

EMERGING CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Dr. Davinder Kour

Senior Assistant Professor in Education Govt. GLDM Degree College Hiranagar JKUT

Abstract

The term Higher Education in India refers to education that is imparted after 12 years of basic and elementary education. This includes 10 years of primary education and 2 years of secondary education). Graduation, Post Graduation, Doctoral and Post Doctoral Research all fall in the category of Higher Education. India is home to some of the best higher education institutions in the world. The country also conducts some of the toughest entrance examinations in the world to get into these institutions. However, the irony is that even till date, none of the institutions of India have occupied the number one position in the list of top institutions in the world. It is also seen that the education sector in the country has not been able to maintain a balance in terms of enrollment in higher education all over the country. There is a huge margin of difference between the urban (tier I, tier II) cities and rural areas. The high school drop-out rate is a significant and poses a challenge to higher education. The drop-out rate is higher among girls as compared to boys. A significant issue is that the premier government institution for higher studies offers limited number of seats leading to emergence of private mediocre institutions. This research paper tries to study the emerging challenges in higher education in India.

Keywords: Higher Education, Challenges, Enrollment, Government/Private Institutions, Employability

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the strongest pillars of development of a nation. Education and development of human capital go hand in hand. One of the factors causing the wide gap between developed, developing and under developed countries is lack of educated, trained human resource.

India with a population of 1.42(approx.) billion and abundance of natural resource is still climbing on the path of development. There is a long way to reach the top. There are a lot of factors for growth of an economy and society, human resource is the most significant as it the catalyst to set the wheel of growth moving making use of other resources.

1.2 Human Resource in India:

Almost 63% of population in India is between the age group of 15 to 59 years. It has one of the youngest population in the world as compared to countries like United States of India, Japan, China, etc. Around 41% population of India is below 20 years of age. Government established Higher Education Finance agency (HEFA) for promoting higher education in the country.

However, in India, one of the major problems is school drop-outs, especially in the rural areas. On an average 12.6% children prefer to drop-out after 12th class, resulting in sharp decline in enrollment in higher education. Mostly students from economically weaker sections discontinue formal education after 10th class. Few go up to class 12 and then leave. Though infrastructure issues contribute heavily to this decision, other factors that motivate youngsters to take this decision is (a) help increase the family income by being an earning member, (b) directionless disoriented youth that indulges in drinking, gambling, drug trafficking for quick money making, etc.

1.3 Briefly, the education system of India can be explained as follows:

There are Central Universities (Act of Parliament establishes these), State Universities (set up by State Legislatures) and Deemed Universities (authorized to award degree through notification of Central Government). There are also some institutions being declared as 'Institutes of National Importance,' by Parliament.

There are several colleges affiliated to these Universities. UGC (University Grants Commission), established by an Act of Parliament, 1956 is a Central Government's statutory body. Its main function is to coordinate and maintain quality of education, teaching and research at the University level. UGC established NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) in 1994, that gives accreditation to universities and other colleges after proper survey and quality inspection.

For technical education AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) and IMA (Indian Medical Association) are responsible for maintaining and promoting quality standards in the technical and medical education respectively. NBA (National Board of Accreditation) set up by AICTE does the similar function as that of NAAC.

The Government of India has also set up a very significant stream of higher education by the name of Vocational Education. Several polytechnics are run by government as well as private sector for imparting skill based vocational training to people.

Another very significant aspect of Indian education system is the concept of Open University. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was set up in 1985 by an Act of Parliament. In terms of enrolment, it is the world's largest university today with 2063 Learner Support Centres and 69 Regional Centres. IGNOU is spread across 15 nations and there are 25 Overseas Study Centres.

