

HIGHER EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The destiny of India is shaped with the help of higher education. Higher Education is the main backbone of sustainable economic development and modern society. India has one of the largest, multi-faceted and complex higher education systems in the world. Higher education in India is facing problem because of quality of education system. India lives in villages. From the freedom struggle till today special attention to the education of rural people has given by many social reformers. But, majority of the higher educational institutions are urban centric and higher educational institutions belonging to rural areas are lack in quality education. Gross Enrolment Ratio in rural areas is 7% where as in urban area is about 23%. Poor communication system and financial crisis of rural areas are barriers for accessing higher education system.

Keywords: *Rural, higher education, issues and challenges.*

1. Introduction

"Education is an Ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity"

– Aristotle

Growth of the Country largely depends upon its educational prospect primarily in terms of social reforms and appropriate support to the aspirations and contemporary needs of the society (Gosh *et al.*, 2016). Higher Education is the main backbone of sustainable economic development and modern society. Higher education is intrinsically intertwined with the development process and constitutes the instrumentality of modernization of tradition. It is a powerful tool for socio economic transformation and focusing on proper education system to nurture future citizens (Dasgupta, 2015).

India, being the largest education system in the world and with the growing youth population is in the midst of a major demographic transition by adding working age population annually. India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 62% of its population in the working age group (15-59 years). Its population pyramid is expected to bulge across this age group over the next decade. It is estimated that the average age of the population in India by 2020 will be 29 years as against 40 years in USA, 46 years in Europe, 47 years in Japan. During the next 20 years the labour force in the world is expected to decline by 4% while in India it will increase by 32 %. This poses a great challenge. To reap this demographic dividend, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute substantially to the economic growth of Country (Nageshwar Rao and Dahane, 2016).

In the current environment of globalization, a country like India with such a huge population basically needs a sound higher education system capable of transforming a raw student into an employable graduate. Indian education system has expanded at a faster pace nevertheless the remarkable changes have taken place in our higher education system; though the tremendous growth of higher education institutions and changing scenario of development in education are efforts of policy thinkers and policy makers, the system of higher education is facing certain challenges in adequate coverage of youth to avail higher education (Hebbalkar, 2014).

2. Higher education in India

In India the higher Education has grown in a remarkable way 3 universities to 19 universities (1837-1947), 25 universities in 1947 to 677 universities in 2013 with more than 35000 colleges where the number of colleges in 1947 were 700. Total enrollment of students increased from 0.1 million (1947) to 21.80 million (2013). Enrolment of students in universities and colleges was found to be 32.3 million in the year 2013-14 (Table 1& 2 and Figure 1).

To compete with global education the establishment of 677 universities comprised 43 central universities, 295 state universities, 154 private universities, 5 Institutes set up by states whereas 50 Institutes set up by Central government, with more than 35,000 colleges.

The Indian higher education is the third largest after China and United States of America (USA). Total higher education enrollment today is of 25 million and on an average, five million graduate every year. Of this 25 million student enrolment, more than three million are Post Graduate and estimates point out that there are more 200,000 research scholars in various disciplines. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) which is presently higher than 20% is inching towards the 30% average of developed countries with various initiatives from the government of India. No doubt, India has taken great strides in Higher Education considering the fact that the GER of USA is 34% and China 28%. These include multifarious issues related to access, accreditation, employability, equity, faculty, funding, research, quality, and ranking (Nair, 2016).

FICCI (2012), points out that with the healthy growth of institution and student enrollment, India has become one of the largest higher education system in the world and higher education has grown 12 times which is the second position in the world.

3. Structure and Size of Higher Education in India

Higher education plays an essential role in the development of social, human and technical skills. India is recognized for its strength of higher education institutions in the world. Higher education involves three levels of qualification in the country namely graduation level, post-graduation level and doctoral program. Besides these, diploma course is also a part of higher education which can be pursued at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In the globalized economy, due to greater awareness, individuals give more emphasis on the quality and value of education and they are showing willingness to pay for quality education. Enrolment of students in universities and colleges was found to be 32.3 million in the year 2013-14 (Table 1& 2 and Figure 1).

