

## **Structure and challenges of higher education in India**

N.K. SINGH, KSHITIJ PARMAR<sup>1</sup> AND LOKESH KUMAR TINDE<sup>2</sup>

*Head, Deptt. of C.D. & Extension, B.V.R.I. Bichpuri, Agra. [Email—nksbvri@gmail.com](mailto:nksbvri@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*Present paper explains the story of higher education in India. It is an effort to analyze the situation and to identify the key challenges like demand-supply gap, quality education, Equity, research and development, faculty shortage and differences between State and central universities in India's higher education sector. The study also suggests some steps to improve the quality of higher education like Merit-based student financing, Internationalization of education, enabling a research environment and to attract high quality faculty etc. Further, it is felt that, India's higher education system can be expected to be better aligned to industry and global practices, and be more transparent and inclusive, provided the Government is able to create an enabling regulatory environment and put in place robust implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms. Enabling a research environment and making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool.*

Key words: demand-supply, quality education, education-industry

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of India's independence, there were 20 universities and 591 colleges while students' enrolment at the tertiary level of education was 0.2 million. After independence, the growth has been very impressive. India now possesses a highly developed higher education system that offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human life. India's higher education system is the second largest in the world after United States in terms of enrolment. However, in terms of the number of institutions, India is the largest higher education system in the world with 26455 institutions (634 universities and 33023 colleges). This means that the average number of students per educational institutions in India is lower than that in the US and China. The education commission set up in 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari (Kothari Commission) had recommended that government should spend at least 6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education. However, in over 45 years, we have been able to achieve only half the target. The Knowledge Commission additionally

recommends an increase of at least 1.5% of GDP for higher education out of a total of at least 6% of GDP for education overall.

The emergence of India as a knowledge-based service driven economy has made its human capital its major strength and opportunity for growth. Unlike China or other Asian economic giants, India's growth has not been led by manufacturing. Instead, the nation's pool of skilled workers has allowed India to move quickly up the economic value chain in several knowledge based industries. According to a report by ICRIER, New Delhi, India is home to the world's largest pool of scientific and knowledge workers and produces 400,000 engineers per year while the US produces 60,000. This indicates that on the science and technology side, India has built up the largest stock of scientists, engineers and technician. In order to sustain these positive trends and an economic growth rate of 7%, a venture Intelligence calculates that India's higher education gross enrolment ratio (GER) would need to increase from 12 to 20 percent by 2014.

*Present Structure of Higher Education in India*

In India the institutional framework consists of Universities, Deemed Universities, Institutes of National Importance and Institutions established by State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated with the

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar at Deptt. Of Agril. Extension, S.V.P. Uni. of Ag. & Tech. Modipuram, Meerut.

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D.Scholar, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Mohanpur, Nadia District (W.B.)

University (both government-aided and unaided). The Higher Education sector ensures the quality of the educational process with the help of accreditation agencies established for the purpose. The main agency which accredits universities and colleges in general education is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) established by the UGC in 1994, whereas a similar function is done for technical education by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) set up by AICTE in 1994, and for agricultural education by the Accreditation Board set up by ICAR in 1996. NAAC proposes to introduce the India Education Index (IEI) for ranking institutes based on academic, research performance and other parameters.

As per the UGC report 2011, presently there are 634 degree awarding institutions in the country, out of which 47 per cent (297) are state universities followed by deemed universities with 20 per cent share (129). The central universities and institutes of national importance and other university level institutions standing at 7 and 10 per cent each. Interestingly, the private universities are just 100 in number accounting for 16 per cent share. Regarding growth in enrolment, the total number of students enrolled in higher education in 1950 was 3, 97,000. The growth witnessed steady till 2001 and stood at 83, 99,000 but saw an unprecedented surge in next 10 years. In 2010-11 it stands at 1, 69, 75, 000, a figure that has almost doubled in the last decade. Representing the enrolment of girls during the same period, the report states in 1950 the figure was 43, 000 and in 2001 it stood at 33, 06, 000 while in 2010-11 it reached 70, 49, 000. Talking about enrolment by stages, 86 per cent students complete their Graduation, while only 12 per cent opt for Post-Graduate courses and only 1 per cent opts for research thus making it clear that the students either do not have zeal for pursuing post graduation and research or have better career option available after graduation. The rest 1 per cent go for diploma or certificate courses. In 1950, the expenditure in higher education was 0.64 per cent of the GDP while in 2009 it stood at 1.2 per cent of GDP.

