

THE STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: ITS ROLE, CHALLENGES AND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Education is a Nation's Strength. The world has recognized that the economic success of the countries is directly determined by their education system. A developed country is inevitably an educated country. Higher education system of India is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Since independence, India as a developing nation is continuously progressing in the education field. To develop India as an education hub or to become a flourishing partner in global economy, India has to qualitatively strengthen their education in general and higher education with research and development in particular. Higher education offers people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to the growth of the nation through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. It is therefore, a crucial factor for survival. This paper is mainly focused on the role of higher education in India and aims to identify the key issues and challenges that India is currently facing in higher education. Finally, the paper analyses the initiatives taken by the government to improve the higher education in India.

Keywords: Development, Higher Education, Government, Issues, Challenges.

Introduction

Today, knowledge is power. The more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. Higher education system in India is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth as compared to 20 per cent in China in higher education. The main governing body in India at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission (UGC), which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the Centre and the State. Universities and its affiliated colleges are the leading institutes of higher education in India. Higher Education ensures large opportunities to the people to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing the humanity. Higher education system provides specialized knowledge and skilled persons for national development. It is a powerful tool to build knowledge-based society of the 21st Century. In next few decades, India will have world's major set of young people. The vision of higher education in India is to realize the country's human resource potential to its fullest with equity and inclusion. The nation has embarked upon initiating a number of development-linked strategies to promote higher education. As a result of which the higher education sector, in recent decades, has

witnessed an incredible growth in many aspects such as its enrolment, institutional capacity, teacher-student ratio etc. The 'Right to Education Act' which stipulates compulsory and free education to all children within the age groups of 6-14 years, has brought about a revolution in the education system of our country with statistics revealing an astounding enrolment in schools over the last four years. The participation of private sector in higher education has seen drastic changes in this field. Today over 60% of higher education institutions are promoted by the private sector in India.

The rapid expansion of the higher education sector as a whole has brought several pertinent issues related to equity, excellence, efficiency and access to higher education in the country. The quality of education in India whether at primary or at higher education is significantly poor as compared to major developing countries of the world. As of 2011, there are 1522 degree-granting engineering colleges in India with an annual student intake of 582000 (Science and Technology Education, 2009) plus 1244 polytechnics with an annual intake of 265000. However, these institutions face shortage of faculty and concerns have been raised over the quality of education. Despite of these challenges India provides highly skilled people to other countries. Therefore, it is very

easy for India to transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation. An attempt has also been made in this paper to discuss the role of higher education in India, to identify issues and challenges in the field of higher education in India and to highlights the initiatives taken by the government to improve the higher education in India.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the brief history and structure of higher education system in India
- To examine the role of higher education in India
- To evaluate the issues and challenges to India's higher education system
- To discuss Government initiatives for improvement

Materials and Methods

The present paper is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data collected from the published and unpublished records, reports and contributions of several institutions, organizations and individuals in India. Specifically, the secondary sources consist of Annual Reports of UGC, Planning Commission, Education Department of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Economic Survey and other journals, books and websites.

Results and Discussion

Section I: Brief History of Higher Education in India

Higher Education under British Rule

The foundation stone of British education system in India was The Charter Act of 1813. The purpose of the British education in the beginning stage was well brought out by Lord Macaulay in his Minutes of Education in 1835. "We must, at present, do our best to form a class who may be the interpreter between us and the millions whom we govern". This group had to be "Indian in blood and colour but British in taste, in opinions, and in morals and intelligent"

The higher education system built by the British was a response to the needs of an imperial administration, looking for on the

overhand to supplant the indigenous set up and on the other hand to produce a manpower pool alienated from the local people and capable of performing territory functions of an align administration. The colonial system of higher education was a device to build up a perfect exploitative machinery to deny the Indian an identity of his own. It was an effective instrument used by the British to generate a socio-cultural base for recruitment and training. It enabled some to become aware of the nature of imperialism where as some converted themselves into tools of westernization.

