

Higher Education in the 21st Century: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the educational system, higher education is regarded as the tertiary level. This level gains significance as it addresses a country's economic growth by producing skilled workers, introducing research and innovations, and fostering the development of an intellectual community. Providing high-quality higher education is a constant struggle for a nation as diverse and populous as India. Different cultural and ideological practices, unequal socioeconomic conditions, resource distribution, and creating an atmosphere that is favourable for the right academic administrators of higher education constantly face a challenging task in managing higher education. The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to the state of higher education in India today and the difficulties it has in delivering high-quality instruction. Here, the researcher attempts to talk about the main issues that Indian higher education is facing.

Keywords: Higher education, issues, challenges and status

INTRODUCTION

After China and the United States, India has the third-largest student body in the world for higher education. India will rank among the world's major centers of education in the future. Since gaining independence, the number of universities, college-level institutions, and other higher education establishments in India has skyrocketed. The "Right to Education Act," which mandates free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14, has completely transformed the nation's educational system, as seen by the startling increase in school enrollement during the previous four years. The field of higher education has witnessed significant changes as a result of the private sector's involvement. Between 1950 and 2014, the number of universities grew 34 times, from 20 to 677. International education rating agencies have not ranked several of these institutions among the top in the world, despite these figures. Furthermore, India has not produced any top-tier universities. As indicated correctly, the New Education Policy 2020 In addition to fostering individual and societal well-being, higher education is crucial to making India a democratic, just, socially conscious, culturally sensitive, and compassionate country that upholds justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity for all. Furthermore, this research emphasized that the nation's economic progress and sustainable livelihoods are greatly aided by higher education. In order to create a more stable and prosperous society, an increasing number of young Indians are therefore likely to strive for higher education. Higher education must, at the societal level, facilitate the growth of an informed, skilled, socially conscious, and enlightened nation capable of identifying and putting into practice sound answers to its own issues. Therefore, providing more options for individual employment is not the exclusive goal of high-quality higher education (NEP 2020).

Therefore, higher education plays a more important role in India since the expansion and advancement of a higher education is essential to the nation's survival.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Public evaluations, international rankings of higher education institutions, and program quality are all becoming more and more important to society as higher education systems expand and diversify. However, by using research success as a metric for evaluating institutional worth, these comparisons frequently place an undue emphasis on research.

India has long been a place of intellectuals and students. In ancient times likewise, India was renowned all over the world for its universities like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and its intellectuals. India had 500 colleges and 20 universities by the time of independence, with over 2,30,000 students enrolled. Since independence India has evolved India has been always been a land of scholars and learners. India's universities, including Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila, as well as its scholars, were highly valued in antiquity. India had 500 colleges and 20 universities by the time of independence, with over 2,30,000 students enrolled. (Sheikh, Y. A. (2017). Higher education in India: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(1), 39-42.)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) and several councils oversee higher education in India. Established under the UGC Act 1956, the UGC has the authority to organize and promote higher education in India as well as authorize financing for such institutions. Coordination, standard-setting, upkeep, and grant distribution to academic institutions and research groups fall within the purview of the UGC. Recognizing courses, promoting professional institutions, and awarding money to undergraduate programs are the responsibilities of several professional councils. The number of schools and enrollment rate in India's higher education system have grown exponentially during the past 60 years. According to the most current UGC data, which discusses the increase in student enrollment, in 1950–51, there were only 3, 97,000 students enrolled in all disciplines across 750 institutions connected to 30 universities. Higher education in India is currently expanding at a remarkable pace. Around 100 institutes of national importance, more than 45,000 colleges, roughly 13,000 stand-alone institutions, and 784 universities (47 central universities, 353 state universities, 123 deemed universities, 246 private universities, etc.) were present in India as of September 6, 2016. (Singh, J. D. (2015). Higher Education for the 21st Century. *University News*, 53(26), 18-23.)

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

India's higher education system is a vast and complex ecosystem with many subsystems, stakeholders, and organizations connected to it. The country's economy is expanding, and higher education can meet its needs. (Nayek, D. (2023). Higher Education of India: Issues and Challenges. *IJRAR.ORG*, 10(1), 553-558.) Despite efforts to restructure higher education to improve its quality, India continues to face numerous obstacles and issues, some of which are covered below:

Enrolment: India's higher education Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) is only 15%, which is relatively low when compared to both developed and developing nations. As school enrollment rises, the number of higher education institutions in the nation cannot keep up with the rising demand.

