

# Higher Education in India: Striving for Excellence

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**Abstract:** Although there have been challenges to higher education in the past, these most recent calls for reform may provoke a fundamental change in higher education. This change may not occur as a direct response to calls for greater transparency and accountability, but rather because of the opportunity to reflect on the purpose of higher education, the role of colleges and universities in the new millennium, and emerging scientific research on how people learn. These disparate literatures have not been tied together in a way that would examine the impact of fundamental change from the policy level to the institutional level and to the everyday lives of college and university administrators, faculty and students. Now the time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building. We need higher educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. This paper covers the issue regarding quality of higher education and to improve the same in the present scenario.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Quality, Present scenario

## INTRODUCTION

The efficacy of education in human development can never be understated.

Education is fundamental to every constituent of the society irrespective of gender, physical, racial, economic, geographical, cultural, or linguistic differences. Education is a Nation's Strength. A developed nation is inevitably an educated nation. India as a developing nation has been systematically progressing on the educational front since its independence and has seen an appreciable surge in reaching out to all the classes of its society. The improvement on the country's economic front, the up scaling of communication technology and the advent of the internet, have vastly leveraged the promotion of education across all verticals. The accelerated growth of the educational sector in last decade is a sparkling testimony to this fact, with facts and figures showing an unprecedented improvement of education in India.

Today over 60% of higher education institutions in India are promoted by the private sector. This has accelerated establishment of institutes which have originated over the last decade making India home to the largest number of Higher Education institutions in the world, with student enrolments at the second highest.

While the focus of the government has largely been on school education, in the context of post-secondary and higher education, consistent and quality growth however has become debatable. An overwhelming demographic divide still persists in the access to quality higher education with several communities still remaining under represented, contradicting the very objective of equity within the social growth of the country.

## Higher Education in a Changing Global Scenario

In the present context, education policies and strategies have to reckon with emerging challenges and opportunities that come from increasing globalization.

The task of nation building has to take into account increasing demand for certain professional skills and knowledge that is linked to the labour market. A globalized world will ultimately require the outsourcing of human skills in regions which will witness a "demographic deficit". Skilled human capital will have to be imported to certain regions to sustain economic growth. This can offer tremendous opportunities for employment and growth provided the youth are equipped with requisite knowledge and skills in this era of Globalization and Internationalization of education, there will be impetus to mobility of people including students, teachers and researchers. The main challenge, therefore, is to provide the requisite opportunities through investment in schools, colleges and universities. The access to quality education for all will create an environment whereby the fruits of development and growing opportunities are available to all sections. A further challenge is to ensure that the foreign institutions coming to India also fit in with the developmental goals of our nation.

## Issues in Access to Higher Education

With the urban and the rural divide having significantly narrowed due to the onset of technology, communication and better infrastructure over the last two decades, there has been an appreciable improvement in the reach of better higher education to several under-represented groups across the country. However the need of the hour is a provision of high quality education across all sectors to match the requirements of a growing Indian economy. The suffering of the under-represented communities has not been appreciably alleviated as unemployment, inflation, low income and lack of adequate access to quality education continue to plague them.

**Poor Infrastructure**– This shortcoming is perhaps the chief of all in delivery of quality education. While focus on the urban segment has been heavy, the same is not replicated in most of the rural areas. Establishment of quality higher education institutes in the rural sector has not been significant, which is a serious deterrent for the rural community in general.

**Inadequate faculty** – The student teacher ratio on the whole is at a lamentable state. While it is still lower in the urban areas, the rural areas take the brunt of the scene with the ratios being at very high rate.

**Unqualified or untrained faculty** - Even as the woes of inadequate faculty remain, a major part of the ones who are present to impart higher education are woefully unequipped in terms of either qualifications or experience or proper training.

**Inappropriate or over load in curriculum** –The curriculum of most higher education courses is very infrequently updated even as the world sees a continuously changing scenario in industry manpower requirements. This has caused a crass divide between the industry expectations and the college pass outs who are poorly equipped with the right technical, business or social skills to be employed.

