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A study on higher education in India: Issues, challenges and directions

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Abstract
India's Higher Education system is the largest in the world in terms of number of institutions. Higher education in India has undergone rapid development after post-independence era. Every society gives importance to education because it is a panacea for all evils. It is the key to solve the various problems of life. Education has been described as a process of waking up to life also. This article attempts to examine the scenario of higher education in India. Besides the university departments of education and their affiliated colleges, government and government aided institutions; private and self-financing colleges and open universities are also engaged in education. This paper discussed the issues of higher education and direction to improve the higher education in India.

Keywords: development, higher education, post-independence, university

Introduction
Higher education is of vital importance for the country, as it is a powerful tool to build knowledge-based society of the 21st Century. With the growing size and diversity of the higher education sector particularly in terms of courses, management and geographical coverage, it has become necessary to develop a sound database on higher education. Existing data base on higher education is inadequate and out-of-date. Collection and dissemination of data on higher education suffers from incomplete coverage, inordinate time lag etc. Due to this, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which is being calculated on the basis of available data, does not reflect the correct picture of the country's development in respect of Higher Education sector. Government has set a target of increasing the GER from the present level of about 12% to 15% by the end of XI Five Year Plan and to 30% by the year 2020. Various new initiatives have been taken during XI Five Year Plan to increase the GER. Reliable and comprehensive data-base is an immediate requirement to measure the actual GER and efforts taken to improve the GER. A sound database on higher education is also required for planning, policy formulation, fulfilling International Commitments, Research etc.

Methodology
Nature of Study
The study is mainly descriptive in nature. Secondary data are used for the purpose of the study

Secondary Data
Secondary data was collected from websites, various articles and journals

Limitation of the study
- Lack of primary data
- Time consuming
- As the research mainly depends on secondary data, it may not be hundred percent accurate.
- The study is restricted to India only

Total 1: Number of Universities in India (As on 25-05-2016)

Universities	Total Number
State Universities	347
Deemed to be Universities	123
Central Universities	47
Private Universities	237
TOTAL	**754**

Source: http://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/alluniversity.pdf

Issues in Indian Higher Education System
- The National level enrolment into high education is a mere 20%.The access to education among various groups such as castes, religions produces a dismally poor picture. While Upper castes, Christians, jains fare significantly higher than others. Muslims, SC, ST rank way below national averages. The poor among all groups are the worst affected with abysmal enrolments. The rural-urban, female-male divide are staking too. Private un-aided universities are out of reach to majority of Indians.
- Corrective measures should aim at spreading, strengthening of central, state university regulating the exorbitant fee charged by private university. Providing credible financial assistance to economically weaker sections and encouraging higher education among SC, ST, Muslims are the need of the hour.
- Rankings of our university on Global, Asian level reflect the poor state of quality in education. Lack of quality coupled with poor access forms a vicious cycle for students.
- Leveraging technology to provide Massive open online courses by IITs, IIMs can normalise quality levels. Improving infrastructure, teacher-student ratio, strengthening regional language resources and building global network of academicians such as recently launched GIAN project to bring world class teachers to India can point to a bright future
- Knowledge, skills should also translate into employability. Pursuing the objectives of National Skill Mission and

encouraging industry-classroom relations can go a long way in making students industry ready and relevant.

Challenges Faced By Education System in India:-

- Enrolment ratio less than 20%
- Disparities on access to education based on, Caste, religion, class, gender etc
- Lack of relevant teachings
- One teacher for 98000 schools.
- Only 722 universities for higher education should be at least 1500.
- No reliable data available regarding education status.
- No review of education policy in last 50 years.
- Increase in self-financed private institutes.

New Direction of Higher Education in India.

Move towards a Learning Society

As we move towards a learning society, every human activity will require contributions from experts, and this will place the entire sector of higher education in sharp focus. Although the priorities, which are being assigned today to the task of Education for All, will continue to be preponderant, the country will have to prepare itself to invest more and more on higher education and, simultaneously, measures will have to be taken to refine, diversify and upgrade higher education and research programmes.