There are a lot of challenges in the context of higher education in India that would be studied in detail in this chapter.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- 1 To study the evolution of higher education in India from historical times to present day
- 2 To study the gender disparity in higher education in India
- 3 To study the immediate challenges faced in the area of higher education in India and its impact in country's development

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The nature of research is qualitative mostly based on secondary sources of data collection and primary information received from all stakeholders of higher education. This includes discussions with academia, students and parents. High quality research papers are studied covering a period of 10 years (2012 – 2022). News reports are studied. High level literature on the subject is consulted.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

(Gupta & Gupta 2012) points out that the Kothari Commission of 1964, recommended usage of 6% of country's GDP on education. Only half the target was achieved in 45 years. Even then India has the largest pool of knowledge workers and scientists in the world. Asian economic powers like China, South Korea, etc, have relied on manufacturing sector. But for India, this educated human capital has pulled up Indian economy in a faster pace.

(Saravanakumar AR, 2014) rightly suggests that more attention should be given on refining and upgrading not only higher education but also research programs. The author also talks about diversification of higher education.

(Varghese & Malik, 2015) rightly says that it is the higher education sector that is instrumental in forwarding and disseminating knowledge. But the challenges or problems faced by higher education are also many. These include, low enrollment rate, regional disparities, poor teaching quality, academic practices are very old. There are problems in the examination and assessment system as well.

(Thorat S 2015) mentions that the role of state governments in the area of higher education as more private players are coming in. when private investment happens in higher education institutions, rather than just public funding, financial burden comes on households owing to higher fee structures.

(Madeshia PK, Verma S, 2020) says that there should be focus on entrepreneurial education and practical skills training.

This is very significant for the education system in order to increase employability of Indian students.

(Rattan L, 2019) observes that India has made significant progress in the field of higher education since independence. Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world after China and the US. However, the author expresses concern over the quality of education imparted in the higher education institutions. He points out that only 25% of engineering graduates in India possess employable skills.

(Naik GL, et al, 2021) feels that online mode of teaching in higher education is not very effective. The authors support, the traditional 'chalk and talk' method of teaching. This study was done after the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant changes in the way of teaching.

DISCUSSION:

Discussion is being carried out as per the objectives of this study.

Evolution of higher education in India from historical times to present day.

The Indian education system before invasions from Middle eastern countries and finally British colonialists, was based on the Vedic system of Gurukuls. Students were given the knowledge of Vedas and Upanishads. India saw great developments in scientific research particularly in the areas of medicine, astrophysics, astronomy and mathematics. It was a phase that saw Indian scholars reaching great heights in all aspect of study and human development. May it be art, literature or science, development was unparalleled. Great scholars like

Varahamihir (505-587CE), Sushruta and Aryabhata (476CE) made significant progress in their areas of study. Sushruta excelled in surgery, particularly plastic surgery. Varahamihir and Aryabhata achieved great heights in the areas of mathematics and astronomy. Nalanda (425AD-1205AD) and Takshashila also called Taxila (5th or 6th century BC) were the two great Universities of ancient India known for higher education and research. Scholars from all over the world came to these Universities for quality education.

The invasions led the destruction of these universities and severe loss of significant scholarly works. This was followed by British colonialists declaring Indian education as backward and imposing Western education. Almost all Gurukuls were closed down making way to Western educational institutions with English as the medium of instruction. Sanskrit as a language died a natural death as children took up English from the pre-primary level.

Gender disparity in higher education:

It is said that if a woman is educated, the whole society is educated. But there is always disparity between male and female education levels. particularly in terms of higher education, this gap is more widened. Recent years have witnessed girls outperform boys in most of the public competitive exams. However, it is a matter of concern that female drop-out at secondary education level in India is 12.3%. The reasons are many in the rural areas where boys' education is preferred over girls because they would be the earning members of the families. Moreover, girls are married off at an early age in rural areas and smaller towns. The evil of dowry still exists in India. At the time of marriage, girls are given good amount of dowry as demanded by the groom's family. The lower income group parents fail to afford both dowry as well as cost of higher education. So, finally, higher education takes a back seat. There are other reasons like safety issues of females owing to distance of colleges from the villages.

Even in middle class households in Tier II cities, boys are sent to coaching centres for Engineering/Medical entrance exam preparations, while girls are asked to continue with humanities subjects where tough competition and coaching needs are not there.

