I to V
Upper Primary	Class VI to VIII

Secondary	Class IX to X
Senior Secondary	Class XI to XII
Level F to L (Higher Education)	
Under Graduate	
Post Graduate	
M.Phil	
Ph.D.	
Diploma	
Post Graduate Diploma including Advanced Diploma	
Integrated	
Level M,N,O (Certificate Courses)	
Certificate	
In-Service Training	
Adult Education	

Source: MHRD, InSCED 2014.

Higher Education

It is widely recognized that higher education promotes social and economic development by enhancing human and technical capabilities of society. Technical change and institutional change are key components of development. Higher education plays an important role in facilitating these changes by incorporating all of the various demographics of the population.

Higher education has been found to be significantly related to the human development index, and greater for the disadvantaged groups (Joshi, 2006). Similarly, the lack of such education causes the inverse to occur; i.e. the greater the level of higher education in a society, whether in stock or flow forms, the greater the level of human development can be, through its influence on two main components of human development index: life expectancy and GDP per capita (Tilak, 1994).

In its size and diversity, India has the third largest higher education system in the world, following China and the United States. The higher education system in India grew rapidly after independence (Agarwal, 2006).

Today, Indian higher education is comprised of 33,657 institutions, made up of 634 universities and 33,023 colleges; it is the largest higher education system in the world in terms of the number of institutions, but it ranks the third in terms of enrolment with about 17 million students (UGC 2012). With the changing demographics, political, philanthropic and economic environment, the objective of higher education has now a more focused attention on access and equity.

With this back ground author would like to address the following objectives in the paper

Objectives

1. To find out the challenges of Higher education in India
2. To explore government’s initiatives in Higher Education
3. To study the financing of Higher Education in India

Data Collection

The research paper is based on secondary data. Various sources that have been used for the same include the reports and documents of Ministry of Human Resource Development, various regulatory bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), accreditation organizations, National Sample Survey Organization, Five Year plan documents, etc.

Observations and Findings

The observations and findings with regard to the Indian higher education have been mentioned here along the same lines as the objectives, i.e. challenges, government’s initiative and financing of Indian Higher Education.

Challenges

There are many challenges posed for higher education system in India. Some of the key challenges are related to access, quality, governance, funding.

- (a) **Access:** India’s Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is about 15 percent (MHRD 2011) which is much lower than the world average of 26 percent (and of course, that of many advanced countries-over 50 percent). Making matters worse, there is a wide disparity in GERs across states, urban and rural areas, gender and communities. The enrolment ration in urban areas is 24 percent while in rural areas it is a poor 7.5 percent; for women it is 10.5 percent and for socially disadvantaged groups it is even lesser.

Table 2.1 Level Wise Enrolments (In Lakhs) 2010-11

Year/Level	Primary (I-V)			Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Secondary/Senior Secondary (IX-XII)			Higher Education		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2005-06	705	616	1321	289	233	522	223	161	384	88	55	143
2006-07	710	627	1337	298	246	544	229	169	398	96	60	156
2007-08	711	644	1355	310	262	572	252	193	445	106	66	172
2008-09 (P)	700	645	1345	294	260	554	256	199	455	112	73	185
2009-10 (P)	708	648	1356	318	276	594	267	215	482	124	83	207
2010-11 (P)	705	648	1353	328	292	620	283	229	512	155	120	275