Table 1. Status of higher education in India

Type and Number of Institution	Number of Institution			
	Central	State	Private	Total
University and university-level institutions	152	316	191	659
Colleges	669	13,024	19,930	33,623
Diploma - awarding institutions	0	3,207	9,541	12,748

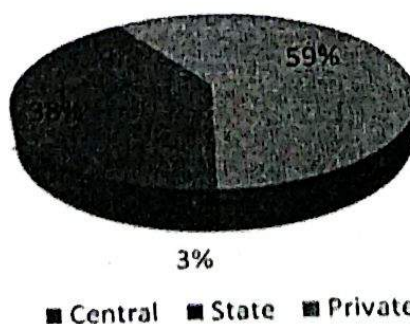
Source: Higher Education in India: twelfth five year (2012-17) plan and beyond

Table 2: Number of Recognized Institutions and Student Enrolment in Higher Education

Level / Years	Number of Universities	Number of Colleges	Number of Student Enrollment (in lakhs)
1950-51	27	578	4.0
1960-61	45	1819	10
1970-71	82	3277	33
1980-81	110	6963	48
1990-91	184	5748	49
2000-2001	254	10152	86
2005-06	350	16982	143
2006-07	371	19812	156
2007-08	406	23099	172
2008-09	440	27882	185
2009-10	436	25938	207
2010-11	621	32974	275
2011-12	642	34852	292
2012-13	665	35829	296
2013-14	723	36636	323
2014-15(P)	757	38056	333

Source: i) Statistics of Higher and Technical Education Publication (Figures from 1950-51 to 2009-10)
ii) AISHE Portal (Figures from 2010-11 to 2014-15 (P))

Figure 1. Enrolment in 2013



4. Role of Higher Education

Higher education helps in developing knowledge based economy, and provides skilled manpower and training to execute specific tasks and jobs. Higher education inculcates social and moral values in students. India's higher education institutions have been widely accepted not only in India but also in other countries which contributed in realizing the higher education policy of the 1950s that focuses on excellence in education, mainly in technology and science. Doctors educated and trained in India have been recognized as key persons of the British Medical services. India possesses a pool of skilled manpower which attracts the attention of world's biggest MNCs. Multinational companies are opening their R&D centers in India and outsourcing their work to Indian companies. This trend is apparent in many sectors such as software industries, medical sector, financial sector and others.

5. Issues in Higher education

Though Government of India's policy on higher education had three objectives i.e. Expansion, Inclusion & Excellence, Higher education in India is facing problem because of quality of education system. These includes inadequate infrastructure facilities, poor quality of faculty, low student enrollment rate, unmotivated students, outdated teaching methods, declining research standards, overcrowded classrooms, demand of continuous up gradation of syllabus, rapid growth of technology and science, challenging standards from international universities, wide spread geographic income, gender and ethnic imbalances, access to students from poor background, most of the faculties in higher education sector are not trained in pedagogy etc.

Central government prepares policy and State government needs to implement it. Implementations of these policies are never checked. One more concern about higher education in terms of employability is practical training. Practical training in South Korea is 95%, in Japan 80%, in Germany 70% where as in India it is 5%. In fact china has more than 5 lakh practical institutions against 3000 institutions in India involved in practical training.

More than 5 lakh foreign students move to USA, Australia, England, and Canada for higher studies whereas Singapore attracts more than 1.5 lakh foreign students and only 27000 foreign students come to India and it is a concern about the quality and standards of higher education. Large number of breakthrough – credits to the mankind has come from the laboratories of the Universities.

In order to achieve the underlines objective, we need liberal funding in higher education like what China has been doing over two decades. Currently, we account for a little over 2% of the global economy as against China's 12%.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education. 'India needs 1000 new universities and 50,000 colleges by 2020 to meet the demand of its young population' (Hindusthan Times, Kimberley Dixit, 9.12.2015). There is an imperative need to have many more universities and colleges to provide for places for all the aspirants for higher education and also to ensure inclusive growth.

6. Suggestions

Some of the suggested remedies are developing a meaningful interface between the industries, government and society, imparting relevant knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, habits, values at the age of 10-16 years by parents, team spirit among the students must be encouraged. Emphasis should be given on communicative skills. Kshama Pandey (2013) suggests Holistic approach in teaching leads for better understanding of the concept.

