

Higher Education in India: Reflections, Images, and vision

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“Let us think of Education as a means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into our benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”
--John.F. Kennedy

ABSTRACT

The demand for higher education and the magnitude of planned reforms over the next ten years in India will provide the largest opportunity in the world for international higher education institutions and education businesses.

The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population.

Over the next five years, every aspect of higher education is being reorganized and remodeled: funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration and the way teaching and research are conducted. Emphasis will be placed on strengthening existing institutions. These issues are reflected in the three central pillars for the Government of India's 12th Five Year Plan for education.

The private sector, which currently accounts for 59% of all tertiary enrolment, continues to grow rapidly, providing most of the professional courses, particularly engineering and management. Many more providers are waiting for legislation which would allow them to enter the market. The private sector is expected to play a significant role in the future expansion of higher education in India.

While, it is important, to address the existing shortcomings in the higher education system, it is more important to move towards a bold and apparitional vision-The vision-2030.

India's Higher Education system is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States. Unlike China, however, India has the advantage of English being the primary language of higher education and research. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth in higher education as compared to 20 per cent in China.

The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. After observing noteworthy progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is stressed with four broad challenges;

The supply-demand gap: India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.(BC,2014)

The low quality of teaching and learning: The system is inundated by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.

Constraints on research capacity and innovation: With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

Uneven growth and access to opportunity: Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies.

Over the next five years, every aspect of higher education is being reorganized and remodeled: funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration and the way teaching and research are conducted. Emphasis will be placed on strengthening existing institutions. In arguably the biggest reform in the governance and funding of state universities, an ambitious programme is underway to devolve authority and budgets for higher education from federal government to the state governments.

The transformation of education in India in the next ten years is being driven by three main factors: economic growth, demographics and politics. Wider, global factors are also influencing change, including the rapid internationalization of education, global competition for talent and research funding and the co modification of education.

In the next decade, India will experience enormous growth in its middle classes: from 50 million now, to 500 million by 2025 (McKinsey Report, 2007). By 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy. The relationship between economic growth and growth in the tertiary enrolment ratio is particularly strong for economies with lower levels of GDP (purchasing power

parity) per capita. As India's economy continues to grow, a huge number of first generation learners will demand access to higher education. In ten years' time, 25 million households across India will have an income equivalent to \$15,000 and will be able to pay fees for higher education, an increase of 15 million on today's enrolment rates (NESTA, 2012).

However, growth will be uneven; India will be challenged by a growing disparity between those who have access to better life chances, and those who do not. Despite huge strides in primary enrolment rates, India still has the largest number of out-of-school children in the world, more than the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and 69% of India's population still lives on less than \$2 a day (World bank report, 2010). The World Bank categorizes India as "an extreme dual economy".

Another important driven force for educational change is population growth and the demographic profile. More than 50% of India's population is under the age of 25. By 2020, India will have one of the youngest populations in the world, with an average age of 29 years (ILO, 2011). India will outpace China in the next ten years as the country with the largest tertiary-age population (BC, 2012) and its relative success in boosting primary enrolment, access to secondary education and improved retention rates should see it have the largest growth in tertiary enrolment in the world in 2020 (BC 2012). The OECD predicts that in 2020, 200 million of the world's 25-34 year olds will be university graduates and 40% of these will be from China and India, representing a huge proportion of the global talent pool (OECD, 2012)

Together, these factors present three interrelated key challenges for education in India: expansion of the system, equity of educational opportunities and enhancement of the quality of teaching and research in Indian institutions. These issues are reflected in the three central pillars for the Government of India's 12th Five Year Plan for education. The three central pillars of India's 12th Five Year Plan are;

Excellence-Improving quality for better learning outcomes and employability,

Expansion-Providing educational opportunities to all citizens, regardless of social position, economic ability and geography,

Equity-Creating the capacity to meet the rising demand.