Source: MHRD 2013

- (a) **Quality:** The quality of higher education in India is mediocre at best. According to the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), 90 percent of the universities and 70 percent of the colleges are of mediocre or poor quality. In 2007–08, 45 per cent of the positions of professors, 51 per cent positions of readers, 53 per cent positions for lecturers were vacant in Indian Universities (FICCI, 2011). In 2009, a review committee set up by the MHRD found 88 of the 130 deemed universities to be of inferior quality and identified problems such as control of management boards by nominees of the sponsoring trust or government functionaries, low quality of research, and improper practices in admission process.
- (b) **Equity:** The issues related to inequity have four dimensions in India: gender disparity, geographical inequity (by state/province), ethnic groups based inequity, and inequity based on economic class. Males register a GER of 17.1 per cent as against that of female being 12.7 per cent. The Gender Parity Index (GPI2) for higher education in India is 0.74. A wide disparity can be observed in the GER by states ranging from as low as 9 per cent as that in Assam to as high as 48 per cent in Delhi. The inequity on the basis of peoples' ethnic background is highlighted by GER for Scheduled Castes–SCs³ (the most disadvantaged group of indigenous population) being 11 per cent, Scheduled Tribes–STs (indigenous population) being 10 per cent as against 15 per cent for all categories combined (MHRD, 2011).
- (c) **Over-Regulated and Under-Governed:** The National Knowledge Commission has aptly described the current regular environment in higher education as 'over-regulated and under-governed'. Multiple agencies, with overlapping functions, are regulating almost every aspect of functioning of a higher education institution. The university Grants Commission (UGC) and The All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) have wide powers to regulate the sector: the UGC for universities and colleges teaching general subjects, and the AICTE for technical education. Besides the AICTE, there are 14 statutory professional councils that regulate courses related to areas such as law, medicine and nursing. The NAAC and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) are autonomous bodies set up by UGC and AICTE, respectively that accredit institutions.
- (d) **Funding:** Universities in India face financial constraints. Only 0.7 percent of India's GDP is spent on higher education (as against a target of 1.5 percent) which is lower than countries such as the US (2.9 percent), UK (1.3 percent) and China (1.5 percent) (NBS of China 2007; NCES 2010: 110-11). In general, about 75 percent of maintenance expenditure is spent on salaries and pensions, and 15 percent is absorbed by claims such as rents, electricity, telephones, and examinations (NKC 2009).

Governments' Initiatives

Considering citizen of India as one of the most valuable resource and to nurture and care their needs in the form of basic education to achieve quality of life the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was created on September 26, 1985, through the 174th amendment to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961. Currently, the MHRD works through two departments:

- Department of School Education and Literacy
- Department of Higher Education

The Department of School Education and Literacy is responsible for development of school education and literacy in the country and the Department of Higher Education is engaged in bringing opportunities of higher education and research to the country so that Indian students are not found lacking in skills and talents, when facing an international platform. For this, the Government has launched joint ventures and signed MoUs to help the Indian student benefit from the world opinion. Moreover, for the promotion of higher education the government has introduced several new bills in the parliament. These are as follows

(i) New Higher Education Bills

- (a) The Higher Education and Research (HER) Bill, 2011 to establish the National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER).
- (b) The National Commission for Human Resources for Health (NCHRH) Bill, 2011;
- (c) The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010;
- (d) The Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010;
- (e) The Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010;
- (f) The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010.

The bills largely focuses on accountability through traditional regulatory approaches, by establishing new regulatory bodies, mandatory accreditation, dispute resolution, and penalizing unfair practices including capitation fees. There is also a bill to allow foreign institutions to set up campuses without an Indian Partner.

(i) Schemes

The discussion on challenges made it clear that the education system is experiencing low enrolment; drop out, unsatisfactory teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate funds and poor governance which is hampering in receiving quality education. By giving equal importance to all these components, MHRD has introduced different need based schemes. These are presented as below, for the year 2011-12.

Table 3.1: List of Schemes of the Human Resource Development, 2011-12.

Group 1	Enrolment Increasing Scheme	National Bal Bhawan, New Delhi
		SarvaShikshaAbhiyan
		RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan
		National Institute of Open Schooling
		Access and Equity
		Indira Gandhi National Open University
Group II	Dropout Reducing Scheme	National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in Schools
		National Merit-cum-Means Scholarship Scheme
		Educational Loan Interest Subsidy
		Commonwealth of Learning Scholarships/ Apprenticeship Training
		Scholarship to Students from Non-Hindi Speaking States/ Union Territories and Other Scholarships
		Scholarship for College and University Students
		Book Promotion
Group III	Quality Improving Scheme	1. Strengthening of Teachers Training Institutions
		2. National Council of Educational Research and Training
		3. Vocationalisation of Education
		4. National Mission in Education through Information and Communication Technology
		5. Directorate of Hindi
		6. Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology
		7. Kendriya Hindi Shikshan Mandal
		8. National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language
		9. National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language
		10. Central Institute of Classical Tamil, Chennai
		11. Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan
		12. Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratisthan
		13. Education in Human Values
Group IV	Equity in Education	1. Mahila Samakhya
		2. National Scheme for Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education
		3. Scheme for Construction and Running of Girls Hostels for Students of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools
		4. Women's Hostels in Polytechnics