Incentives to Teachers and Researchers

Industry and students are expecting specialized courses to be offered so that they get the latest and best in education and they are also industry ready and employable. Vocational and Diploma courses need to be made more attractive to facilitate specialized programs being offered to students. Incentives should be provided to teachers and researchers to make these professions more attractive for the younger generation.

Innovative Practices should be involved

The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. It offers opportunities for economic growth, improved health, better service delivery, improved learning and socio-cultural advances. Though efforts are required to improve the country's innovative capacity, yet the efforts should be to build on the existing strengths in light of new understanding of the research innovation-growth linkage.

To mobilize resources

The decline in public funding in the last two plan periods has resulted in serious effects on standards due to increasing costs on non-salary items and emoluments of staff, on the one hand, and declining resources, on the other. Effective measures will have to be adopted to mobilize resources for higher education. There is also a need to relate the fee structure to the student's capacity to pay for the cost. So that, students at lower economic levels can be given highly subsidised and fully subsidised education

Student-Centred Education and Dynamic Methods

Methods of higher education also have to be appropriate to the needs of learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. Student-centred education and employment of dynamic methods of education will require from teachers new attitudes and new skills. Methods of teaching through lectures will have to subordinate to the methods that will lay stress on self-study, personal consultation between teachers and pupils, and dynamic sessions of seminars and workshops. Methods of distance education will have to be employed on a vast scale.

Public Private Partnership:

PPP is most essential to bring in quality in the higher education system. Governments can ensure PPP through an appropriate policy. University Grants Commission and Ministry of HRD should play a major role in developing a purposeful interface between the Universities, Industries and National Research Laboratories (NRLs) as a step towards PPP. Funding to NRLs by the government should ensure the involvement of institutions of higher education engaged in research activities to facilitate availability of latest sophisticated equipment. There has been some effort both by the government and the private education institutions to develop the teaching staff at various levels. However, this needs to be intensified with appropriate attention to all the aspects related in order to prepare quality and sufficient number of educational staff. Such efforts need a very serious structuring for the research base institutions. We have to be optimistic that private-public partnership and the Industry interface will take place in the field of education at all levels, and particularly in the backward regions, which is the need of the hour. To achieve excellence, we thus need to create a real partnership between government, educators and industry– Partnerships that can provide our high-tech industries with skilled workers who meet the standards of their industry.

To Provide Need Based Job-Oriented Courses

All round development of personality is the purpose of education. But the present day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life and nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels in the field one is interested. So, combination of arts subjects and computer science and science and humanities or literature should be introduced so that such courses could be useful for the students to do jobs after recruitment in some companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to higher education. The programme must be focused on graduate studies and research and developing strategies and mechanisms for the rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge and for its application to specific national and local conditions and needs. Meritorious doctoral students should be recognized through teaching assistantships with stipends over and above the research fellowships. Finally, based on knowledge only vision of the future life and work can be had; based on this vision only a broad ambition can be fixed for oneself; and based on this ambition only one can lead interesting life doing satisfying job to do remarkable achievements in some field in the world.

International Cooperation

Universities in India have been a primary conduit for the advancement and transmission of knowledge through traditional functions such as research, innovation, teaching, human resource development, and continuing education. International cooperation is gaining importance as yet another function. With the increased development of transport and communication, the global village is witnessing a growing emphasis on international cooperation and action to find

satisfactory solutions to problems that have global dimensions and higher education is one of them.

Cross Culture Programmes

After education, tour to all the places in India and world as far as possible with the cooperation of government is necessary so that one can understand about people, culture, arts, literature, religions, technological developments and progress of human society in the world.

Action Plan for Improving Quality

Academic and administrative audit should be conducted once in three years in colleges by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-finance colleges should come forward for accreditation and fulfil the requirements of accreditation. Universities and colleges should realise the need for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institutions.

Privatization of Higher Education

In any nation education is the basic necessity for the socio-economic development of the individuals and the society. In reality only 20% of the population is educated in India. So, improved standard of education as first priority should be offered to the majority by the govt. authorities with sincere political will. Also, privatization of higher education is absolutely necessary in a vast country like India as government alone is helpless to do so.