Challenges faced in the area of higher education

Higher education in India has made substantial progress since the independence of the country. At the time of independence in 1947, there were 20 universities and nearly 500 colleges in India. Prior to 1947, Indian people had to go outside the country to pursue higher studies. Even Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ambedkar, etc, travelled all the way to Britain to fulfil their academic goals. However, things changed tremendously after independence of the country. Leaders focussed on scientific and technical institutions along with establishing Universities and colleges for general studies. IITs (Indian Institute of Technology), IISc (Indian Institute of Science), IIMs (Indian Institute of Management), AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), NLUs (National Law University), NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology), NID (National Institute of Design), etc were set of over a period of time. These institutions provided world class education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, medical science, management, law, design, etc. Engineering aspirants are required to score good marks IIT/JEE (Joint Entrance Exam) for engineering, NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) for medical science, CLAT (Common Law Admission Test) for law, etc.

These institutions of higher education were not enough to cater to the growing youth population of this enormous country. For instance, there are 388 govt/semi govt medical colleges in India. The total number of available seats in MBBS annually in all 20 AIIMS combined is 2044. But the number of students appearing for entrance test is 20.38 lakh. A total of 56,268 seats are available in govt/semi govt medical colleges in India.

Similar is the case with engineering. There are 822 government engineering colleges in India. Out of these 23 are IITs and 31 NITs, rest are state government colleges. IITs offer 17,385 seats and NITs offer 23,997 according to AICTE. However, total number of aspirants taking entrance exams in 2023 is 11,13,325 as per statistics given by NTA (National Testing Agency).

This is the case with all other streams of higher study like Law, Management, Design, etc. there are total 23 NLUs in India. Out of these 22 NLUs (that accept CLAT scores) offers 2800 scores. NLU Delhi has its separate entrance test AILET that offers 110 seats.

This situation has given rise to the problem of cut-throat competition among aspirants. Private coaching institutes took advantage of this situation and had a mushrooming growth all over the country in the last two decades. There is hardly any government control over these institutions. The competition is much higher among coaching institutes than among students. These institutes have also occupied the online space as well.

Even with these large number of coaching institutes both online and offline, there exists a huge gap between demand and supply. This market gap is being filled by private institutions.

There are 31,390 private colleges, 388 private universities and 88 private deemed to be universities in India as per survey done by All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), 2023. This means around 70 per cent of higher education institutes are in the hands of private sector. Some of these institutions are not even affiliated to University Grants Commission or AICTE. They have affiliations to foreign universities whose credibility cannot be ascertained.

Though the curriculum of these institutions is approved by state statutory councils, yet they enjoy significant freedom in curriculum design and delivery.

Most of the private academic institutions conduct their own entrance test and charge huge amount of money as fee. There is no significant governmental control or regulation over fee charged by these institutions. The amount of fee is so exorbitant that a private institution's one semester fee is equivalent to the entire course fee of premier government institutions. The banks taking advantage of this situation has come up with education loan for students' higher education.

There is another aspect to of higher education in the country. Students who cannot crack the very tough competitive entrance exams for premier government institutions and are not willing to join any of the private institutions of the country, prefer to study in foreign universities. Around 4,45, 498 students took admissions in foreign countries in 2021 according to the Union Ministry of Education. The total number of Indian students going to Ukraine is 18,596, China and Russia is 15,814, Kazakhstan is 5625. The data of students going to the United States and Canada goes up to over a lakh as per report.

Interestingly most students go to Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan for medical studies. It was quite a surprising revelation at the time when war broke out between Russia and Ukraine and Indian government took the responsibility of bringing back these students, home. Ironically, the degrees, especially the medical degree obtained from these countries are not even recognised by Medical Council of India. And hence, these students cannot even get direct licence to practice medicine in India. For this they need to appear and pass Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE). This is conducted by the National Board of Examination (NBE).

