Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Institutions in India: Challenges Ahead

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ABSTRACT

Higher education system in India has been expanded in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest systems of its kind in the world. However, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is far below when compared to developed and many developing countries. The Government of India has focused on increasing the access and ensuring equity during successive plan periods. The resultant growth, though impressive, failed to ensure desired Quality in Higher Education. Only a few Higher Education Institutions earned reputation for high quality services. Globalization has resulted in significant changes in the knowledge economy and ushered new conditions for the provision of higher education to cater the skill requirement all across the globe. Under these circumstances, focus on quality enhancement of higher education in India assumes greater significance. This paper analyses the growth of higher education in India, the major quality concerns, the government initiatives and challenges for enhancement of quality of higher education in India.

KEYWORDS

Access, Equity, Faculty, Growth, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Quality, Services, Stakeholders, Student, System

INTRODUCTION

*The ideal of all education, all training, should be man-making. But, instead of that, we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The man who influence, who throws his magic, as it were, upon his fellow-beings, is a dynamo of power, and when that man is ready, he can do anything and everything he likes; that personality put upon anything will make it work. - Swamy Vivekananda*

The words of Swamy Vivekananda, describe the core purpose of education in any society. It is to improve the quality of human resource in the society. Nurturing of values as well as skills shall be the integral part of an effective education system. Education can accelerate economic growth and investment and is a key indicator to quality of life and the Human Development Index (HDI) (Agarwal, 2015). India has the reputation of being the oldest civilization in the world and the founder of high quality education system. The country has established the first International University at Takhasila which flourished from 600 BC to 500 AD, in the kingdom of Gandhar. As many as 68 subjects were taught at this university. It had students from Babylon, Greece, Syria, and China. Experienced

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masters taught the Vedas, languages, grammar, philosophy, medicine, surgery, archery, politics, warfare, astronomy, accounts, commerce, documentation, music, dance and other performing arts, futurology, the occult and mystical sciences, and complex mathematical calculations. The panel of masters at the university included legendary scholars like Kautilya, Panini, Jivak and Vishnu Sharma. Thus, the concept of a full-fledged university was developed in India. The Nalanda University was also established in India and functioned from 500 to 1300 AD. The university attained great fame. The university had a towering observatory for astronomical research and a massive library set up in three buildings. The Chinese traveler, Hien Tsang wrote that 10,000 Students and 200 Professors were at Nalanda University.

The Takshasila and Nalanda Universities achieved high level of reputation in providing quality education throughout the world and attracted students from many countries despite the poor communication and transport systems at that time. The age old scriptures like Vedas are the testimonies of high level of knowledge generation and research in the country. The Vedic education system right from the gross root level in the form of Gurukulas and at the highest level in the form of Universities provided high level of quality standards compared to any other system in the world.

The Indian education system suffered many setbacks and got diluted in standards over the last two and half centuries due to many obvious reasons. The quality of international repute became the glory of the past. No doubt, the country has expanded the institutional system to provide access and equity of education at all levels. Though India has made significant progress in terms of enhancing access to and participation in all levels of education, the overall picture of education development in the country is mixed and there are many persisting concerns and challenges relating to access to and participation in education, quality of the education imparted, equity in education, system efficiency, governance and management, research and development, and financial commitment to education development (NEP, 2016).

As per the records of University Grants Commission (UGC, 2016), the total number of Universities established in this country is 759. The number includes 47 Central Universities, 350 State Universities, 123 Deemed Universities, and 239 Private Universities.

There are 38,056 Colleges and 11,922 Stand Alone Institutions affiliated to different Universities providing higher education services in all parts of the country, including rural and tribal areas (AISHE, 2015). Though the substantial growth in numbers is impressive particularly during the last two decades, the most important factor i.e., quality has not been addressed at the desired level.

Eminent scientist and Bharat Ratna awardee, CNR Rao stated that ‘90 per cent of the universities and higher educational institutions in the country have outdated curriculum, keeping them away from making into the top institutes of the world. This is one of the major reasons behind why Indian institutions don’t make it to the top 100 universities in the world. There are lots of Indian students abroad who want to study in our country and come back but there are no quality colleges to offer them the same kind of environment and education. Talent search in our country has always been marginal’ (Rao, 2015).

The major issues such as commercialization of higher education, shortage of teaching faculty, inadequate and outdated infrastructure, rejections from industry, inadequate competency building to start new ventures, and absence of focused vision on quality have not been given due attention over the years. Therefore, the gaps are expanding in their scope and intensity. Though the state and union governments should shoulder greater responsibility, it is highly desirable to enhance other stakeholders’ participation in strengthening the system and eliminating the weaknesses.

The stakeholders of Indian education system are not satisfied very much with the present status of the system. They are not confident that the competency building by our education system can meet either national or global needs. Lots of Indian students are looking at advanced countries for admission into higher education institutions every year. The students as well as their parents are having a strong belief that the education system in advanced countries is far superior to that of the
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