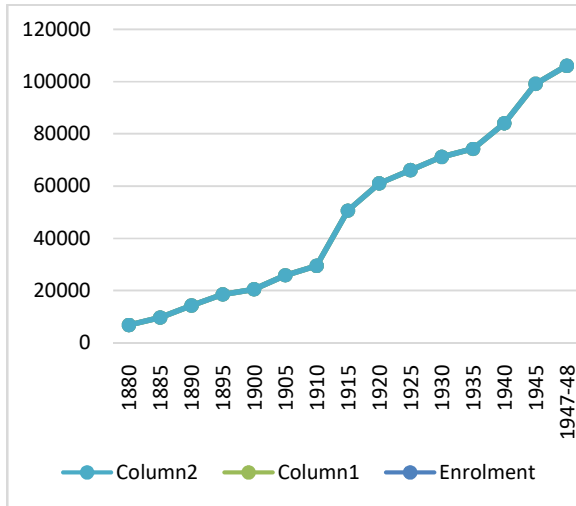
The impact of higher education under British Rule was not uniform and even throughout the country. The facilities for higher education was not in even supply and was concentrated in a few regions like port towns and business centers. This brought about the inter and intra-regional disparities in the progress of higher education in India. The distortions and inequities embedded during the period have continued to persist. The system developed an anti-imperialist movement and inspired the search for alternative models of education, symbolised by the intellectual contributions of a group of Indian leaders ranging from Raja Rammohan Roy, C.R.Das, Dadabai Naoroji, Aurobindo Ghosh and Syed Ahamed to Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abdul Kalam Azad, and Zakir Huzzain. The following table shows the poor enrolment in higher education in British India.

Table 1
Enrolment in Higher Education in British India

Year	Enrolment	Growth rate (percent)
1880	6738	-
1885	9636	43.00
1890	14268	48.06
1895	18484	29.54
1900	20440	10.58
1905	25800	26.22
1910	29465	14.20
1915	50579	71.65
1920	61013	20.62
1925	66100	8.33
1930	71100	7.56
1935	74190	4.34
1940	84060	13.30
1945	99100	17.89
1947-48	106043	7.00

Source: Higher education in India: An Assessment by Moom Raza Y.P., Aggarwal and Mabud Hassan (An essay from higher education in the eighties, opportunities and objectives), Veena Raghavan, Lancer International, 1985.

Figure 1
Enrolment in Higher Education in British India



Higher Education Since Independence

India’s independence brought a new hope, a new vision and a new future for this sub-continent. It offered new opportunities and new challenges. Freedom urged India to get more concerned with the question of a social re-engineering. The country got more concerned with the question of producing middle and higher level manpower in the shortest possible time to meet the demands of faster growth. It set novel objectives and responsibilities before the people. The immediate task before the country was to re-establish identity and to explore every respect of life. It is the man who is the cause and consequence of under-development and the subject and object to all development. Hence, it is the foremost responsibility of the university to develop human resource for orderly socio-economic growth.

Education is the most significant single factor in achieving rapid economic development and technological progress and for creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities. Such a precious service must be quality full and must be

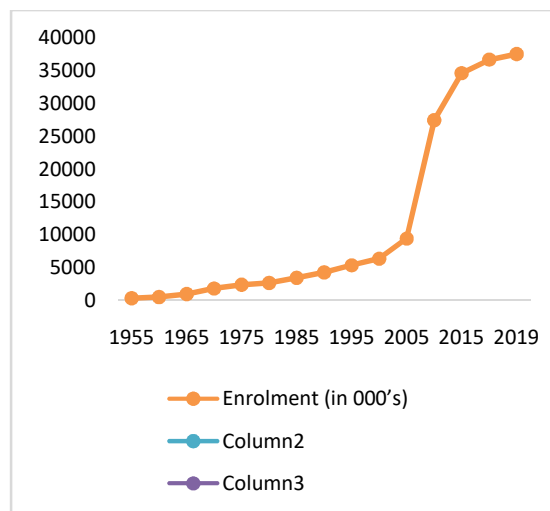
accessible for all without type of any discrimination. The enrollment in higher education has expanded substantially since independence. The following table elucidates the phenomenal growth.

Table 2
Growth of Enrolment in Higher Education after Independence

Year	Enrolment (in 000's)
1955	294.9
1960	481.8
1965	952.2
1970	1792.8
1975	2363.2
1980	2648.5
1985	3404.1
1990	4246.9
1995	5315.3
2000	6324.7
2005	9396.9
2010	27420.4
2015	34584.7
2018	36645.2
2019	37496.4

Source: UGC Annual Reports

Figure 2
Growth of Enrolment in Higher Education after Independence



The gross enrollment ratio has increased from 294.9 in 1955-56 to 37496.4 in 2018-19. Since independence India has witnessed drastic progress in terms of higher education statistics. The number has increased to 993 Universities and 39931 colleges in 2018-19. Central and State Governments are trying to nurture talent through focusing on the

