

Indian Higher Education at the Crossroads

Paper Submission: 16/09/2020, Date of Acceptance: 26/09/2020, Date of Publication: 27/09/2020



Jay Kumar Jha
Vice-principal, Kendriya Vidyalaya
New Bongaigaon
Assam, India.

Abstract

Higher education is very significant not only for an individual's success but also for the overall development of a nation. It can produce world class engineers, doctors, MBAs, academicians, teachers and other professionals. Thus, it becomes very natural to know the position of Indian universities or institutions of higher learning among the best institutions of higher learning in the world. Of course, Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world after China and United states. Some of the institutes like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are globally acclaimed. It is true that the fate of a country depends upon the education of its people. Therefore, the aim of education should simultaneously be the current needs and aspirations of a society as well as its values and human ideals. Mahatma Gandhi has visualized "education is a means of awakening the nation's conscience to injustice, violence, and inequality entrenched in the social order".

Elementary education, being the foundation of the pyramid in the education system, has been accorded high priority. Later on, there is a great demand for both secondary and higher secondary education in the country. After the successful completion of elementary, secondary and higher secondary education, a student enters the broad spectra of higher education of his or her choice often through competitive examinations. However, despite several initiatives, India's ranking in the higher education sector is far from satisfactory. Conclusively, the modern higher education needs a fine blending of both political and economic independence of the west and traditional Indian Community values for becoming responsible citizens to participate in democratic processes with confidence. Intelligence plus character should be the goal of our higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, crossroads, curriculum, privatization

Introduction

India is a nation with a rich variegated history, an extraordinary cultural diversity and a commitment to democracy. Here, quality education is a necessity for the successful working of democracy. Educated voters can make a correct choice and so the working of the government will be in the larger interest of the public. Otherwise also education in a democratic set-up must aim at bringing out the hidden talent of the people and should develop the mental faculties of the individuals. It should aim at making children capable of becoming responsible, productive and a useful member of a society. It is rightly said that the fate of a country depends upon the education of its people. Therefore, the aim of education should simultaneously be the current needs and aspirations of a society as well as its values and human ideals. Mahatma Gandhi has visualized "education as a means of awakening the nation's conscience to injustice, violence and inequality entrenched in the social order."¹

Elementary education, being the foundation of the pyramid in the education system, has been accorded high priority since the independence in India. Two programmes which were implemented in the beginning of the 21st century through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Midday Meal Programme (MMP), played important roles in making the school system popular among the children in 6-14 years age group. The implementation of Right To Education (RTE) proved to be instrumental in the universalization of education at elementary stage.

Due to a substantial increase in the number of students completing the elementary stage, there is a great demand for both secondary and higher secondary education in the country. The Central

Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the highest advisory forum on education in the country with the Union Education Minister as chairman and education ministers of all states and eminent educationists as its members, has developed a perspective plan to make secondary education universal too. After the successful completion of elementary, secondary and higher secondary education, a student enters the board spectra of higher education of his or her choice often through competitive examiners.

In today's highly competitive world, where every student wants to be on the top and wants to earn money in six or seven figures, the role of education especially higher education is very crucial. Higher education is very significant not only for an individual's success but also for the overall development of a nation since good higher education can produce world class engineers, doctors, MBAs and other professions. Thus, it becomes very natural to know the position of Indian universities or institutions of higher learning in the world. Of course, Indian higher education system is the third largest in the world after China and United States and some of the institutes of India like Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are globally acclaimed.

However, despite several initiatives, India's ranking in the higher education sector is far from satisfactory and a recently published list shows that only two Indian institutions have made it onto the list of the top 200 globally accredited institutes. Also, the comment of Narayan Murthy on the poor quality of IIT students, where he says, "Apart from the top 20 percent of students who crack the tough IIT entrance examination and can stand among the best anywhere in the world, quality of the remaining 80 percent of students leave much to be desired"² presents a frustrating reality of Indian higher education.

The unplanned growth of higher education coupled with a lack of resources affected the quality of education in India in the past. The government has been largely blamed for this debacle and there are several other factors that have compounded this miserable state. Lack of innovation and sticking to a redundant curriculum, a widening gap between the educational system and the ultimate professional performance, lack of funds in the system, lack of emphasis on research and no quality monitoring in the education system are prime reasons for such a dismal state of affairs. The gross enrolment rate (GER) for higher education, which has risen from 0.7 percent in 1950-51, 1.4 percent in 1960-61, and 8 percent in early 2000, is still very low (about 10 percent) compared to the world average of 23.2 percent, and an average of 54.6 percent for developed countries, 36.3 percent for countries in transition and 11.3 percent for developing countries. Thus, the need of the hour is to bring tremendous improvement in Indian higher education both quantitatively and qualitatively. More HEIs should be established and developed in underserved regions to ensure full access, equity and inclusion. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education (including vocational education) should increase from 26.3% in 2018 to 50% by 2030.

