

## Higher Education in India: An Overview

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### Abstract

*India is still a long way from achieving universal literacy, even after years of independence. There are numerous colleges throughout the country, but they lack fundamental infrastructure. On a more positive note, India is utilizing higher education as a potent weapon for developing a knowledge-based information society in the twenty-first century. Indian experts are in high demand because they are considered among the best in the world. The purpose of this paper is to highlight and explore a number of issues and concerns that 'Higher Education' in India faces. The report is the result of a comprehensive assessment of secondary sources on contemporary issues and difficulties.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, Challenges, Problems, Enrollment, Quality of teaching

### Introduction

Higher education is defined as the learning/training /research that an individual gathers after the post secondary level. A considerable deal of research has been done on education in general and higher education in particular, which forms a pivotal point in the shaping the society. Higher education provides a foundation for improved human resources that become instrumental for the progress of a nation. Through higher education the students get a higher educational credential, it also develops a variety of talents and aptitudes in students that have a significant impact on society [1]. Thus higher education provides in-depth knowledge and comprehension in order to propel them forward to new horizons of knowledge. There are four levels of education, of which higher education forms the tertiary level and occupies the apex in the educational pyramid. Higher education may be general or technical and comprises the colleges, Universities and different research institutions. Education is the key to a developed nation. The present world has realized that education without research and applications is just like a ship without rudder. Higher education is valuable because it combines education and research, allowing information to be applied for the development of society. Education is a greater asset than it is recognized, and it determines a nation's socioeconomic prosperity. A developed country is invariably an educated country. India is among the top three nations having largest higher education system, [3] and the with 795 universities, 39,671 affiliated colleges, 10,15,696 teaching faculty, and 2,37,64,960 students, including 29,34,989 post-graduate and 2,00,730 research scholars, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (NIRF-2015)[4]. In spite of the progress in higher education; there are several obstacles and challenges that the nation has

to overcome for future prosperity. Because higher levels of education are associated to decreased rates of employment generation and poverty, adults with higher levels of education are less likely to rely on social safety-net programs, putting less demand on government finances. Higher education makes an individual conscious of his/her health and the individual becomes more responsible towards the society. Higher levels of education are linked to increased civic participation, such as volunteering, voting, and blood donation. India will become one of the world's largest educational centers in the future.

The first stepping stone of higher education in India was laid by the British rule in 1857 as a result of which the Universities of Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay came into existence. Since independence, India's Higher Education sector has seen a massive expansion in the number of universities, university level institutions, and colleges. The constitutional right of every child aged 6-14 years to free and compulsory education has increased the enrolment rate in schools but this has led to a demand in increasing the number of schools all over the country. The corporate sector's involvement in higher education has influenced the field significantly. This demand has also led to the increased involvement of the private sector. This has hastened the creation of colleges that began in the last decade, giving India the world's greatest number of Higher Education institutions and the second highest number of student enrolments. The Government of India has set a goal of increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from around 12 % to 15 % by the conclusion of the XI Five-Year Plan, and to 30 percent by 2020 [5-7]. Several new initiatives to increase the GER were implemented throughout the XI Five Year Plan. The demand for higher education and the extent of anticipated reforms in India over the next ten years would create the world's largest opportunity for international higher education institutions and educational enterprises. The system, however, continues to have a number of flaws. Regulators must analyze institutions and certify them. There are concerns about funding and maintaining education as a public service in the country. It must not become a profit-making enterprise. Furthermore, in India, there are very few institutions that provide high-quality inputs to pupils in order to instill learning skills. In comparison to emerging and developed countries, India's higher education system is in desperate need of reform.