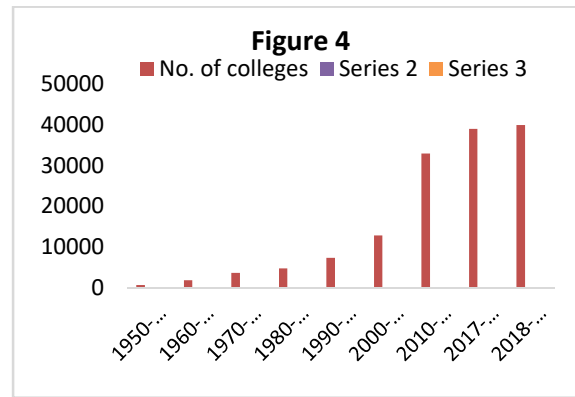
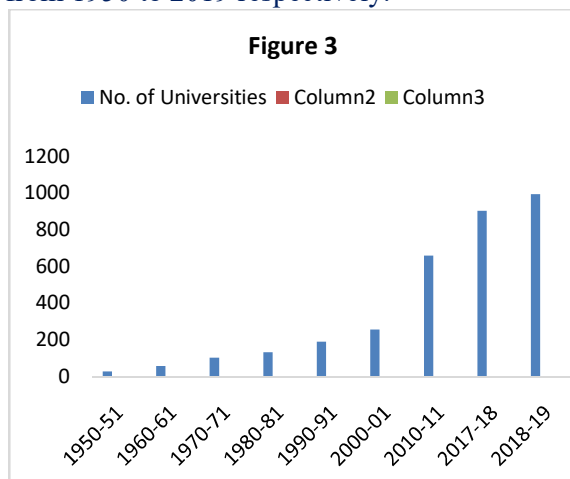
number of Universities and Colleges for expansion of higher education. There is no doubt to the fact that much of the progress achieved by India in higher education has come from private sector. In fact, the public sector and private sector is not in opposition to each other but they are working together in Indian education sphere. UGC is the main governing body that enforces the standards and advises the government in terms of higher education. The table shown below depicts the growth of universities and colleges in India from 1950 to 2019. The number of universities has grown more than six times in last four decades and the number of colleges has been increased from 700 in 1950-51 to 39931 colleges in 2018-19.

Table 3
Growth of universities and Colleges in India from 1950 to 2019

Year	No. of Universities	No. of colleges
1950-51	28	700
1960-61	58	1816
1970-71	103	3603
1980-81	133	4722
1990-91	190	7346
2000-01	256	12803
2010-11	659	33023
2017-18	903	39050
2018-19	993	39931

Source: *Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) and beyond FICCI Higher Education Summit 2012*

The figure 3 & 4 shown below depicts the growth of universities and colleges in India from 1950 to 2019 respectively.



Higher Education Structure and Institutions

India’s higher education system is primarily a public funded activity. However, its organization and structure are varied and complex. There are different departments and agencies involved in its operation. The agencies are mainly the Ministries. Simply put the higher education system in India is both vast and complex.

1. The structure of higher education: In the Indian system, higher education comprises the education conveyed after the ten years of primary and secondary education followed by two years of higher secondary education. The first degree, the Bachelor’s degree, is obtained after three years study in the case of liberal arts and four years in the case of most professional. The post graduate degree programme involves two years of study after first degree. The research degrees like M. Phil. And Ph.D. take variable time depending upon the individual student. The minimum period of an M. Phil. degree is one and half year and Ph.D. a further two years. The highest degrees like D.Litt. and D.Sc. are awarded after the Ph.D. degree for unique contributions of the highest order.

2. The Universities: The university level institutions in the India’s higher education system are fundamentally of three types:

- **Conventional University** are tertiary-level institutions that are established through the Act of Parliament and State Legislatures. They are almost entirely funded by the Government. The universities that are established by Acts of Parliament are mainly funded by the Central Government and are normally stated to as Central Universities. Examples of Central Universities are Banaras

Hindu University, Varanasi; Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh; University of Delhi, Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

- **Deemed Universities** are institutions that are deemed to be universities for the purposes of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. The Deemed University status is conferred by the Central Government, on the guidance of the University Grants Commission (UGC) for work of high quality in specialized academic fields. Examples are the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal.

- **Institutions of National Importance** are institutions established by Acts of Parliament that undertake teaching and research in areas that are critical to national development. Examples are the Seven Indian Institutes of Technology and Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum.

3. Colleges: The bulk of undergraduate teaching is done in colleges. These are of two types – the constituent colleges and the affiliated colleges.

(i) Constituent Colleges, also known as Conducted Colleges, are those which are established and managed by the University.

(ii) Affiliated Colleges are those that are set-up outside the university campus and managed either by the government or by educational trusts.

