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## Higher Education in India: Challenges and Opportunities

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### **Abstract:**

*Education contributes for developing human capital which intern promotes economic development. Being the human rich nation, young India has the opportunity of capitalizing the advantage of human capital in development process. This is possible by educating the human resource. The higher education system has witnessed significant expansion in recent years both in terms of number of institutions as well as student enrollment. Globalization has brought in vast opportunities where we have to concentrate on international level as regards enrolment. Since India is recognized as an intellectual destination, it is high time to project India as an education hub.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, enrollment, equity, privatization, GER

### **1. Introduction**

In the emerging global world order, India is trying to position itself as a knowledge driven economy. Higher education assumes tremendous importance in the context and plays a vital role in a nation's development. Education contributes for developing human capital which intern promotes development. Given amount of fixed capital investment will be far more productive in an economy with an educated population than in an economy with uneducated population. For a developing economy investment in education is as important as invest in capital equipment.

### **2. Objectives**

This paper attempts to analyze the potential of higher education sector with the challenges and possible solutions to strengthen the higher education sector in India. The specific objectives of the present study are:

1. To understand the present status of Higher Education in India.
2. To know the growth of Higher Education Institutions and Enrollment in India.
3. To identify challenges in Higher Education Sector.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper is based on the secondary data from various published works such as books, reports, journals and the internet sources relating to higher education.

### **4. Brief Review of Literature**

There are large numbers of studies focused on higher education in India. It will be appropriate here to briefly review some of them Vigneshwara Varmudy (2012) in his research paper on "Higher Education: Still a Sick Child". Discussed the issues of higher education in India such as growth of institutions, enrollment and causes for the low enrollment rate in India.<sup>1</sup> Vikram Parek and Gupta (2012) in their combined study on "Indian Higher Education Sector: Heading Towards Transformation" puts across the view that the government of India alone will not be able to achieve general enrollment Ratio target and will require public Partnership, private investment and participation of foreign institutions to achieve their ambitions goal.<sup>2</sup>

According to Deepti Gupta and Navaneeth Gupta (2012) in their study on "Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges" reveals the study on economic and industrial development of India is essentially dependence on adequate number of good

<sup>1</sup> Vigneshwara Varmudy (2012). "Higher Education: Still a Sick Child", Amarthya, Mangalore Economic Association Publication, Mangaluru, 5(12): 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Vikram Parekh and Gupta C. (2012). "Indian Higher Education Sector: Heading towards Transformation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(14): 36-40.

quality skilled man power.<sup>3</sup> In a paper entitled “One Fifty Years of University Education in India: Challenges Ahead”. Sudha Rao K and Mithilesh Kr. Singh (2010) examined the higher education system in India along with important contemporary issues related to governance, academic, profession, .... and role of ICT in teaching-learning and policy research. The study also points out the challenges of higher education in India.<sup>4</sup> Kim Weers (2009) in his working paper on “India’s Conformation with Foreign Higher Education Proceiders” focuses on the partnership between India and foreign institutions in offering higher education, in the height of the Indian government’s willingness to add higher education to the GATS negotiation rounds.<sup>5</sup> Sujata Patel (2004) in her research paper on “Higher Education at Cross Roads” discussed the system of higher education in India & its challenges. These challenges have a historical origin, in recent times especially in the context of globalization these have increased.<sup>6</sup>

### 5. Higher Education in India

In India now more than half of the country’s population is under the age group of 30 years. Being the human rich nation, young India has the opportunity of capitalizing the advantage of human capital in developmental process. This is possible by educating the human resource. Better education contributes for higher productivity. India is witnessing rapid growth in R & D operations across domains such as IT, Telecom, Biotechnology, Pharmaceuticals, Chemicals, and consumer goods and medical research. Hunger for acquiring knowledge on the part of the youth has led to increase in the enrollment rate in the institutions of higher education. There are greater opportunities in front of the higher education sector to grow.

### 6. Growth of Higher Education in India

Before independence, access to higher education was very limited with enrollment of less than a million students in 500 colleges and 20 universities.<sup>1</sup> Today, India has the third largest higher education system in the world, next to China and United States. The institutional frame work for providing different streams of higher education consists of universities established by the Act of parliament or of the state legislature, deemed universities, institutions established under state legislative Act, and college affiliated to the university as well as autonomous colleges.<sup>2</sup> In India the universities widely differ in terms of their structure and coverage. As far as the percentage growth of the universities was concerned they have been increasing over these years. Table – 1 gives statistics as related with the growth of different types of universities in India between the period 2006 and 2011.