Faculty mentoring can be used as an important tool of faculty development and helps to create a supportive environment and potential growth. Entrepreneurship spirit should be developed among the students by giving them access to entrepreneurship education so that young generation become self reliant and independent which leads to the social growth of economy (Kalpana Mathur and Sheetal Soni, 2013). Teacher should prepare framework of the courses taught by them. The higher education system that needs to be properly planned, nurtured and developed keeping pace with the fast changing time of the knowledge – based economy of the world. The system needs liberal funding, aggressive break through research and innovation.

7. Higher education in rural area

India lives in villages. From the freedom struggle till today including reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore gave special attention to the education of rural people. In fact many institutions were meant only for rural people but over the period of years these institutions failed to receive the sufficient support and encouragement.

Access to higher education is major issue before policy makers. Higher education in country is still a distant dream for several groups. Most of the higher education institutes are urban centric where as rural population is deprived of access to higher education.

GER in rural areas is 7% where as in urban area is about 23%. GER for rural men is 9.28% against 24.77% of urban men where as GER for rural women is 5.67% which is much lesser than GER of urban women 22.56%. There are issues with education system and rural institutes. Education system in India has focused more on the needs of the urban middle class. Poor communication system and financial crisis of rural areas are barriers for accessing higher education system. Higher education is not equally available to different sections of the society due to regional disparity in economic development and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education. There is lesser number of institutes in rural area as technical higher education institutes.

Rural based institutes lack in physical and other infrastructural facilities which cannot be compared with international standards. Technical higher education is like a dream for the rural students because of its cost. Availability of adequate and quality of faculty is prerequisite for quality education. The problem here is quality faculty prefer better colleges in urban place. These institutes lack in implementation of best practices and lack in quality of education.

Nevertheless rural institutes face problem like most of the students are of the first generations of learners of higher education. Hence they do not have exposure. The institute gets lower grades from NAAC as the student dropout rate is high. The reason for high dropout is family burden, lack of monetary funds, less attendance. At rural places minimum cut off rank is not applicable at the

time of admission. Most of the students are scholarship holders, number of enrollments in educational institutes are bound to be more compared to number of teachers due to low quality of input higher ratio of teachers – students, poor communication, and grants sanctioned on lower side. Less access to ICT due to electricity problem are the challenges in improvement in the physical infrastructure.

Another challenge is lack of motivation to the faculty in research activities. The challenge for higher education system is to make students equipped with life skills such as self awareness, empathy, creative thinking, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal skills, stress and emotional management along with technical knowledge.

Finally access to IT is very low in rural areas though but as per IAMAT and IMRD (2009) 5.5 million are internet users out of 7.45 millions in rural area. However the consumption of this internet facility is used for communication and entertainment but not around education.

8. Measures for promotion of Higher Education and Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

It is necessary to adopt some remedies for improvement of higher education in rural areas as follows.

Required number of Government higher educational institutions has to be made available in the rural areas for improvement of higher education as well as development of rural areas. Cost of higher education have to minimize, so that the families belongs to lower category of income can also enroll their kids for higher education.

Scholarship facility should made available on merit basis. Proper research works have to be done for development of higher education. Traditional field of knowledge should also be given priority along with global technology for proper development of rural area and higher education on those areas. Proper infrastructure should be developed in rural areas for better improvement of higher education and sustainable development.

Separate schemes and financial grants are to be introduced by the state to support higher education to reduce the gaps between region, age and other

disparities. E-education should be encouraged to address the problems of accessibility, quality, faculty shortage.

9. Conclusion

India as developing country is undergoing a tremendous transition in demographics adding more working age population. Higher education in India is facing problem because of quality standards of education system. Most of the population lives in rural area. Access to rural masses is a serious concern. Most of the Higher Education Institutes are urban centric. Higher education and sustainable development in rural areas is facing big challenge having them to compete with the global players, especially after education becomes a marketable product and after India opened its market for global competitors. The annual exodus of bright students from rural areas of the state in search of better education partially indicates the defeat of the institutions of higher education. If the higher education is to be saved from becoming bane on economy of the rural areas, then a well thought policy for sustainable development and higher education combined with adequate Government funding and proper monitoring and control can bring much needed change in the area.

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