**Lack of financial resources** –Most under-represented communities face a lack of financial strength to pursue any reasonably high quality of education. While successive governments have declared financial aid for many economically weaker sections for higher education, many communities are denied the advantage due to complex processes.

**Ineffective Monitoring** –Higher education requires constant monitoring from the regulatory bodies through periodic inspections and performance measurement methodologies. There are no appropriate parameters to measure performance indexes once faculty are employed and this has given rise to severe inconsistency in the delivery of quality education.

**Social differences between classes** – This constraint has been historically a damaging element in healthy social relationships. While the upper classes look down upon the lower classes, the lower classes are de-motivated from continuing their higher education. This divide is more rampant in the northern states of India by comparison with the south.

**Poor government funding** –With government funding in higher education receding over the years, many institutes themselves suffer, barely managing to survive. In such a scenario employees are more focused on sustaining themselves rather than deliver quality education.

### **Suggestions for improving quality of higher education for striving excellence**

There are some suggestions and Expectations from Government, Industry, Educational Institutions, Parents and Students for improving quality of higher education. There are issues which must be retrospectively and holistically measured and diligently handled so that the results may fall within the projected framework. Following are the suggestions-

1. **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.

2. **Industry and Academia Connection**-Industry and Academia connect necessary to ensure curriculum and skills in line with requirements. Skill building is really very crucial to ensure employability of academia to understand and make sure good jobs (keeping in view knowledge + skills+ global professional skills = good jobs).

3. **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.

4. **Innovative Practices**- 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.

5. **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.

**6. Coming of Information Age**-The world is entering into an Information Age and developments in communication, information and technology will open up new and cost-effective approaches for providing the reach of higher education to the youth as well as to those who need continuing education for meeting the demands of explosion of information, fast-changing nature of occupations, and lifelong education.

Knowledge, which is at the heart of higher education, is a crucial resource in the development of political democracy, the struggle for social justice and progress towards individual enlightenment.

**7. 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-centered 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.

**8. 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.

**9. Provision of adequate trained and qualified faculty**- Student Teacher ratio must be brought up to an ideal level and all faculty must possess adequate qualifications and training before taking up education. Periodical refresher training is an indubitable necessity to ensure adherence to performance standards. While updating curricula the faculty must be acquainted with the newer studies and technologies to keep them abreast and conduct proper delivery.

**10. Eliminate Ethnic inequalities**- Caste must be removed from focus and only economic backwardness must be made criteria for extending government support to all communities. Several individuals from the traditionally down trodden groups, even after having richly benefitted from government support continue to exploit the opportunities provided, preventing the real oppressed groups from any significant benefits.

**11. Promote use of Internet and Communication Technology** - Adequate emphasis must be placed on improvement of internet and communication technology as it enables easier access to information and educational content and facilitates better education than traditional methods.

### **Conclusion**

India has historically been a nation divided on social, ethnic and economic fronts. Successive governments have attempted to analyse and overcome the divide but have not made much headway chiefly owing to political compulsions. With the onset of higher technology, easier access to communication and information technology, the divide has shown definitive signs of narrowing down even though only to a marginal extent. The government and the private sector will continue to play a key role in improving the reach of good quality education to all the corners of the country. Most of the under-represented communities today are able to access better education at elementary and higher levels. However the ancient system of social divide as a whole remains unshakably strong and continues to resist change howsoever economy or technology attempts to. Still it is appreciable that several policy initiatives undertaken by the government are continuing to demonstrate better efficacy and gradual success. The turn of the twenty first century has brought about a revolution in technology and with it have tremendous changes been made across the education system of the country. Though the community divide exists still and perhaps will continue to do so, it is shown that equity in higher education and a healthy economy is not at too far a distance. We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world. The thrust of public policy for higher education in India has to be to address these challenges. However, one university can't make much difference. If the government welcomes more such initiatives, the future will be ours. We will be able to match and compete with other countries and the dream to be the world's greatest economy won't be difficult to achieve.

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