

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN INDIA

Pankaj Kumar Arya*

Manoj Kumar**

*Research Scholar, Deptt. of Sociology Government PG College Dwarahat (Almora)

**Research Scholar, Deptt. Of political science, DSB Campus Kumaun University (Nainital)

Abstract

After independence, there has been rapid development in higher education in India. During the time of the country's independence, the number of universities was very low, but currently, there are 711 universities and 40,760 colleges along with institutions of university level, where 26.585 million students are pursuing higher education. Along with the expansion of higher education, there has also been a decline in quality. This has led to a focus on improvement from time to time. This is the reason why there is a lack of qualifications and skills among students, even after obtaining a degree from a university, they are not getting employment. Today, students are more focused on acquiring knowledge and obtaining a degree by any means necessary. Through this research paper, an attempt has been made to understand the problems before higher education and some suggestions have been given for their solution. The description of which is being presented in detail in the research paper.

Keywords: Higher education, Issues, Solutions, Independence, Institute, Framework.

Introduction

The current form of higher education in modern India is a legacy of British rule. Almost all countries in the world give special importance to higher education because leading scientists, technicians, researchers, and philosophers emerge from the framework of this education. The future of a country's economic development is linked to its higher education. When universities deteriorate, the entire nation suffers. Therefore, if primary education is the foundation of education in the entire education system, then higher education is its crown.

Brief Overview of National Education Policy

After India's independence, the Kothari Commission in 1968 implemented the first National Education Policy based on the recommendations of 1964-66. In 1986, with necessary improvements in the education system and to strengthen the reach of education, especially addressing inequalities in the education sector (especially concerning women, disabled

individuals, and scheduled castes and tribes), the second National Education Policy was implemented. In 1992, the National Education Policy of 1986 was revised, introducing the concept of a national-level entrance examination for admission to technical and vocational education programs in the country.

The New Education Policy 2020 has been prepared based on the recommendations of a committee chaired by former ISRO chief Dr. Kasturirangan. The aim of the policy is to improve the quality of education, promote innovation and research in education, and make the Indian education system globally competitive. It divides the current 10+2 educational model into a 5+3+3+4 system, focusing on mother tongue/local language up to class 5 and prioritizing mother tongue in further education. Emphasis is placed on reducing curriculum load, developing 21st-century skills, experiential learning, and promoting logical thinking. Vocational education will be included from class 6 onwards. The policy also advocates for the use of artificial intelligence-based software to assist in decision-making related to education and development of students. Additionally, it proposes the establishment of 'Multi-disciplinary Education and Research Universities' equivalent to IITs and IIMs.

India's higher education system is the third-largest in the world, with significant growth in the number of colleges and universities nationwide. However, there are challenges such as unequal access to quality education and overcrowded institutions. Despite having the largest number of universities globally, India lags in terms of quality compared to developed nations, with many colleges lacking basic facilities. The situation underscores the need for reforms in higher education. The Standing Committee on Human Resource Development, chaired by Dr. Satyanarayan Jatiya, submitted a report on challenges and issues in the higher education sector in India, highlighting the need for improvement. The committee examined universities in various cities and discussed the provision of education loans by public sector banks. Some of the major issues identified by the committee include:

1. *Shortage of Resources:*

Most of the admissions in higher education are conducted by state universities and their affiliated colleges. However, these state universities receive less funding comparatively. While 65% of the University Grants Commission budget goes to central universities and their colleges, state universities and their affiliated colleges receive only the remaining 35%.

2. *Low Overall Domestic Enrollment:*

According to the All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20, the overall enrollment ratio in higher education in India is 27.1%, which is lower compared to developed countries and lags behind even developing nations. Although there has been a consistent increase in domestic enrollment at the school level post-COVID, the supply in higher education institutions is unable

to meet the same proportion. Consequently, a significant number of students from India opt to pursue higher education abroad.

3. *Vacancies of Teachers:*

As per the University Grants Commission, there are vacancies for 16,699 Professors, 4,731 Associate Professors, and 9,585 Assistant Professors in various central universities. Among these, 5,925 Professor positions (35%), 2,183 Associate Professor positions (46%), and 2,459 Assistant Professor positions (26%) remain vacant. The committee cited two reasons for these vacancies: firstly, young students do not find teaching financially attractive, and secondly, the recruitment process is lengthy and involves excessive formalities.