So, even after spending huge amount of money outside India to earn the degree, it is difficult to find employment in their own home country. There are cases, when many of the aspirants are duped by travel agents.

These are some of the challenges faced mostly in terms of technical education in urban areas. In terms of general under graduate and post graduate colleges in the rural areas of India, the infrastructure facility is poor. Faculty positions lie vacant. Even in some cases, faculty is appointed as per government rules and the person is drawing salary and other benefits from government. But the person remains absent from his/her job. Most educated people do not want to spend time in the poor infrastructure of rural areas. So, even if students are enrolled, there is no quality education. These students somehow manage to pass the examinations, but lack basic employability skills.

Faculty recruitment is another big challenge in higher education. The highly skilled qualified people tend to move to other areas or professions as the remunerations in the academic field is quite low in comparison to the corporate sectors. There are large number of vacancies in the government institutions including big universities. However, for lacklustre attitude of government timely recruitment does not take place.

The private institutions on the other hand run the institutions mostly by mediocre faculty members at a lower pay scale. The students even after paying heavy fee are getting poor quality education. The end result is poor employability of these students whom big business houses do not prefer as they would require long term training. In most cases, the cream of corporate houses fills up vacancies from the premier institutions.

May it be rural areas graduates or urban private college graduates, the employability is really low of these students. The situation is not highlighted in the urban private institutions because these students generally come from upper middle and high income group families. Either they join family business or move to foreign countries. What sets them apart is basic grooming and spoken English skills. In terms of subject knowledge, situation is almost same.

So, basically it is a vicious cycle of mediocrity of faculty, poor quality education, financial burden on students and the final output is lack of employability.

Lastly, the discussion would not be complete without mentioning the prospects and facilities of Doctoral and Post Doctoral research in India. Very less focus is paid on these areas. As the government has made it mandatory for college and University level faculty to have completed doctoral research, many existing teachers have enrolled in the same. Since, most of these working people are unable to leave jobs for a full-time university PhD program, private Universities have introduced part-time program. Research and researchers need to be encouraged with high remuneration and career opportunities within the country. Most of these researchers tend to leave the country as they get good remuneration, social recognition and honour in foreign developed countries, leading to heavy brain-drain from India.

FINDINGS/CONCLUSION:

India has made progress in the field of higher education in the recent years. Apart from the conventional areas of study, the country offers facility for new age fields of study like Artificial Intelligence, Advanced Robotics, Data Science, Genetics, Astro-Physics, etc. Apart from government run institutions, there are some good private institutions that offer these courses. However, there are some challenges in the field of higher education that have emerged in recent years. If these are not tackled now, the problems would grow manifold.

From this study, the emerging challenges in higher education can be summarized in the following points below:

1 Gap in Demand-Supply:

The number of government institution for higher education is low, offering lesser number of seats. With the current number of higher education institutes, not even 50% of the aspirants can be accommodated in the government institutions.

2 Quality Education:

Quality of education is directly responsible for employability of students. Even after obtaining degrees, these students fail to get employment either in the government sector or in the private sector. They end up doing petty jobs.

3 Research and Development:

The country fails to provide proper research facility and research environment to the students. Most scholars tend to leave the country for better scope outside leading to brain-drain.

4 Faculty Shortage:

Qualified people are available in the country in abundance. However, the government recruitment process is so difficult that most subject matter experts lay outside recruitment process. Political involvement and corruption spoils the recruitment process. Most government colleges take faculty on contractual basis. Having no job security even after such high qualifications, people move to the corporate sector to enjoy more financial benefits.

5 Gender disparity:

Gender issues exist in higher education in India. In most technical education, the per centage of female students from rural areas is very low. Factors responsible for this involve early marriage, need to do household work, financial burden on parents as they need to provide for dowry of girls during marriages and high fee structure of private institutions. There is no disparity in talent, but disparity exists in resources and facilities. Parental mindset also has a role to play in this.

6 Political Involvement:

In most educational institutions, political leaders are part of the Board of Directors or Governing Councils. This makes decision making biased. Decisions are taken more for the benefit of political parties than for students' welfare.