Equity: In GER, there is no equity between the various social groups. Previous research indicates that there is a bigger difference in GER between males and females in Indian higher education. Regional

differences also exist; some states have high GERs, while others lag much behind the national average, which reveal serious inequities in the system of higher education.

Quality: In higher education, quality is a dynamic, multifaceted, and multilayered term. One of the biggest issues facing India today is ensuring the quality of higher education.

Nonetheless, the government is always emphasizing the importance of high-quality education. However, Numerous colleges and Indian universities are unable to fulfill the minimal standards established by the UGC, making it impossible for them to claim a spot among the best in the world.

Infrastructure: Poor physical facilities and infrastructure are another issue facing India's higher education system, especially for public sector institutions. There are numerous universities operating on the second or third floors of the building, and there are ready-made homes or photocopy businesses on the ground or first floors.

Political interference: Political elites own the majority of educational institutions and hold important positions in university governing bodies. For their own self-interest, they are exploiting the defenseless pupils. Students plan campaigns, lose sight of their own goals, and start pursuing political careers.

Faculty: Quality education has long been hampered by a lack of faculty and the state educational system's incapacity to draw and keep talented educators. Even though there are many openings in higher education, a significant percentage of NET and PhD candidates remain unemployed. These worthy applicants are then applying to other departments, which is a major setback for the higher education system.

Accreditation: According to the NAAC's figures, "not even 25% of the total higher education institutions in the country were accredited" as of June 2010. Only thirty percent of the authorized universities and forty-five percent of the colleges were judged to be of sufficient quality to receive a "A" level ranking.

Research and Innovation: Notable Western authors have cited the works of some extremely nominal experts in our nation. Research is not given enough attention in institutions of higher learning. Inadequate facilities and resources are available, and there aren't enough qualified staff members to counsel pupils. The majority of research academics lack fellowships or do not receive them on time, which has an impact on their work either directly or indirectly. Additionally, research centers are not well connected to Indian higher education institutions. Thus, this presents yet another obstacle for Indian higher education.

Structure of higher education: Overcentralization, bureaucratic frameworks, and a lack of professionalism, accountability, and openness are problems facing Indian education management. The administrative workload of universities has grown dramatically as a result of the rise of affiliated institutions and students, and the primary emphasis on academics and research has been lessened (Kumar, 2015).

(Sheikh, Y. A. (2017). Higher education in India: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(1), 39-42.)

SUGGESTIONS IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- To make the Indian educational system more competitive and relevant globally, creative and transformative approaches must be implemented at all educational levels, from primary to higher.
- Institutions of higher learning must enhance their reputation and quality.
- Colleges and universities should have adequate infrastructure in order to draw in students.
- For higher-quality and cooperative research, the government must encourage cooperation between Indian higher education institutions and prestigious international institutions. It must also create connections between national research laboratories and prestigious universities' research centers.

- In order to prevent students' knowledge from being limited to their own subjects, universities and colleges, whether public or private, should be free from political affiliations, favouritism, the profit-making process, etc.
- Higher education should also adopt a multidisciplinary approach.

CONCLUSION

In order to prevent students' knowledge from being limited to their own subjects, universities and colleges, whether public or private, should be free from political affiliations, favoritism, the profit-making process, etc. Higher education should also adopt a multidisciplinary approach. It is widely acknowledged that the current data base on higher education is outdated and insufficient, and that higher education can play a crucial role in achieving these outcomes through the establishment of knowledge networks, research and innovation centers, corporately backed institutions, and support for faculty development. Given its role in fostering sustainable economic, social, and cultural development, society as a whole must support education at all levels, including higher education. Higher education is crucial for the nation because it is a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century. (Singh, J. D. (2015). Higher Education for the 21st Century. University News, 53(26), 18-23.) In order to prevent students' knowledge from being limited to their own subjects, universities and colleges, whether public or private, should be free from political affiliations, favoritism, the profit-making process, etc. Higher education should also adopt a multidisciplinary approach. India has enormous human resource potential; the topic that needed to be discussed was how to best utilize this capacity. Opportunities do present themselves, but the issue is how to take advantage of them and make them available to others. Both the quantity of institutions and the caliber of higher education in India must rise in order to maintain that rate of growth. Financial resources, equity and access, quality standards, relevance, infrastructure, and responsiveness must all be reexamined immediately in order to meet and surpass future requirements. (Sheikh, Y. A. (2017). Higher education in India: Challenges and opportunities. Journal of Education and Practice, 8(1), 39-42.)

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