Universities	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011
(01)	(02)	(03)	(04)	(05)	(06)
Central Universities	20 (5.73)	25 (6.61)	40 (9.44)	41 (8.38)	43 (7.73)
State Universities	217 (62.18)	231 (60.95)	234 (55.33)	257 (52.55)	289 (51.97)
Deemed Universities	102 (29.23)	102 (26.95)	128 (30.28)	130 (26.58)	130 (23.38)
Private Universities	10 (2.86)	21 (5.49)	21 (4.95)	61 (12.49)	94 (16.92)
Total	349 (100)	379 (100)	423 (100)	489 (100)	556 (100)

Table 1: Growth of Universities in India, 2006 to 2011

Note: Figures in Parentheses indicate percentage to their tables which are computed

Source: UGC Report 2011, pp. 42-44

It can be observed from the figures presented in the Table 1, that the relative percentage share of Central, State, deemed and private universities stood at 7.73, 51.97, 23.38 and 16.92 respectively in the year 2011. As far as private universities are concerned their percentage share has been increasing from the year 2006 onwards, whereas the share of other universities is declining.

### 7. Growth of Students’ Enrollment

The higher education system has witnessed significant expansion in the recent years, both in terms of number of institutions as well as student enrollment. The student enrollment here in India as a whole from 1999 to 2009 is considered. The statistical information regarding the growth of students’ enrollment in India can be observed from the Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> Deepti Gupta and Navaneeth Gupta (2012). “Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges”, *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(20): 28-30.

<sup>4</sup> Sudha Rao K. and Mithilesh Kr. Singh (2010). “One Fifty Years of University Education in India- Challenges Ahead”, *University News*, New Delhi, 39(48): 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Weers (2009). “India’s Conformation with Foreign Higher Education Proceiders”, IS Academic Quality Education Alumni University, Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Sujata Patel (2004). “Higher Education at Cross Roads”, *University News*, New Delhi, 24(15): 20-21.

Year (01)	Total Enrollment (Number) (02)	% growth over the Preceding Year (03)
1999 – 2000	80,50,607	(-)
2000 – 2001	83,99,443	4.3
2001 – 2002	89,64,680	6.7
2002 – 2003	95,16,773	6.2
2003 – 2004	1,00,11,645	5.2
2004 – 2005	1,05,42,262	5.3
2005- 2006	1,11,37,623	5.6
2006 – 2007	1,18,87,095	6.7
2007 – 2008	1,27,27,082	7.0
2008 – 2009	1,36,41,808	7.2
2009 – 2010	1,42,27,707	7.5
2010 – 2011	1,58.32,808	7.9
2011 – 2012	1,60,32,909	8.3

Table 2: All India Growth of Students' Enrollment in Higher Education (1999 to 2011)

Source: UGC Annual Reports from 1999 to 2012

Data presented in Table 2, clearly indicate that the growth of student's enrollment in India over these years has been slowly and steadily increasing on an average the overall growth rate is in between 6% to 7%. At present as per the data given by the human resource development ministry the gross enrollment is about 17.87 percent stands very low. Access to higher education for all eligible in country will be a major issue before the policy makers.

On the one hand GER stands low the overall population, while on the other hand, there exists large variations among the various categories of population based on gender, urban or rural habitation and rich and poor. Due to regional and disparity in economic development and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, the higher is not equally available to the different sections of the society. The rural areas represent 65 per cent of total population have just 20 per cent of the total professional colleges. Similarly, 58 per cent of all higher educational institutions are located in the states of South India. R&D Expenditure is low at .81 per cent of GDP as compared to 1.15 per cent of China and 2.60 per cent of USA.

UGC was allotted Rs. 4390 cores for the year 2010-2011. Out of this only Rs. 73.50 crores, i.e. 1.7 per cent of total funds allocated is earmarked for research Rs. 18 corers i.e., 0.4 per cent of total allocated funds is for improving efficiency of higher education.<sup>3</sup> given the number of universities and institutions offering higher education in the country, this money is quite meager and effective utilization of this sum is a challenge. It can be observed from the Table 3.

Sector (01)	Plan Expenditure (02)	Plan Percentage Share (03)	Non-plan Expenditure (04)	Non-plan Percentage Share (05)	Total Expenditure (06)	Total Percentage share (07)
Elementary Education	29533.97	58.39	71057.60	45.16	110591.57	49.14
Secondary Education	10506.31	15.52	59268.49	37.67	69774.80	31.00
Adult Education	1661.29	2.45	221.22	0.14	1882.51	0.84
Language Development	245.62	0.36	774.71	0.49	1020.33	0.45
University and Higher Education	8384.75	12.38	20403.43	12.97	28788.18	12.79
Technical Education	6539.74	9.66	4470.04	2.84	11009.78	4.89
General Education	816.24	1.21	1000.95	0.67	1877.19	0.84
Physical Education	19.66	0.03	90.51	0.06	110.17	0.05
Total Education	67707.58	100.00	157346.95	100.00	225054.53	100.00

Table 3: Sector-wise Expenditure (Plan and Non-Plan) on Education by Education Department (Revenue Account), 2010-2011

Source: Analysis of predigested expenditure on education ministry of HRD, Govt. of India 2012, pp. 44-46

Data presented in Table 3 clearly indicates that, elementary education accounted for 49.14 per cent of the total expenditure on education in 2010-2011, followed by secondary education, which was 31 per cent. The share of university and higher education and

technical education was 12.79 and 4.89 per cent respectively. This clearly indicates that more efforts are required to promote higher education in the country.