The key factor affecting educational change is political. Education in India is highly politicized and complex. Throughout the political system to the highest levels, the education sector is powerfully represented. Reforms in education are controlled by political processes and interests at both central and state levels. Many education reforms, plans and ambitions are highly contested. There is a complex interplay beneath the formal structures affecting the distribution of power and resources in education in India; underlying pressures, interests, incentives and institutions can influence or upset future educational change. This is particularly complex in the higher education sector (Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

There is a great deal of centralization in decision-making in education, driven primarily through the five year plan system, which sets out priorities and central budget allocations to states.

However, there has been increasing dissatisfaction among the states that central government is too slow and interfering, and has held back progress in education. Education bills can languish for years in parliament without being put to the vote.

In reality, central government does not have a strong authorization to control education at the state level, and the mechanisms to ensure that states are following central decisions. There is now central government approval to devolve more decision-making power to the states, and this has widespread support. States are taking education reform into their own hands, although within the confines of central legislation. However, there are considerable variations in the ability and the political will of states to achieve this.

As of 2012, India has 152 central universities, 316 state universities, and 191 private universities. Other institutions include 33,623 colleges, including 1,800 exclusive women's colleges, functioning under these universities and institutions, and 12748 Institutions offering Diploma Courses. The emphasis in the tertiary level of education lies on science and technology. Indian educational institutions by 2004 consisted of a large number of technology institutes. Distance learning is also a feature of the Indian higher education system. The Government has launched “Rashtrya Uchattar Shiksha Abhiyan” to provide strategic funding to State higher and technical institutions. A total of 316 state public universities and 13,024 colleges will be covered under it. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the “University Grants Commission (India)”, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state (UGC, 2012)

As per Report of the Higher education in India, Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance, the access to higher education measured in term of gross enrollment ratio increased from 0.7% in 1950/51 to 1.4% in 1960–61. By 2006 the GER had been increased to about 11 percent. Notably, by 2012, it had crossed 20 % (E&Y,2012).

Let me share you some figures in this context. The total population between the ages of 15 and 24 in India is 234 million. If India is to meet its 30 percent GER target by 2020, about 40 million students -- 40 million university places- an increase of 14 million, and 500 million skilled workers -- would be enrolled in the higher education system in 2020. Currently, around 18.5 million students are enrolled in the higher education sector. The problem is that as increasing numbers come out of the high school system, we just don't have the capacity to absorb them into the college system. There is a massive mismatch in the supply-demand, of proportions that have never been seen anywhere or anytime in the world before (BC & EIU, 2014).

For instance, to reach the target of the 30 percent GER, let alone aspire to developed nation standards, we need to create an additional capacity of about 25 million seats over the next decade. This requires an additional 10,510 technical institutions, 15,530 colleges and 521 universities! That's the root cause of the problem – but, why did the problem happen?

The problem happened because for a long time we were happy with the public, government-owned system. Unfortunately, until a few years ago, India was in denial of the situation. While there was a government pushes to ramp up access in primary and secondary schooling, when it

came to higher education, we were too focused on the few good institutions we have, such as the IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) and the IIMs (Indian Institutes of Management).

Today 316 state universities and 13,024 aided colleges are facing acute financial shortage, which are steadily decreasing. In past three five-year plans, grants being given to central institutes have increased, but share of state universities has almost remained same. From ninth to eleventh five-year plan, grants to central universities increased from Rs. 2,272 crore to Rs. 34,784 crore, i.e. increase of 15 times. In same time, grants to state universities increased only three times, from 1,724 crore to 5,342 crore, which if considered inflation would mean no increase. The result of such step motherly behavior is creating problems in quality, availability and excellence of the higher education in the country (BC& EIU, 2014).

State governments are no less responsible for this. On an average, states spend around 5 per cent on the higher education. While states like UP, West Bengal, and Jharkhand spend less, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, and Andhra Pradesh spend more money per student and are much better than national average. It is not just financial problems the universities are facing, but also problems like political interference, mismanagement, and lack of accountability are also affecting education standards (GOI, MHRD Annual Reports).