Quality development

Quality depends on its all functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, building, facilities, equipments, services to the community and the academic environment. It also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimensions: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances. The level of education and knowledge being imparted by many colleges...is not up to the mark. Instead of concentrating on quantity, these institutions should concentrate on quality. The approach of doctoral research in social sciences needs to be more analytical and comparative and be related to society, policy and economy. A study conducted on Social Science Research Capacity in South Asia (2002) showed that the share of the Indian universities in the special articles published in the Economic and Political Weekly was only about a 25 percent. This too was dominated by only three universities, namely Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Mumbai & University of Delhi.

World Class Education

Indian government is not giving priority to the development of Standard in education. India should aspire for the international standard in education. Many national universities like in the USA, UK, Australia, etc. allow studies in higher education for foreign students in their countries and through correspondence courses as well. In the same way India Universities of world class education can also offer courses of studies to foreign students taking advantage of the globalization process. To achieve that goal it should adopt uniform international syllabus in its educational institutions.

Personality Development

Finally, education should be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunities for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. As a result business process outsourcing (BPO) activities have increased competition in the world trade leading towards the production of quality goods and their easy availability everywhere in the world market. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skilful men.

Status of Academic Research Studies

If we see the number of researchers engaged in Research and Development activities as compared to other countries we find that we have merely 119 researchers, whereas Japan has 5287 and US has 4484 researchers per million of population. Even in absolute terms, number of researchers in India is much smaller compared to US, China, Japan, Russia, and Germany. Numbers of doctoral degrees awarded in all subjects are 16, 602 out of which 6774 are in Arts and 5408 in science and rest in others (professional subjects). India has a little over 6000 doctorates in Science and engineering, compared to 9000 in China and 25000 in US. It increased rapidly from a little over 1000 in 1990 to over 9000 in recent years in China. In comparison, there has been a modest increase in India. National Science Foundation (NSF) - Science and Engineering Indicators (2002) shows that in the US, about 4% of the science and engineering graduates finish their doctorates. This figure is about 7% for Europe. In India this is not even 0.4%. Data on doctorates particularly in science, engineering and medicine suggests that only a few institutions have real research focus. In engineering there were merely 650 doctorates awarded in 2001-02. Of these 80 percent were from just 20-top universities. In science, 65 percent of the doctorates awarded were from the top-30 universities.

Stipends to Research Fellows

The number of Ph. Ds from Indian Universities should increase with proper standards. This should be seen in the context of extremely low fraction of Ph. Ds in India in relation to M.Sc. /B Tech., as compared to what it is in USA, UK, Germany, Japan etc. Meritorious doctoral students should be recognized through teaching assistantships with stipends over and above the research fellowships Identifying talented, meritorious students and encouraging them through recognition is very important to attract students into research and teaching.

Fair Quality Assurance System

Colleges and Private institutes should set up Internal Quality Assurance Cell and must follow a minimum standard to give degrees. The quality assurance system must be independent of political and institutional interaction and it must have a basis in the legislation. There should be operational, financial and academic autonomy coupled with accountability. There is a need of an independent accreditation agency with a conglomerate of government, industry, academia, society etc. means all stakeholders of the education to ensure that the stakeholders particularly the students are not taken for a ride.

They should be able to know whether a particular institution delivers value or not, then things can be under control to some extent. It is also important that all institutes of higher learning must make public the acceptability of their courses and degrees. (i.e. the status, recognition and acceptability of their courses by other institutions)

To increase Quantity of Universities

We need more universities because we are more in number and present number of universities is too less. On 13th June, 2005 Government of India constituted a high level advisory body known as National Knowledge Commission (NKC) to advise the PM about the state of education in India and measures needed to reform this sector. It was headed by Sam Pitroda and submitted its report in November 2007. NKC has recommended setting up of 1500 universities by 2015 so that gross enrolment ratio increases to 15 percent. It has also called for establishing an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to monitor the quality of overall higher education in India.

Examination Reforms

Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning should be implemented.

High-tech Libraries

Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. A library must be online and conducive for serious study. Indian universities should concentrate more on providing quality education which is comparable to that of international standards.

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