CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

Ms. K.Kusuma Kumari[1]

[1]Lect. in Library Science, KTR Women's College, Gudivada, Krishna Dt , AP.

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Abstract – "EDUCATION IS THE POND OF KNOWLEDGE"

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world; next to the United States and China. Higher education is an engine of economic growth in any country including India. Higher education has significant role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies. It provides an opportunity to critically reflect upon the social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. Although there have been challenges to higher education in the past, these most recent calls for reform may provoke a fundamental change in higher education. Now the time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building. We need higher educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation very easily and quickly. In this background the main objective is to study the challenges and opportunities for the higher education system in India. Some issues related to the 12th plan for education and also key proposals for quality higher education have been discussed.

Key Words: Higher education, Knowledge economy, Quality education, Financing, Globalization.

1.INTRODUCTION

Education has always been considered as the only key component of human development and greatest liberating force. It is considered as fundamental to all round development of the individual both at material and spiritual levels. Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable. Public awareness, education and training are keys to moving society toward sustainability. Education creates human capital which is the core of economic progress and assumes that the externalities generated by human capital are the source of self sustaining economic process.

In order to become prosperous global economy within first five ranks, India has to qualitatively strengthen higher and technical education. In this regard, higher education has significant role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies. The third world countries currently have a weak higher education system. While globalization, technological and demographic changes and the growing economic importance of knowledge are making higher education reform more urgent and challenging than in past, some of these factors are also making such reforms potentially more attainable (IBRD/world bank 2000).

India's education system turns out millions of graduates each year, many skilled in IT and engineering. This manpower advantage underpins India's recent economic advances, but masks deep seated problems within India's education system. While India's demographics are generally perceived to give it an edge over other countries' economies (India will have a youthful population when other countries have ageing populations), if this advantage is restricted to small, highly educated elite, the domestic political ramifications could be severe. With 35 per cent of the population under the age of 15, India's education system faces numerous challenges. Successive governments have pledged to increase spending on education to 6 per cent of GDP, but actual spending has hovered around 4 per cent for the last few years. While, at the top end, India's business schools, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and universities produce globally competitive graduates. Indian governments have seen education as a crucial development tool. Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and (IISc), All India institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) have been globally acclaimed for their standard of education.

2.CHALLENGES FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

- The most important challenge today for Indian Higher Education sector is to establish many new universities and colleges.
- The quality of H.E. in India is extremely bad
- The structure of the governance in India is at a very poor state.
- The H.E. in India is not governed and regulated in an independent manner.
- The funding and investment in H.E. needs to be redefined.

- Most of the premier institutes are located in big cities and already developed places.
- If the quest is to reach the deprived sections of the society and those who are marginalised, then the new H.E. institutions should be set up in remote places of India.
- The entry of the foreign universities will be very easy in the present domestic setup. More intense competitions from the quality players in the H.E. are envisaged. Popularity of regular class teaching going down and correspondence studies becoming popular.

3.OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

Future Opportunities	Rationale
Institutional collaborations in teaching and learning	Stated highest priority for international partnership. Increasing the quality of teaching and learning is central to government plans over next five years, including faculty exchange. Considerable scope and scale in state-funded institutions and the private sector
Research collaboration in STEM	Top priority in research, mostly, but not exclusively, with the 'tier 1' institutions. Research funding is likely to increase.
Research collaboration in the humanities, arts and social sciences	Supporting multi and inter-disciplinary research; emerging opportunities for professional courses. Pockets of excellence across different institution types (public/private,central/state-funded). Potential interest in wider south Asia networks
Multi-dimensional,	Emerging opportunities through state governments
system-wide support for higher education reform	as devolved authority and budgets are made to states based on performance and outcomes.
Students and early stage researchers	UK to India mobility increasingly important and demanded by Indian institutions; capacity building to enhance employability skills and researcher skills; encourage greater pipeline into research careers, English.
Enterprise education, entrepreneurship, links with industry	Important for job creation and enhancing employability. Across institution types, particularly state and private institutions; potentially in partnership with state governments
Leadership and management	New roles for leaders and senior managers as reforms force more accountability and change which require strategic leadership and planning
Vocational skills	Emerging interest in linking skills and HE sectors, increasing employability and access. Huge interest and need in developing skills market, particularly with private colleges, private universities and business
Digital learning technologies	Vital component to achieve expansion and increase access and quality. Blended learning and MOOCs have large potential. Collaboration in pedagogies and design.
Conferences, policy dialogues	Support to system reform and emerging areas of

and networks	mutual interest; provide forums for shared learning and relationship-building between the UK and India in HE. Across all institution types, central and state governments
Links with industry, establishing incubation centres and innovation units	Top priority for government: driving innovation, supporting technology transfer, encouraging impact-driven research. All institution types; utilise private institutions for links with industry

4.ROLE OF REGULATORY BODIES IN MAINTAINING QUALITY IN HE:

Higher education in India is coordinated by several agencies. While most of general higher education falls within the jurisdiction of the UGC, professional institutions are coordinated by different bodies. The AICTE is responsible for coordinating technical and management education institution. The other statutory bodies are Medical Council of India (MCI), Central Council of Indian Medicine, The Homeopathy Central Council, The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Nursing Council, The Dental Council, The Pharmacy Council, The Bar Council of India, and The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) etc. There are also a few such bodies at state level, such as State Council of Higher education that were established currently. There is yet another type of a coordinating agency, called AIU, which was earlier known as Inter-University Board of India. AIU has no executive powers, but plays an important role as an agency of dissemination of information and as an adviser both to the government and/or UGC and University.

There are significant differences in their mandate, powers and functions. The councils have rules and regulations of their own. There is large overlap of their functions with the functions of the UGC, other professional councils and even function of universities in some cases. In five cases, namely - Medical Council of India, Pharmacy Council of India, All India Council for Technical Education, Indian Nursing Council and the Bar Council of India, there are also State Councils; and there are overlaps in functions of the national councils and state councils.