Section II: Role of Higher Education in India

Higher education plays a key role in the realization of India's extraordinary potential and aspirations for economic and technological advancement. Higher education is the fount or feeder system in all walks of life. Therefore, higher education supplies the much needed human resources in management, planning, design, teaching and research. It is basically the gateway to multi-faceted development and prosperity in the country. Scientific and technological advancement and economic evolution of a country

depends on the higher education system. Higher education also provides prospects for

life-long learning, allowing people to upgrade their knowledge and skills from time to time centered on their societal needs. In this regard, it will be beneficial for us to discuss the roles to be played by the higher education in the society.

- To strive for and nurture new knowledge, to engross vigorously and audaciously in the pursuit of verity and to interpret timeworn knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries;
- To equip the right kind of leadership in all vocations, to identify gifted youth and work up their potential to the fullest by cultivating physical fitness, developing the powers of the mind and instilling in them the right interests, attitudes, moral and intellectual values;
- To present the socially competent men and women trained in agriculture, arts, science and technology, medicine and several other professions, who will also be refined beings, imbibed with a sense of social objective;
- To elevate quality and social justice, and to reduce social and cultural disparities through diffusion of education
- To foster in the teachers and students and by virtue of them in the society by and large-the attitudes and values desired for evolving the 'good life' in individuals and society.

The report of the UNESCO, International Commission on Education in the 21st century labelled "Learning: The Treasure Within", popularly tagged as the Delors Commission, accentuated four pillars of education - learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The report drew our attention to the following specific functions of higher education:

- To prepare students for learning and teaching
- To provide highly specialized training courses suited to the requisites of economic and social life
- To be open to all, so as to cater to the numerous aspects of lifelong education in the widest sense
- To endorse international co-operation through internationalization of research,

technology, networking and free movement of persons and scientific ideas.

Section III: Issues and Challenges to India's Higher Education System

India has been a multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-linguistic society. Each State has a diverse and distinct identity. Dealing with several aspirations of such people in a democratic country is indeed a challenge to the Government of India. The various issues and challenges to higher education system in India are outlined here:

Low quality of education

Quality in higher education system is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and a dynamic concept. Guaranteeing quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today. However, Government of India is continuously focusing on the quality education. Still large number of universities and colleges in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world. In the top 100 universities listed by 'Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings', none of the Indian universities could be found in the list. In the 2017 rankings by the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry, only 2,995 institutions (6%) participated from around 51,000 strong higher educational institutions in India. There is severe regional imbalance too.

Poor Enrolment

India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country. In higher education, India has a low rate of enrolment i.e. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), at only 19%. If we compared to China and Brazil, GER is 26% and 36% respectively.

Poor Women's Education

Women have a much lower literacy rate than men. Conservative cultural attitudes prevent

girls from attending schools. Despite Government's attempts to provide incentives viz. midday meals, free books and uniforms, girl's attendance is poor. Though the minimum age for marriage is 18, many girls get married much earlier. Therefore, at the secondary level, female drop-out rate is high.

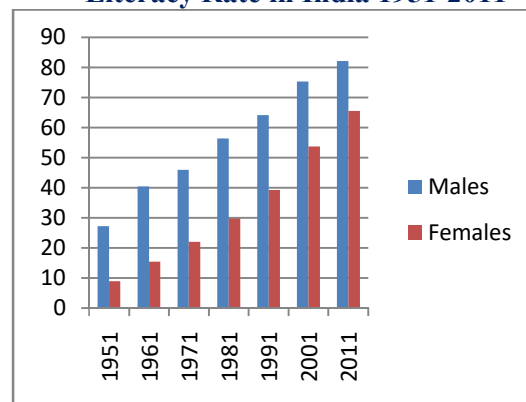
Table 4
Literacy Rate in India 1951-2011 (%)

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male Female Gap in Literacy Rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.03	82.14	65.46	19.68

Source: Census India, 2011

Table 4 reveals the percentage of literacy rate as per 2011 census among males and females in India. The gap which was 18.30 percent in 1951 increased to 25.05 percent in 1961 and 26.62 percent in 1981. After that there was a slow decrease in the gap as the literacy rate among women started gradually increasing after 1991 due to government intervention. In the year 2001 the literacy rate among women became 53.67 and thereby the male female gap in literacy rate narrows down from 24.84 to 21.59 percent. There is a gradual increase in women literacy rate in India during the period of 2001 to 2011 i.e. from 53.67 to 65.46 percent which is shown by the decline in gender gap in literacy rate. The same is shown in the following figure:

Figure 5
Literacy Rate in India 1951-2011



Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities

Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India. Particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical and infrastructural facilities. Many institutes are running without proper infrastructure and basic facilities like library, hostels, transport, sports facility etc. As per 2016 Annual Survey of Education Report, 3.5 percent schools in India had no toilet facility while only 68.7 percent schools had useable toilet facility. 75.5 percent of the schools surveyed had library in 2016, a decrease from 78.1 percent in 2014. Percentage of schools with separate girls' toilet has increased from 32.9 percent in 2010 to 61.9 percent in 2016. 74.1 percent schools had drinking water facility and 64.5 percent of the schools had playground.