		5. Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage
		6. Polytechnics for Disabled Persons
		7. Adult Education and Skill Development Scheme
		8. Support to Non-Governmental Organisations/ Institutions/ State Resource Centres for Adult Education and Skill Development
		9. National Literacy Mission Authority
		10. Other Programmes in Adult Education

Source: GOI 2011

Reservation

The vision statement of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) highlights the consciousness amongst the policy makers for affirmative action. Equitable access of higher education is described as an unambiguous objective. The most prominent policy for promoting access to higher education has been reservations. The policy of reservation in higher education is based on the assertion that participation of disadvantaged groups has been low, and reservation would enhance their participation. The percentage of reservation varies across the States in accordance with the population of these groups in respective States. 22.5 per cent quota/seats are reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe students. An additional quota of 27 per cent is reserved for Other Backward Castes in federal educational institutions. It means 49.5 per cent seats are reserved for the marginalized social groups. Effective caste based seats crosses 65 per cent. Many States of India already have reservations above 50 per cent since long. Along with reservation, the government provision of scholarships, special hostels, meals, book loans and other schemes exclusively for SC and ST students have encouraged the participation (Joshi, 2010).

Financing

The responsibility of financing higher education is shared by both public and private sector. Even in public sector it's a joint responsibility of Central/Federal government as well as State/Provincial government. About 80 per cent of the public higher education funding has been sourced from State governments and about 20 per cent from the Centre. Of the 80 per cent State government funding about 82 per cent goes in non-plan expenditure, i.e. routine administration and maintenance and hardly in any capacity building (FICCI, 2011).

Distribution of Government of India Education expenditure, by type for 2011-12**Table 3.2. Education expenditure**

Groups	Schemes	Allocation (Rs. in millions)
Group I	Enrolment Increasing Scheme	213,930.0
Group II	Dropout Reducing Scheme	103,047.3
Group III	Quality Improving Scheme	20,314.6
Group IV	Equity in Education	11,678.9
Group V	Institutional Grant	212,943.7
Group Va	School Education	50,129.3
Group Vb	Higher Education	162,814.4
Group Vb (i)	University Grants Commission	89,274.1
Group Vb (ii)	Non-Technical Higher Education	16,140.7
Group Vb (iii)	Technical Higher Education	57,399.6
Group VI	Grant for North East State	49,707.0
Group VII	Other Administrative Expenditure	2,029.9

Source: GOI 2011

The Central government spending is lopsided towards central universities and centers of excellence, serving hardly 3 per cent of the total students. While the trend has always been upwards, the total public expenditure on higher education at about 1.25 per cent of the GDP, is by any standards certainly insufficient (UGC, 2012). The private expenditure on higher education has increased about 12.8 times during last one decade. The household expenditure on higher education shows that the share of tuition and other fees have increased to about 53 percent, which largely due to increase in the share of private institutions.

Conclusion

The Indian Higher Education has various complexities in context of regulations, access, finance, equity, governance etc. The regulatory bodies of higher education have cumbersome procedures which are resulting in lack of clarity for the ones who are supposed to implement the same. As a result regulations associated confusions cause apprehension in terms of perceiving the regulation to suit the individual requirements the best. When the higher rates of gross enrolment ratios still remain unfulfilled, it would be very challenging to create sufficient opportunities to assure access to every eligible candidate in the relevant age cohort. There will soon be huge demands on the system with universalisation of elementary and secondary education and the growing number of youth. The higher education system needs a major overhaul to provide greater autonomy with accountability and strengthening of governance as well as enforcement of regulation. As for infrastructure, 48 percent of universities and 695 of colleges have infrastructure deficiencies. Broadly the Indian higher education is facing triple challenges like

‘Expansion, Inclusion and Excellence’. In this context, flexibility, diversity, different approaches and models to ensure quality higher education has become the need of the hour.

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