4. *Quality:*

While India ranks third in terms of higher education systems after the United States and China, its quality doesn't match up. Among the top 220 universities worldwide, none are from India. Despite the abundance of colleges and universities, many of them fail to meet the criteria set by the University Grants Commission and struggle to comply with its standards and regulations.

5. *Political Factors:*

Political interference in the management and other activities of most higher education institutions in India is increasing. The growing intervention of politicians has also affected the autonomy of these institutions. Key political leaders play a significant role in governing bodies of universities.

6. *Foundational Structure:*

Given the rising population and the proportion of the youth demographic, there will be an unexpected surge in the number of youth seeking higher education in the next 10-12 years. However, there is a lack of clear and meaningful plans for necessary educational infrastructure and resources. Many colleges and universities lack their own buildings and laboratories, and there is also a shortage of resources in those currently available.

7. Inadequate Research

Professor Yashpal believes that institutions neglecting research and its quality end up benefiting education but not society. The surge in publications has diverted attention from classroom teaching, leading to a decline in quality and an increase in plagiarism incidents.

8. Poor Infrastructure and Facilities

The poor infrastructure of publicly operated institutions poses a significant challenge to India's higher education system. Lack of facilities and outdated structures have hindered quality education for years.

9. Lack of Employable Skills

There is a noticeable absence of employable skills among technical education graduates. Outdated curriculums fail to address skill gaps and suitability for employment in various sectors, neglecting the current job market demands.

10. Weak Governance Structure

There is a growing interference of bureaucracy in higher education institutions, coupled with a trend towards centralization. This shift lacks seriousness among administrators regarding education's importance.

Need and Importance of Higher Education:

1. Development of Comprehensive Perspective among Youth

While general education imparts knowledge, higher education exposes students to national and international subjects, broadening their perspectives. Higher education graduates transition from narrow fields to inclusive domains, fostering social equality, cultural tolerance, and international awareness.

2. Acquisition of Specialized Expertise

Higher education cultivates specialists in various fields such as philosophy, science, engineering, medicine, teaching, organization, and administration. It prepares top-tier human resources indispensable for societal advancement, impossible in its absence.

3. Multifaceted National Development

For any nation's development, two fundamental resources are necessary: natural resources and human resources. Higher education constructs high-level human resources. A nation's economic development depends on industrialization, facilitated by the creation of scientists, engineers, and administrators through higher education.

4. Attainment of Advanced Knowledge

Higher education imparts appropriate knowledge in humanities, social sciences, sciences, and other fields, enabling students to explore new knowledge and real facts. It enables students to make discoveries and innovations in science and technology.

5. Development of Work Skills and Leadership

Higher education equips students to skillfully perform tasks according to their interests, aptitudes, and abilities. Only those with higher education can provide leadership in various fields of practical life.

Efforts are being made to improve the quality of higher education by addressing its current deficiencies. Various measures need to be taken at different levels:

1. Science plays a crucial role in addressing various societal and economic challenges of the present time. Higher education should emphasize professionalism, competitiveness, and dedication.
2. Most prestigious colleges should be brought under autonomous schemes to free them from centralized university control and provide more flexibility in academic matters.
3. There is a need to increase funding for scientific research in India. The education policy should ensure provision of resources according to the requirements for research in higher education.
4. Promote online education in university and college systems and involve professors in creating online courses. Technology should be used for education instead of traditional methods like chalk and blackboard.
5. With a large youth population in India, it's crucial to provide better higher education to make initiatives like "Make in India" and "Digital India" successful.
6. Keeping a university relevant involves adapting the curriculum to emerging fields of knowledge. This requires the inclusion of eminent scholars and experts in the respective fields.
7. There should be regular evaluation of students by teachers.
8. Knowledge, skills, and ethics should be integral components across all aspects of education and teaching.
9. Increasing political interference in educational institutions should be curbed.
10. Libraries should have access to socially relevant journals, general books, annual reports, etc.
11. Special attention should be given to talent retention.
12. The government should promote collaboration between Indian higher education institutions and top international institutions.

Conclusion:

India possesses the largest demographic dividend in the world, yet it is not digitally prepared for the impending digital revolution, causing concerns regarding overall economic growth. Strategic investment in re-skilling the workforce to align with digital transformation is imperative to fully realize its potential. This entails adapting curricula in higher education timely to develop an education system capable of addressing future challenges and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. Special efforts are needed to improve India's education system, along with collaboration with foreign institutions to enhance its quality.

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