5.QUALITY ASSURANCE:

There is a need of an independent accreditation agency with a conglomerate of government, industry, academia; society etc. means all stakeholders of the education to ensure that the stakeholders particularly the students are not taken for a ride. They should be able to know whether a particular institution delivers value or not, then things can be under control to some extent. The institution, which excels in obtaining Accreditation, should be encouraged to levy higher tuition fees from those who can afford, compared to those who do not receive Accreditation. It is also important that all institutes of higher learning must make public the acceptability of their courses and degrees i.e. the status, recognition and acceptability of their courses by other institutions. Any misrepresentation of facts to the general public should make the institute and its promoters, directors and staff liable for civil prosecution technical education, both vocational and professional, constitutes the foundation for development of science and technology, and business. India is rightly proud of the international standing of its IITs, and IIMs, but a handful of world-class technical institutions are not sufficient. A large number of the country's engineering colleges, medical colleges, business schools, other science and technology institutions need to be created and upgraded to quality standards and given the required autonomy.

6.HIGH-TECH LIBRARIES:

Our university libraries have a very good collection of books, but they are all in mess. A library must be online and conducive for serious study. Indian universities should concentrate more on providing quality education which is comparable to that of international standards.

7.INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION:

There has been a very aggressive approach by USA, UK and Australia in few decades on spreading their education outside the country and these countries have taken some of the issues in their parliamentary bills to expand and develop the vocational and higher education outside the country. In Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai are such places, which have made few locations of Education offering with quality while providing minimum infrastructure. As commented by Dean, London 21 Business School that 'India lacks in offering basic infrastructure and location to offer quality education from the reputed universities of the world'. There is a need of very clear view on Education Policy on the internationalization of the higher and other level of education in either form by inviting the foreign players in the Indian education and by providing the Indian education players through and official channels to the countries, which have opportunities for Indian educational institutions.

8.LACK OF MORAL VALUES AND QUALITY:

Rapid growth of science and technology and subsequent industrialization has caused a great and danger to our old moral and values. The younger generation's dissatisfaction and revolt is the outcome of a decaying system of values. Quality in higher education is another burning issue which can be ensure through regular review of the functions of the institution either through self assessment or through outside agencies and by accrediting the institutions. The expansion of higher education over the years has also resulted in educational malpractices which exist in the form of capitation fees being charged by the private institution at the time of admissions and various other charges imposed upon the students. This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms. The various regulatory bodies regulating higher education have constituted autonomous bodies for monitoring quality standards in the institutions under their purview e.g., NAAC, NBA, AB, DEC etc. But, the quality norms of such councils are not comparable with international standards to a certain extent and the enforcement process is not stringent.

9.GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S 12TH FIVE YEAR PLAN FOR EDUCATION:

The three central pillars of India's 12th Five Year Plan

Excellence - Improving quality for better learning outcomes and employability.

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

Expansion - Creating the capacity to meet the rising demand.

9.1.Key reforms in India planned in the next five years:

The central government operates a five-year planning cycle. The twelfth five-year plan (2013-17) for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion.

9.1.1Excellence:

Priority issues in excellence include improvements in teaching and learning, and a focus on learning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching. More international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and consortia are also included in excellence.

9.1.2.Equity:

Equity means further initiatives targeted at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities

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9.1.3.Expansion:

Expansion is scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects. Enabling flexible and skills-based learning; ensuring a more even spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment are also explained in expansion.

10.ACHIEVING HIGHER ACCESS THROUGH EXPANSION:

Increasing and enhancing access through mission mode national plan "Rashtriya Uchch Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)" which aims to achieve 25 percent GER by bringing forth the up gradation of Autonomous colleges, promoting evening universities & colleges for those who have little time in day to spare, increasing the intake capacity keeping in mind the requirements, advocating the concept of Cluster University, and Meta University.

A huge investment in ICTs and internet access under a'meta university framework', which enables multi-disciplinary collaboration and development of technology-enhanced learning and teaching, including MOOCs and online courses

10.1.Key proposals in the 12th five year plan include:

- A strengthened accreditation system along with more autonomy for states and universities
- Improving the quality of teaching and doubling the number of faculty
- Doubling of investment in R&D to 2 percent over five years
- Significant investment in ICT in terms of infrastructure and content development
- A shift to a credit-based and internationally recognised assessment system
- Strengthening the capacity of existing institutions, establishing 20 'innovation and research universities' and 50 centres of excellence, training and research in science, technology, social sciences and humanities
- A review which could pave the way for for-profit private education in some areas

- The introduction of schemes to target underprivileged and underrepresented students
- Support for further internationalization through a broad range of initiatives, including increased international research collaboration, international programmes for faculty development and attracting foreign faculty to India. A more detailed summary of provisions in the plan is contained in the Annexes.

11.CONCLUSION

According to our Ex Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh 'The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building'. We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world. The thrust of public policy for higher education in India has to be to address these challenges. However, one university can't make much difference. If the government welcomes more such initiatives, the future will be ours. We will be able to match and compete with other countries and the dream to be the world's greatest economy won't be difficult to achieve.

The future of the H.E. system in India does not look bleak in totality. The need is to understand the real requirements; the problems should be sought at the grassroots level to begin with. Policy making for H.E. has been very sound; however, the time now demands action on the same with precision. The need today is also to have competent faculty members who are engaged in their work and have sound quality competence. India cannot afford to have below par faculty now as the world is now being transformed into a global village. The pedagogy, the regulations, the evaluation criteria, the curricula, the infrastructure all of them need to be revamped from time to time to list India among the quality players in H.E. system.

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