#### **Present status of Higher Education in India**

The current state of India's higher education system is complicated and hard. The number of students seeking admission to these institutions and colleges for higher education has increased as the population has grown. In the field of higher education in India, there was a time when the country's population was substantially lower and higher education was open to all. With the advent of modern facilities different activities, rankings, teaching learning outcomes, employment generation of the institutions are becoming a key factor. These lay a basic foundation for the research and aptitude skills which help to elevate the standards of the institute [8, 9]. India has long been a place of thinkers and

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students. India was once known around the world for its universities, such as Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila, as well as its scholars. India had 20 universities and 500 colleges by independence, with approximately 2, 30, 000 students enrolled. The central government and state governments are attempting to develop and provide the scope of higher education by increasing the number of universities and colleges. With around 52,000 institutions, India's higher education system is one of the world's largest, and enrolment has increased fourfold since 2001. From 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014, the number of universities has increased 34 times, whereas the number of colleges has increased from 34,852 in 2011-12 to 41817 in 2017-18. In 2016, India's gross enrolment ratio (GER) was 26.3 percent. While this is more than double the GER of a decade ago (11.5 percent in 2006), it still falls short of the Ministry of Human Resource Development's aim of 32.2 percent for 2022. The demand for study abroad is really high. In 2018, over 750,000 Indians studied abroad, making India the world's second-largest source country for international students after China and one of the world's fastest-growing outbound markets [10]. The enormous expansion of higher education institutions across India, as well as the increased emphasis on improving the quality of higher learning institutions to meet international standards, demonstrated a growing concern for higher education quality. In the twenty-first century, India has major advantages in attaining quality higher education. India boasts of a large higher education sector, which, after China and the United States, is the world's third largest in terms of student numbers. Its principal language of higher education and research is English. It has a lengthy history in academia. Academic autonomy is protected. There are just a few high-quality institutions, departments, and centers which are dedicated towards providing quality higher education. Wide range of policies and approaches offered by the government helps to cater the needs of higher education in the different strata of the society. However, the flaws vastly outnumber the advantages. India educates roughly 10% of its young people in higher education, compared to about half of young people in the major industrialized countries and 15% in China. Almost every academic institution in the world is structured like a pyramid, with a tiny, high-quality tier at the top and a large sector at the bottom. India's top tier is quite small. None of its universities are among the best in the world. There are only a few good undergraduate/graduate institutions, and a few of the best universities offer strong departments and centers which enroll about only 1% of the student population [11].

### **Problems of higher education in India**

In spite of the increase in the number of academic institutions, universities and centers of advanced learning the quality of higher education in India remain compromised to a greater extent when compared to the standards worldwide. India's higher education system has various flaws. As a result, despite increasing shortages of competent people, it continues to produce graduates who remain unemployed. Academic research is of poor quality and is deteriorating. Some of the problems of higher education in India are as follows [10-11]:

- **Quality of teaching-** There is a decline in teaching quality in India as the teachers are under qualified for the jobs they are allocated, and some universities hire young graduates with no experience or knowledge. The multilingual environment comprising of different regional languages as mode of instruction poses a major challenge in imparting quality education.
- **Lower literacy in women-** The literacy rate of women is significantly lower than that of men. Girls are discouraged from attending school because of conservative cultural norms. Girls' attendance is low despite the government's efforts to give incentives like as midday food, free books, and uniforms. Even though the legal age of marriage is eighteen, many girls marry significantly younger and this leads to high dropout rates.
- **Moral issues-** Younger generations are less interested in serving their country and are more focused in getting a job with a good salary. Rapid advances in science and technology, as well as subsequent industrialization, have posed a serious threat to our traditional morals and values. The discontent and insurrection of the younger generation is the result of a deteriorating value system.
- **Corruption-** Corruption has lowered the quality of education in India. In the United States, it is a major source of black money. The amount of money given to management for admissions is increasing. Some private schools deposit the entire salary into the account and pay the remaining balance to management via blank signed checks.
- **Economic differences-** Many of the pupils come from lower-income families, unable to care for their basic needs. Students work part-time jobs to help pay for their education and must divide their attention between work and college/university studies. Approximately 75% of the whole student population is confronting financial difficulties. Earn while you learn is insufficient to help students deal with financial difficulties.
- **Poor Infrastructure facilities-** One of major impeding factors in the success of higher education is the absence of proper facilities of teaching and research. The condition is indeed severe in the government/ government aided institutions where the fund allocation for procuring laboratory instruments, journal subscriptions, and computer aided teaching aids are lacking. The basic upliftment of the condition is urgent to promote quality teaching and research.
- **Political Interference-** The increased political engagement in higher education management puts the institutions' autonomy in jeopardy. Furthermore, the students divert their interests and get motivated in pursuing political careers.
- **Reservation/Quota system-** The quota system's execution and existence are debatable, yet due to many political interests, merit is being harmed under the cover of this system. Despite its virtues, it has fractured the merit space and heightened competition for the few places available at premier universities.
- **Curriculum issues-** For students pursuing the same goal, such as engineering, medicine, or business administration, there are numerous curriculum systems that can be confusing. There is no consistency