## 8. Challenges

The major challenge before the higher education system is one of access, equity and excellence.

- a) **Access and enrolment:** The Gross Enrollment Rate (GER), measures, the access level by taking the ratio of persons in all age groups enrolled in various programs to total population in age group of 16 to 23. For Higher Education GER has risen from 0.7 per cent in 1950-51 to 1.4 per cent in 1960-61 and 8 per cent in early 2000. The current GER which is about 17.87 per cent stands very low in view of the projected population in the age group of 18-23 years for 2011-12, which is 144.287 million. 4 access to higher education for all eligible in the country will be a major issue before the policy makers.<sup>7</sup>
- b) **Equity:** On the one hand GER stands low for the overall population, while on the other hand there exist variations among the categories of population based on gender, urban or rural habitation and rich and poor. Due to regional disparity in economic development and uneven distribution of higher education, the higher education is not equally available to the different sections of the society. The rural areas represent 65 per cent of the total population have just 20% of the total professional colleges. Similarly, 58 per cent of all higher educational institutions are located in the states of South India. 5 R&D expenditure is low at 0.81 per cent of GDP as compared to 1.15 per cent of Elena and 2.60 per cent of USA.<sup>8</sup>
- c) **Quality:** The Indian Universities produce 6,00,000 Graduates in Arts/Science/ Commerce. Only 10 per cent of these graduates are employable. The most warring factor in our education system is the quality of education imparted. Higher education without quality cannot deliver quality human capital. Quality perceived in higher education is one which fulfills the aspirations of teachers, institutions, industry, students and other. The main reason for the low employability due to low focus on communication skills. In small towns and rural areas, children at school level are taught in the local language of late the situation has changed when they enter higher education, language, therefore, becomes a major issue.<sup>9</sup>
- d) **Privatization:** In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. In the year 2000-01, out of 13,072 higher education institutions, 42 per cent were privately owned and run catering to 37 per cent of students enrolled into higher education, that is 3.1 million out of total 8.4 million. It is also likely that most of the rapidly expanding higher education sector took place in private unaided colleges. Since grant-in-aid to private colleges in becoming difficult, many govt. funded institutions, universities have granted recognition/affiliation to unaided colleges and many universities have authorized new 'Self-Financing' courses even in govt. & aided colleges. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions. Mostly unaided involving high cost.<sup>10</sup>

## 9. Opportunities

Globalization has brought in vast opportunities. We have to concentrate an international level for enrollment since India is recognized as an intellectual destination; it is high time to project India as an education level. But for this, more focus is required on research than academics. The number of research publications coming out in India is comparatively low than other countries. This is a serious area of concern and also an area of opportunity.

Periodic revision of syllabus to include latest updates is required, but unfortunately not followed in majority of universities and institutions. Industry requirements should be considered, industrialists to be made members of panels revising and updating the syllabus.

More industry interaction to make students 'Industry Ready' is the need of the day. This would save valuable time and cost for the industries to train recruiters as their requirements. Universities and institutions should gear up to meet these challenges and achieve excellence. The immediate need is to strengthen the teaching and learning process. Innovation in teaching should be adopted laboratory equipments, smart boards, audio-visuals equipments including LCD projectors and other teaching aids, computers and accessories should be made available to all faculties of higher education. Technology must be put into its best use.

## 10. Conclusion

In India, higher education was traditionally looked after by the government but in view of lack of resources to meet the increasing demand, private sector has been allowed to share the responsibility. The country has a well developed educational set up in terms of range of programs and their acceptability in local industry. The member of educational institutions has been increased considerably in these years. The percentage of enrollment is also increased progressively since 2000 onwards. On the other hand, the government expenditure on higher education is very negligible when compare to primary and secondary education.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Wearts (2009). "India's Confrontation with Foreign Higher Education Provides", IS Academe-Quality Education Alumni University, Amsterdam.

<sup>8</sup> Deepti Gupta and Navneet Gupta (2012). "Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges", *Journal of Education and Practice*, 13(2).

<sup>9</sup> Raghavendra Rao (2013). "Higher Education in India: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities", Higher Education Challenges Ahead Concern, Mangaluru, pp. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> Pawan Agarwal (2006). "Higher Education in India: The Need for Change", ICRIER, Working Paper No. 179, May.

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