7 Reservation system:

Even after 76 years of independence of the country, the caste based reservation system has been plaguing the education system of India. Very few seats remain for General category students as most of the seats are excluded under various reservation categories. This is quite frustrating for students who work very hard to secure a seat in a premier government institution. This results in very good students moving to Universities in the United States of America and United Kingdom.

8 GER:

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is 27.1% in 2023 according to Ministry of Education. It means 27 out of 100 eligible students are enrolled in higher education courses. This is not even 50% of the total eligible population.

9 Infrastructure:

The infrastructure facility in govern higher education institutions except the premier ones are not good. In some colleges even the basic facilities are lacking. Infrastructure facilities are extremely poor in the science laboratories of rural colleges.

10 Accreditation:

Many private institutions in the country are operating without proper accreditation from the government agencies. This makes the degrees offered by them fake and unacceptable by the Indian government. This makes the students ineligible to even apply for government sector jobs. Even foreign university affiliations as claimed by certain private institutions are also questionable.

11 High drop-out rate at secondary level:

This is particularly true at the rural level, where students' drop out rate is very high. This leads to lower GER and overall growth of students. The reasons for drop-outs are discussed earlier.

CONCLUSION:

Though the New Education Policy is being considered with significant changes and new features, yet it can be analyzed and studied only once it is fully implemented and results seen.

The focus of higher education should be to increase employability of students. The government has to increase the number of institutions and check the operations of private institutions. The future of the country lies in the youth. Their education should be given a priority if India has to come in the league of developed nations. India has to create such an environment that brain-drain is stopped.

REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Economic Survey 2018-19
- [2] <https://www.ugc.gov.in/>
- [3] <https://www.aicte-india.org/>
- [4] <http://naac.gov.in/index.php/en/>
- [5] <http://ignou.ac.in//userfiles/Profile%202023.pdf>
- [6] Gupta, D. and Gupta, N., 2012. Higher education in India: structure, statistics and challenges. *Journal of education and Practice*, 3(2).
- [7] Saravanakumar, A.R., 2014. Present Scenario and Future Prospects of Higher Education in India. *Proceeding of the Social Sciences Research ICSSR 2014*.
- [8] Varghese, N.V. and Malik, G. eds., 2015. *India higher education report 2015*. Routledge.
- [9] Thorat, S., 2015. Higher education policy in India: Emerging issues and approaches. In *India Higher Education Report 2015* (pp. 15-40). Routledge India.
- [10] Madeshia, P.K. and Verma, S., 2020. Review on higher education in India. *J. Crit. Rev*, 7(10), pp.1161-1164.
- [11] Lal, R., 2019. Higher Education in India: Emerging Issues and Challenges. *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(2), pp.672-676.
- [12] Naik, G.L., Deshpande, M., Shivananda, D.C., Ajey, C.P. and Manjunath Patel, G.C., 2021. Online Teaching and Learning of Higher Education in India during COVID-19 Emergency Lockdown. *Pedagogical Research*, 6(1).
- [13] <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1131773.pdf>
- [14] <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1894517>
- [15] <https://educationforallinindia.com/dropout-rates-in-schools-in-india/>
- [16] https://www.rajimr.com/ijrhs/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/IJRHS_2019_vol07_issue_3_Eng_01.pdf
- [17] <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/majority-of-indian-colleges-are-run-by-private-sector-govt-tells-rajya-sabha-11627556238570.html>
- [18] <https://www.iimidr.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/Womens-Education-in-India-A-Situational-Analysis.pdf>
- [19] <https://nludelhi.ac.in/UploadedImages/f7801d3a-ce64-4914-b666-8db7f4d2343c.pdf>
- [20] <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/majority-of-indian-colleges-are-run-by-private-sector-govt-tells-rajya-sabha-11627556238570.html>
- [21] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ukraine-russia-among-top-destinations-for-indian-students-in-2021-govt-data/articleshow/90208120.cms>