in the syllabuses taught for the same programmer at the higher education level. Changes in the curriculum are made frequently without regard for the current needs and the variety of subjects available in institutions is limited.

### **Challenges of Higher Education in India**

Even after decades of independence, our educational system is still in its infancy. Even after expansion of our higher educational institutes none of our Universities are ranked within the top 100 Universities of the world [12-14]. Several programs, reforms, and efforts to improve educational quality appear to have been insufficient. The major challenges faced by higher education in India are as follows-

***Insufficient Enrollment of students*** - India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is only 15% as compared to both developed and developing countries, which is essentially not significant. The number of higher education institutes fails to meet the demand of enrolments in the country due to the ever increasing population of India.

***Influence of privatization*** – The tuition fees of private schools and colleges are quite high which forces many guardians to withdraw their children from such schools. Thus privatization should consider the merit of the student and provide some kind of aid to such students.

***Uneven growth and access to opportunity*** – The society is made up of people Rural and urban populations, rich and poor, minority and mainstream communities, men and women, and individuals with disabilities continue to experience major multi-dimensional disparities in enrolment rates. With the rise of the middle class, Indian colleges must prepare for significant changes in student demographics.

***Limitations of Research and Innovation-*** Despite efforts to encourage research, the quantity of scholars and the quality of research are being harmed. The Universities and colleges are affiliating themselves towards conducting PhD programs. Most of the colleges and upcoming Universities lack the infrastructure and modern facilities for conducting research. Most of the research scholars do not have or do not receive fellowships on time, which has a direct or indirect impact on their research. In addition, India's research centers are inadequately networked to institutions of higher learning. As a result, India's higher education faces yet another challenge.

***Accreditation-*** According to NAAC data, "less than 25% of the entire higher education institutions in the country were certified" as of June 2010. Only 30% of universities and 45 percent of institutions were judged to be of sufficient quality to be ranked at the 'A' level among those accredited."

### **Suggestions for improving higher education in India**

Some of the suggestive measures for improving the quality of higher education are-

- To improve the teaching quality of teaching faculty and learning outcomes
- To improve and modernize the facilities and infrastructure which would promote research and different application skills.

- Universities and colleges, whether public and private, must be free of political affiliations, favouritism, and money-making processes, among other things.
- Higher education should take an interdisciplinary approach so that students' knowledge is not limited to their particular topics.
- For better quality and collaborative research, the government should foster collaboration between Indian higher education colleges and national research laboratories and research centres of top institutions.
- Importance should be given to graduate students by offering courses in which they can achieve excellence and develop a deeper understanding of the subject so that they can get jobs after being hired by corporations, reducing the need for unneeded rush to higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the post-independence period, India's higher education sector has faced numerous challenges. There are multiple attempts in the Indian education system to improve quality from diverse perspectives. The UGC, AICTE, QCI, DEC, and BCI, among others, have made significant efforts to improve the quality of education in India and to align Indian education standards with worldwide norms. Our ability as a society to build and maintain a high-quality higher education system is closely linked to the future of our economic system, and consequently our country. India has the capacity to expand the boundaries of knowledge in all areas if appropriate and required attention and support are given to Indian educational establishments and universities.

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