Suggestive measures to improve higher education Restructuring of curriculum

On the pattern of secondary education, the curriculum provided at college and university levels should be restructured. This will make the course problem-based, learner-centered and research-driven. The curriculum should include life skills, problem solving skills and self-discovery of the learners. The weightage of scholastic and co-scholastic activities should be balanced in the curriculum. In the present scenario, relevance and excellence should be the key aspects of curriculum development in the higher education system. The main aims of the higher education should be the need for a paradigm change from theoretical certification to a practical use of knowledge which is essential for talent growth and self-employment. The main thrust of this policy in higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges and HEI clusters, each of which will aim to accommodate more and more students. The very idea that all branches of creative human endeavor – including mathematics, science, vocational subjects, professional subjects and soft skills-should be considered 'arts' indeed has distinctly Indian origins. The higher education system should have multidisciplinary institutions of higher learning that offer undergraduate and graduate programmes, with high-quality teaching, research and community engagement. All HEIs should move towards becoming large multidisciplinary institutions, with programmes across disciplines and fields-offered either in their institutions or through HEIs clusters.

Review of literature

National Education Policy 2020 says that considering the requirements of 21st century, the aim of higher education must be to develop to develop good, well-rounded and creative individual. It must enable and individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deeper level, while at the same time build character, ethical and constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service and 21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines including the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages as well as professional, technical and vocational crafts. A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement and productive contribution to society. It must prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence. Quality higher institutes of learning, therefore, must be both a joy and an opportunity, to which all citizens must have access.

According to Harvey and Green¹, quality can be viewed as excellence, as transformative, as fitness for purpose or as value for money and as perfection. Quality in the educational context increasingly includes terms such as "fitness for purpose", and "value for money". An alternative view of educational quality proposed by Astin² is that quality is a

continuing process of critical self-examination that focuses on the institution's contribution to the student's intellectual and personal development. Astin's analysis of quality is relevant and can easily be adapted for analysis at the international level. For example, rankings and accreditation agencies often focus on inputs and some outputs. Harvey and Green categorized common approaches to quality in three main groups - excellence in inputs and outputs, fitness for purpose, value for money and then proposed an alternative perspective.

Aim of the study

Quality education especially higher education is a necessity for the successful working of democracy. Higher education is very significant not only for an individual's success but also for the overall development of a nation can produce world class professionals who in turn can ensure prosperity for the country. Hence, it becomes very natural to know the position of Indian Institutes of Higher learning in the larger interest of the country. It is true that the fate of a country depends upon the education of its people. Therefore, the aim of education should simultaneously be the current needs and aspirations of a society as well as its values and human ideals. Mahatma Gandhi has visualized "education is a means of awakening the nation's conscience to injustice, violence, and inequality entrenched in the social order". The present era needs greater diversification and innovation of our subjects at both college and university levels. There is a need to introduce new subjects to provide a wider choice to the students so that they can emerge as specialists in any specific area.

Quality Higher Education

Considering the requirements of the 21st century, the aim of higher education must be to evolve Quality University or college and the aim of a quality university and college education must be to develop good, well-rounded and creative individuals. A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement and productive contribution to society. The purpose of quality higher education is, therefore "more than simply the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment; it represents the key to more vibrant, socially-engaged and cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive and prosperous nation.³

Modification of teaching- learning process

We need to change from a system that supports rote learning and theoretical explanation to the areas that require practical description. It requires modifying usual teaching methods and introducing new progresses in technology into teaching-learning process. We must change from the usual teaching method to more interactive forms of learning and teaching by utilizing e-content, audio-visual aids, and e-learning objects. The responsibility of a teacher in the higher education system must change from knowledge disseminator to knowledge maker.

Introduction of new courses

The present era needs greater diversification and innovation of our subjects at both college and university levels. For many years, our universities and colleges offer the same courses with little possibility for future courses and newer specializations. Also, there is a need to introduce new subjects to provide a wider choice to the students so that they can emerge as specialists in any specific area.

Open distance learning and online programmes

All types of institutions should have the option to run Open Distance Learning (ODL) and online programmes provided they are specifically accredited to do so, to enhance their offerings, improve access, increase GER and provide increased opportunities for lifelong learning. All ODL programmes and their components leading to any diploma or degree will be of standard and quality equivalent to the highest quality programmes run by the HEIs on their campus.