.In order to improve quality of state universities and affiliated colleges, Human Resource Ministry recently started the National Higher Education Mission. Under this scheme, in 12th and 13th five year plan a total of Rs. 98,138 crore would be spent, of which 69 per cent would borne by the central government and rest by the state governments(GOI, MHRD Annual Reports).

Under the scheme, in next nine years, 278 new universities and 388 colleges would be established and 266 colleges would be turned into model colleges. The ministry also wants to overhaul the way in which universities and colleges are given financial aid. Although intention is good, but real challenge would be proper coordination between central and state governments. It's a step forward that at least now we recognize the scale of the challenge. But, there is no way such magnitude of scale can be achieved by the government. It will need the private sector's active participation. (Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

Right now, the private sector accounts for 59 percent of enrolment in higher education. And there are some worthy examples of quality – institutes such as BITS (Birla Institute of Technology and Science), MANIPALUniversity and FLAME (Foundation for Liberal and Management Education). But, the regulatory environment is absolutely draconian when it comes to the private sector. Due to the need to negotiate through what are really discouraging policies, high-quality people who are not part of the system find it difficult to establish private universities.

So, over the past decade, to cater to the huge supply-demand gap, people who didn't know enough about education, and had no aspirations to be in education – mostly business people from industries such as real estate started to create private colleges and universities. Given that they were not academically oriented people, or who didn't understand education, even if they were well-intentioned they didn't know how to create an environment for education. They saw

themselves as providing a service, and the service was providing somebody a degree that could get them a job.

India needs to make sure that private universities are encouraged, and that the legislation to create them is enabling. It's a maze right now with multiple governing bodies that have conflicting directives. Several states do not yet have a State Private University (SPU) Act. Because universities and institutes are so tightly controlled, there is little autonomy in and flexibility in governance structures. Private universities, like government-owned universities, have little scope for innovation in designing their course curriculum.

The Government of India is aware of the plight of higher education sector and has been trying to bring reforms; however, 15 bills are still waiting for discussion and approval in the Parliament. One of the most talked about bill is Foreign Universities Bill, which is supposed to facilitate entry of foreign universities to establish campuses in India. The bill is still under discussion and even if it gets passed, its feasibility and effectiveness is questionable as it misses the context, diversity and segment of international foreign institutions interested in India. One of the approaches to make internationalization of Indian higher education effective is to develop a coherent and comprehensive policy which aims at infusing excellence, bringing institutional diversity and aids in capacity building.

Issues-

Two observations can be made from what is stated above, as regards the present education system in India. First, the education, in general, and higher education, in Particular, plays a vital role in the realization of India's extraordinary potential and Sustainable, social, economic and technological development. Secondly, precisely Because of this potential and its implications for individual advancement, there is an extraordinary demand for higher education among India's young. These two observations apply to many other countries as well. However, considering both the sheer size of the country and the nature of its development potential, they become exceptionally powerful forces for determining the social, economic, and political dynamics of higher education in India.

Critical issues in Indian Higher Education

There are five issues – quantity/quality, regulation, privatization, staffing, and studying Abroad-emerged out from the state of affair and the prospects of higher Education in India.

Excellence and expansion: Quantity and quality in Indian Higher Education

We can see a silent crisis in the systems as regards the Quantity and quality in Indian higher education which run deeps in it, and has to do much more for both the terms referred and in the system itself.

By observing this crisis the ex-prime minister of India Mr. Manmohan Singh critically expressed his concern over the quantity deterioration and qualitative deficiencies in Indian higher education in a speech in 2007.

“It is a matter of serious concern that almost two third (68%) of the country’s universities and 90% of its colleges are” of poor quality and have not qualified faculty. More so corruption prevails in the universities and colleges.”

Inference -- There are two major challenges for our country in respect of higher education. One is qualitative deficiencies and other is Quantitative expansion. Each one of this required vigorous and exceptional efforts with firm determination and in a fearless atmosphere with a religious wish to tackle them both at once.

Regulation and governance

Indian higher education system is considered to be as sub optimally organized and over regulated both and in extant and in nature. It is governed in such a stiffed manner that has limited the scope for making changes and taking new initiatives. This has also limited the mobilization of additional efforts for the development of system.