#### *Challenges in Higher Education*

##### *1. Demand-Supply Gap:*

According to the recent report of HRD ministry, presently about 12.4 percent of students go for higher education from the country. Addressing a higher education summit organised by the Federation of Indian

Table 1: Growth of students' enrollment (000) in Higher Education Institutions

| Year    | Girls' Enrollment<br>(in thousands) | Total Enrollment<br>(in thousands) |
|---------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1950-51 | 43                                  | 397                                |
| 1960-61 | 170                                 | 1050                               |
| 1970-71 | 431                                 | 1954                               |
| 1980-81 | 749                                 | 2752                               |
| 1990-91 | 1437                                | 4925                               |
| 2000-01 | 3306                                | 8399                               |
| 2010-11 | 7049                                | 16975                              |

Source: UGC and Higher Education in India annual reports.

Table 2: Showing growths of Higher Education Institutions in India

| Year    | No. of Universities | No. of Colleges |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1950-51 | 30                  | 695             |
| 1960-61 | 55                  | 1542            |
| 1970-71 | 103                 | 3604            |
| 1980-81 | 133                 | 4722            |
| 1990-91 | 190                 | 7346            |
| 2000-01 | 256                 | 12806           |
| 2010-11 | 564                 | 33023           |

Source: UGC and Higher Education in India annual reports.

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), HRD Minister Kapil Sibbal said "We will need 800 new universities and 40,000 new colleges to meet the aim of 30 percent GER (gross enrolment ratio) by 2020. Government alone cannot meet this aim."

##### *2. Quality Education:*

Quantity and quality of highly specialized human resources determine their competence in the global market. According to a government report on the basis of their NAAC accreditation, 62% of universities and 90% of colleges were average or below average in 2010. Further, India's relative citation impact is also very low i.e. half of the world average.

##### *3. Equity:*

There is wide disparity in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of higher education.

- Inter-state disparity - 47.9% in Delhi vs. 9% in Assam.
- Urban-rural divide - 30% in urban areas vs. 11.1% in rural areas.
- Differences across communities - 14.8% for OBCs, 11.6% for SCs, 7.7% for STs and 9.6% for Muslims.

-Gender disparity - 15.2% for females vs. 19% for males.

*4. Research and Development:*

Research and higher education are complementary to each other. According to the available official statistics the expenditure on R&D in the field of Science & Technology as a percentage of gross domestic products (GDP) was 1.2 percent during the year 2009 in India. For perspective, countries spending the most on S&T as a percent of their GDP were Israel (5.11 percent), Sweden (4.27 percent), Japan (3.11 percent), South Korea (2.95 percent), the United States (2.77 percent). Moreover, India's higher education institutions are poorly connected to research centres. So this is another area of challenge to the higher education in India.

*5. Faculty Shortage:*

According to a recent report of HRD Ministry premier educational institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) are facing a faculty crunch with nearly one-third of the posts vacant. According to a report published in IANS around 35 percent posts are vacant in the central universities, 25 percent in the IIMs, 33.33 percent in the National Institute of Technology (NITs) and 35.1 percent in other central education institutions coming up under the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry.

*6. Differences that exist between the 'State' universities and 'Central' universities:*

The Central universities in India relative to State universities, have been better endowed financially, have enjoyed better governance and have taken the lead in research and development activities. But as the State universities vastly outnumber their Central counterparts, issues of poor governance and narrow outlook that arises out of provinciality remains key issues for the university sector in India.

*Next steps:*

- Ensure admissions to meritorious students independent of financial background.
- Internationalization of education would entail aligning different aspects of education (curriculum, faculty, etc) to international standards.
- Enabling a research environment would involve creating adequate means of research funding and

practical application of research.

- Create conducive environment and provide incentives to attract and retain high quality faculty.
- Leveraging technology for enhancing the teaching-learning experience will ensure better outcomes.
- Making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool.

**Conclusion**

This paper explains present scenario of higher education in India by analyzing the various data and also identify the key challenges like demand-supply gap, quality education, Equity, research and development, faculty shortage and differences between State and central universities in India's higher education sector. Some steps to improve the quality of higher education like Merit-based student financing, Internationalization of education, enabling a research environment and to attract high quality faculty etc. are suggested in the present study. Further, it is felt that, India's higher education system can be expected to be better aligned to industry and global practices, and be more transparent and inclusive, provided the Government is able to create an enabling regulatory environment and put in place robust implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms.

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