Privatization of higher education to be discouraged

The present mission of educational system is to award degrees and make money out of it. At present, education is a business, where every business, where every businessman is sure to make money. This makes education available to the rich and not to the middle class or the poor. Institutions which are affordable are not well-equipped. Very few good institutions are available to the poor. We must realize that education is more than a luxury, it is a responsibility that society owes to itself. Therefore, privatization of higher education is a curse. It is a blot on the fair name of Indian democracy. Dangers of privatization and commercialization of education far outweigh the so-called opportunities. As Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas have been established by central government in almost every district of the country to cater quality education to school going children. Such similar institutions should also be made available for higher education to minimize the discrepancy in quality of education being offered by different institutions of higher learning. Nevertheless, we should not allow low quality institutions.

Examination and evaluation system to be revamped

In the present scenario the examination and evaluation system tests only a narrow range of skills, especially those of memory and suffers from grave errors, so much so that people question the legitimacy of higher education system. It promotes rote learning and throat-cut competition among students. Within a period of three hours it is not possible to test the knowledge of a student. Chance plays an important role in these types of tests. It is not possible to evaluate the ideas of students in terms of marks so accurately. Moreover, evaluation is more or less subjective. 'Continuous and comprehensive evaluation' popularly known as CCE was implemented in school education. Despite various apprehensions from different quarters in the beginning, gradually it has gained the confidence of all the concerned parties – students, parents and teachers. Similarly, the examination and

evaluation system of higher education deserves a fresh thought. Examination and evaluation should be organized in such a way that it can decrease stress and increase success of students. The role of assessment should be to measure the progress that the learner and teacher have made towards achieving the aims that have been set and appraising how this could be done better. There should be elimination of the terminology of 'pass – fail'. Instead the lack of adequate proficiency should be indicated through re-examination or reappear or retake recommended.

Re-examination should be conducted immediately after announcement of result to enable students needing retake in one or two subjects to move to the next stage without losing a year. The examination and evaluation of graduate and post-graduate courses should be conducted by a centralized agency as CBSE is doing for secondary and higher secondary courses. This will ensure uniformity in result. The result announced by this centralized agency should be the sole criteria for selection of different professionals in various trades of career. The scores obtained by students at such a national-level examination should be used by all departments for the purpose of selection of professions.

Building of characters and moral values

It was said by Winston Churchill that "the first duty of a university is to teach wisdom, not trade; character, not technicalities⁴. Power of Science and technology, economic exploitation and political manipulation have given way to indefinite possibilities of doing harm and have debased human values. In fact, man has not only lost faith in his fellow beings but also in himself, leading to violence all over.

Education in Western advanced countries makes people politically and economically independent but they mostly become emotionally broken and happy. In India, traditional values and systems inculcate strong familial and social bonds in people. But unfortunately, our youth are blindly imitating Western culture and living styles and thus moving away from the priceless indigenous culture and heritage. Radhakrishnan in one of his essays has pointed out, "Our education has lost contact with our culture. Unless the coming generations are familiar with the national culture it is not possible to have proper type of progress in any direction. Indian culture, ancient as it is, has not lost its relevance even today.

Western people after being dissatisfied with materialism have started turning towards Indian culture. So it is necessary that our children should be taught about the basic principles of our cultural heritage⁶. The modern higher education needs a fine blending of both – political and economic independence of the west and traditional Indian Community values for becoming responsible citizens to participate in democratic processes with confidence. Intelligence plus character should be the goal of our education. Addressing the graduates of the Allahabad University in 1947, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, said: "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and

for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. Universities are places of ideals and idealism. If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then, it is well with the nation and the people.⁵.

Conclusion

It is true that the fate of a country depends upon the education of its people. Hence, the aim of education should simultaneously be the current needs and aspirations of a society as well as its values and human ideals. Keeping in view the requirements of 21st century and the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by increasing proportion of employment opportunities for creative, multidisciplinary and highly skilled workforce – the higher education system must, at the earliest, be re-adjusted, re-vamped, and re-energized to meet these requirements. Conclusively, the modern higher education needs a fine blending of both political and economic independence of both the west and the traditional Indian community values for becoming responsible citizens to participate in democratic processes with confidence. Intelligence plus character should be the goal of our higher education.

References

1. A.W. Astin, "Improving Teaching and Institutional Quality", *Proceedings of American Association for Higher Education*, pp. 1-9, 1980. [17] Matthew D. Shank, Mary Walker and Thomas Hayes
2. Lee Harvey and Diana Green, "Defining quality", *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 9-34, 1993.
3. "National Curriculum Framework 2005", NCERT, P.3.
4. *The Times of India*, 2 Feb, 2012.
5. "National Education policy 2020", MHRD, Government of India, P.23.
6. P.R. Rakesh Sharma, "Youth and Literacy", *Competition Success Review*, October 2006, P.55.
7. Mamta Singh, "The condition And Future Of Education System In India", *Pratiyogita Darpan*, July 2007, P.168.