Inference --There should be a nationwide debate among the academicians, educationists, scholars and leaders for the autonomy, new regulatory system and good governance.

The Privatization of Higher Education

We observe one most stunning feature in the development of higher education in India that due to massive demand of higher education among the Indians; there have emerged a large number of private Universities and Colleges in the system in few streams of education like engineering, medical science, management and not for other graduate or post graduate level courses. This is solely due to deficit in regulation and governance. While the government’s share in overall education expenditure declined from 80 percent in 1983 to 67 percent in 1999, whereas private expenditure on education increased more than ten times.

Inference-- Private initiatives and resources are playing ambiguous yet major role in Indian higher education system in the absence of good set of regulations and good governance. But due to many deficits sustainable development of the system is not attainable in future.

Staffing Higher Education

As rightly pointed out by our worthy ex-prime minister in adequate, in appropriate, inexperienced, and untrained staff in Indian universities and colleges is another major issue in Indian higher education. This feature is more pertinent and visible in private institutions.

Inference -- To overcome this situation, an atmosphere of academic culture, good economic conditions, and trainings has to be made and efforts are to be made to bring back scholars who moved out of India for some reason or the other.

Study abroad

Studying abroad more particularly in UK and USA are two faces of the same coin or two banks of a river. Due to globalization and multi- dimensional development in Indian Education System and in India’s social and economic environment India has entered in a globe education market. This has generated a separate bracket of expertise Indian scholars.

Inference -- The manner and to the extent, India has entered in this globe education market, the socio-economic, tecno-cultural, civic-political changes taken place in this market will definitely

effect the direction and growth of education system in India. The sustainable development of higher education in India will have to see many phases in its journey.

Challenges-

India's higher education system faces challenges on three fronts:

Expansion:

India's GER of 16% was much below the world average of 27%, as well as that of other emerging countries such as China (26%) and Brazil (36%) in 2010.

Excellence:

Faculty shortage - there is 40% and 35% shortage of faculty in state and central universities, respectively

Accredited institutions - 62% of Universities and 90% of Colleges were average or below average in 2010, on the basis of their NAAC accreditation.

Low citation impact - India's relative citation impact is half the world average.

Equity - There is wide disparity in the GER of higher education across states and the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) in urban and rural areas, and gender- and community-wise

Inter-state disparity - 47.9% in Delhi vs. 9% in Assam.

Urban-rural divide - 30% in urban areas vs. 11.1% in rural areas.

Differences across communities - 14.8% for OBCs, 11.6% for SCs, 7.7% for STs and 9.6% for Muslims.

Gender disparity - 15.2% for females vs. 19% for males.

–OECD (2012) & Twelfth Five year plan (2012–2017).

Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with two more broad challenges;

Constraints on research capacity and innovation: With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

Uneven growth and access to opportunity: Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies.

Looking to the multitude and magnitude of the problems the Indian higher education system facing, it is easy to overcome by the problems and feel despair for finding solutions of the problems. But simultaneously one can look that India due to its industrial and technological development has made a considerable progress in higher education system. And thus can reach at desired goal by crushing the problems and hurdle in the path.

Initiatives-

The Government of India has been wise in taking note of the gains we stand to accrue from Investing in higher education. The list of initiatives undertaken by the Government is by no means comprehensive; nonetheless it exemplifies the scope and nature of endeavors that are underway. Over the next five years, every aspect of higher education is being reorganized and

remodeled: funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration and the way teaching and research are conducted. Emphasis will be placed on strengthening existing institutions. In arguably the biggest reform in the governance and funding of state universities, an ambitious programme is underway to devolve authority and budgets for higher education from federal government to the state governments.

Budget

As a part of the Twelfth Five year plan (2012–2017), the central government of India outlined an expenditure of 65.6% of its total education budget of ₹438 billion (US\$7.1 billion) i.e. ₹288 billion (US\$4.7 billion) on elementary education; 9.9% i.e. ₹43.25 billion (US\$700 million) on secondary education; 2.9% i.e. ₹12.5 billion (US\$200 million) on adult education; 9.5% i.e. ₹41.765 billion (US\$680 million) on higher education; 10.7% i.e. ₹47 billion (US\$760 million) on technical education; and the remaining 1.4% i.e. ₹6.235 billion (US\$100 million) on miscellaneous education schemes.

Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017)

The private sector has played an instrumental role in the growth of the sector. Private institutions now account for 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of enrolment in the country, as compared to 43% and 33%, respectively, a decade ago. The Government has also given the required thrust to the sector in its Five Year Plans. During the Eleventh Plan period (2007–2012), India achieved a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 17.9%, up from 12.3% at the beginning of the Plan period.

Next steps-

Merit-based student financing: This should ensure admissions to meritorious students independent of financial background (curriculum, faculty, etc) to international standards **enabling a research environment.** This would involve creating adequate means of research funding and practical application of research

High quality faculty: The need of the hour is to create a conducive environment and provide incentives to attract and retain high quality faculty

Improved technology: Internationalization of education: This would entail aligning different aspects of education **for education delivery:** Leveraging technology for enhancing the teaching-learning experience will ensure better outcomes

Employability: Making education-industry relevant and practical would be the right way to ensure a highly employable talent pool

Highlights of India's Education Sector-

-India is the single largest provider of global talent, with one in four graduates in the world being a product of the Indian system.

-India is in the fourth cycle of its research excellence framework, with at least a 100 of Indian universities competing with the global best 23 Indian universities are among the global top 200, going from none two decades ago.

-In the last 20 years alone, 6 Indian intellectuals have been awarded the Nobel Prize across categories.

- India is a regional hub for higher education, attracting global learners from all over the world.
 - The country has augmented its GER to 50% while also reducing disparity in GER across states to 5 percentage points.
 - The Indian higher education system is needs-blind, with all eligible students receiving financial aid. Two-thirds of all government spending towards higher education is spent on individuals, including faculty and students
 - India's massive open online courses, started by several elite research universities, collectively enroll 60% of the world's entire student population
 - Indian higher education institutions are governed by the highest standards of ethics and accountability, with every single one of them being peer-reviewed and accredited.
- (Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

Higher Education in India: Vision 2030-

By 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world. With nearly 140 million people in the college-going age group, one in every four graduates in the world will be a product of the Indian Higher Education System

(Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

The Road to Progress: 2013 to 2030

In recent years, India has undertaken massive structural and systemic changes that have started to yield encouraging results. Some of the significant factors that have contributed to this growth and can help envision the 2030 dream include;

- Expansion of a differentiated university system with a three-tiered formalized structure
- Transition to a learner-centered paradigm of education
- Intensive use of technology
- Reforms in governance

(Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

Vision- 2030

By 2030, India will have the largest population in the world, in the higher education age bracket. Increasing urbanization and income levels will drive demand for higher education.

- India's economy is expected to grow at a fast pace; rapid industrialization would require a gross incremental workforce of 250 million by 2030; India could potentially emerge as a global supplier of skilled manpower.
- India has the opportunity to become a prominent R&D destination.
- Given the expected socio-economic scenario in 2030, India would need a robust higher education system that can deliver on multiple imperatives.
- A differentiated system of institutions with differing objectives and focus areas would be critical for achieving the proposed goals.

(Twelfth Five year plan, 2012–2017).

Conclusion-

While, it is important, to address the existing shortcomings in the higher education system, it is more important to move towards a bold and apparitional vision.

We strongly believe that a thesaurus three tiered structure that enables seamless vertical and horizontal mobility of students would be able to create the desired intellectual, economic and social value. The implementation framework suggests the student at the center stage to promote innovations and choice, an ICT architecture that will increase access, equity and quality, and a transparent governance framework that will enable autonomy and self regulation. A framework for governance has proposed a mechanism based outcomes and strong institutional accountability, clearly thesaurus the role and responsibilities of the government as well as public and private higher education institutions.

Novelist, poet, and an educationist C.S.Lewis, has rightly said **“The task of modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts.”**

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