Lack of Quality Research work

There is no scarcity of funding for the top Indian Institutions such as IITs, IIMs and other institutes of national importance. Though, budget for the Research is not under spent due to the insufficient good quality research work. Due to the limited emphasis on Research and Internationalization, very few Indian higher educational institutes are globally recognized. The number of Research papers published in India has increased continuously for the past few decades but reflected in low citation impact if compared with other countries like United States, Germany, France and China. Indian higher education system is facing with the problem of poor quality of curriculum. In most of the higher educational institutes, curriculum is outdated and irrelevant. The higher education sector in India spends 4.1 percent of country's research fund. It is 17.0 percent in Germany; 22.6 percent in U.K. and 10.1 percent in China. The research manpower in China is 8.6 lakhs; in India 1.3 lakhs and even in Korea it is 1.5 lakhs.

Shortage of Faculty

In most of the State and Central Universities more than 30 percent of faculty positions are lying vacant. Large numbers of NET / PhD candidates are unemployed even there are lot of vacancies in higher education. These deserving candidates are then applying in other

departments which is a biggest blow to the higher education system.

Section IV: Initiatives Taken by the Government

- A project has been taken up to prepared a national digital library of e-Books on various subjects and topics and another set up through which highly qualified faculty of centrally sponsored institutions like IITs, IIMs and central universities would offer online courses at free of cost.
- A special scheme called "Udaan" for girl students has launched by the Central government. Under this scheme, mentoring and scholarship will be provided to enable meritorious girl students to transit from schools to technical education without any difficulty and also to promote teaching and learning of mathematics and science at senior secondary school level by providing free resources.
- The effort of the project is to overcome the low enrolment ratio of girl students in prestigious technical institutions and empower them to receive special incentives and support so that they can join these institutions and go on to take leadership roles in the future.
- Another thought-provoking step is the launching of a mission named after freedom fighter and educationist Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya to build a strong professional cadre of teachers by addressing all the issues related to teachers, teaching, teacher preparation, professional development, curriculum design, and development of more effective pedagogy and better assessment and evaluation methodologies.
- The Central Government has also launched a scheme called Unnat Bharat Abhiyan for the promotion of technologies from the laboratory to the ground. Under the scheme, higher educational institutes would link with villages in their neighbourhood and address the various problems confronted by them. The scheme would particularly be looking for the solutions for water management, renewable energy, organic farming and livelihood. IIT, Delhi is the co-ordinating institute of this scheme.

About 130 villages have so far been adopted by IITs, NITs across the country under the scheme.

- Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan has launched to revive interest in the technology among youth through the support for innovative learning based on observations and experimentation. The emphasis would be on learning outside the classroom through direct interaction with the environment around the educational institutions.
- Under the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) programme, India's ministry of human resource development and department of science and technology will "create a channel for US professors in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to teach in Indian academic and research institutions on short-term exchanges", as per the website of the US Department of State.

Conclusion

India's higher education has expanded very rapidly in the last six decades after independence yet it is not equally accessible to all. Higher education system in India is an extraordinarily important part of modern Indian society. It is intertwined in the political and social systems of the society. Indian economy is facing numerous challenges regarding higher education, that need to overcome through

appropriate policy formation and their effective implementation. In order to sustain the rate of growth, there is essential to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education. To improve the higher education system in India, we need to improve teaching pedagogy, build synergies between research and teaching, facilitate alliance of higher institutions among themselves, research centers and industries. This is necessary not only to take care of economic growth, but it is also essential for social cohesion and to empower the country's youth. Given the low rate of enrolment, we need more quality teaching institutions. India can make use of its vast human resources productively if the learning system is made effective. However, the number of students and programmes increases every year, India has failed to produce world class universities both in the private and the public sector. The Central Government should allocate sufficient money to open new schools, colleges and universities, overhaul the entire system and invest in technology and innovation associated to the education system. Every child born in the country should have equal opportunity to learn, grow and excel in life with quality education blended with character. A vibrant nation is created by the energetic youth.

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