



PROGRESS AND QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Quality is required in every walk of life. With the advent of globalization, it has gained importance in the field of education also. No part of education; be it primary, secondary, higher or technical can remain free of this phenomenon. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to study quality concerns associated with higher education.

What is Quality?

Quality is a complex term difficult to define exactly. It is often considered to be the standard or norm with which to compare two similar things in order to assess the worth of the thing compared. It can also be expressed in terms of fitness for purpose, excellence, perfection, standards, value for money, consistency, transformation and relevance etc. traits related to a particular product or service. Quality is the unending process of building and sustaining relationship by assessing, anticipating and fulfilling stated and implied needs. In fact quality is not an accident rather a conscious effort. With the advent of the 21st century, issues related to quality have started entering into our day to day life- be it products, be it healthcare or be it life. Therefore education also cannot escape this phenomenon.

What is education?

We know that 'education' includes 'literacy'. But it is not confined to literacy alone. It comprehends much more. It is the acquiring of knowledge or learning, together with the equipment, which provides skill and inclination for making profitable use of that knowledge. Since the acquiring of knowledge and improvement of the skill for its application are part of a dynamic process, education is a lifelong exercise. Therefore, from having been a static inquiry into the high points of classical civilization and their concepts it has become a dynamic movement in shaping life processes; it is an ever refined and progressively sharpened tool of academic inquiry tempered by the rigor and objectivity of science. It is this twin-role of education as processor of knowledge and programmer of life that has widened its scope and has entered into every walk of life. We speak of education for utility (hence a wide range of applications of knowledge); education for living (hence employability and global employment); education for social change (hence global and national equity issues); education for economic sustainability in the future through controlled growth in the present (hence promotion of sustainable development); and education for playing a more responsible role as global citizens (hence awareness, creation and propagation of 'green economy').

Progress of Higher Education in India

India can boast of its glorious past in terms of higher education. Right from the Vedic era to the Brahmanical era to the Buddhist period higher education has always remained in forefront. Slowly during Mughal period and then in British period, the status of higher education declined. It was after independence that the need to develop higher education and make it all inclusive was felt with deep concerns. Ever since August 1947, higher education has expanded in India somewhat remarkably. A glimpse of expansion of higher education can be seen through the following table:

Table: 1

Growth of Higher Educational Institutions in India

Year	Number of Colleges	Number of Universities
1950-51	695	30
1960-61	1,542	55
1970-71	3,604	103
1980-81	4,722	133
1990-91	7,346	193
2000-01	12,806	256
2010-11	31,564	574
2011-12	35,539	700
2013-14	36,634	723
2014-15	38,498	760
2015-16	39,071	799

Source: UGC Higher Education at Glance-June-2013

The above table makes it clear that successive governments have contributed significantly for the expansion of higher education. Number of colleges has increased almost 60 times and universities have increased almost more than 25 times ever since independence. The breakup of higher education institutions is given below. It is worth noting that there is a huge surge in the numbers of different types of universities.

Table: 2

Break-up of Higher Educational Institutions

Type of HEIs	Number of Institutions
Central Universities	44
State Universities- Govt. & Pvt.	545
Institutes of National Importance	75
Deemed Universities	122
Other Universities	154

Source: UGC Higher Education at a Glance-June-2013

Thus India can boast of having a vast higher education system. This resulted in an explosion in student numbers and the student enrolment increased from quarter million in 1947-48 to about 8.8 million in 2001-02 and about 22 million in 2011-12. Similarly the GER of higher education has increased from 0.40% in 1950-51 to 24.50% in 2015-16 (AISHE Report 2015-16). Accordingly, India can boast of having a vast education system which generates scientific and technically qualified manpower with an estimated stock of about seven million. On the whole today India ranks fairly high in terms of size of the network of higher education institutions and enrolment therein.

Concept of Quality in Education

The debate and the views about what constitute education quality are as old as education itself. Indian philosophical literature on education, which is almost two thousand years old, covers a wide range of issues and practices relating to education quality. It is a debate influenced by values, norms and subjective judgments. Quality is a relative concept and not something that is absolute. There is no consensus among educationists regarding the definition of the quality in education but there are several ways of measuring quality in education. In the context of school effectiveness, the concept of quality can be linked to the efficiency of teaching learning process. In the context of higher education, it can be based upon the tripartite foundation of quality: a

referable standard of excellence, an ethic that is global minded; and a cultural identity. In fact it can make the knowledge relevant to social and individual needs.

Parameters of Quality in Higher Education

Quality is a multi-faced concept. There can be no single meaning attached to quality. In fact different experts have defined it differently. Harvey (1995) defined five interrelated concepts of quality: exceptional (excellence), perfection (or consistency or flawless outcome), fitness for purpose (fulfilling a customer's requirements); value for money; and transformation.

UNESCO definition of quality (Vlasceanu et al., 2007) as cited in Analytic Quality Glossary describes Quality (Academic) in higher education as a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality may thus take different meanings depending on: (i) The understanding of various interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education (quality requirements set by student/university/labour/market/society/government) (ii) Its references: inputs, processes, outputs, missions, objectives, etc.; (iii) The attributes or characteristics of the academic world which are worth evaluating; and (iv) The historical period in the development of higher education.

Why Quality in Higher Education?

Ever since India has entered into 21st century, there is euphoria in India emphasizing the need to develop primary education at the cost of higher education. A mega programme like SSA has been run by successive governments for the sake of massification of primary education. No doubt that primary education is the base of all types of educational development. But there is an urgent need for finding ways for the development of higher education also so that the nation can take giant leaps forward on the path of economic progress. If we are to survive in this competitive, market-oriented and technology-driven world where boundaries are fast disappearing, then there is an urgent need for good quality of higher education today than ever before.

Causes of Low Quality in Higher Education in India

In the Indian context, the concept of quality education is very much important today than ever before. We are now transiting to a knowledge society where the quality and relevance of education would play a crucial role in economic development. Poor quality of teaching-learning process and systemic level deficiencies has adversely affected the learners as well as the society in many ways. The major problems concerning quality in higher education are listed below:

1. **Lack of Adequate Infrastructure:** The expansion of the system of higher education during the last seven decades has been phenomenal. While the number of universities has gone up many folds and the student strength mounted to a very high figure, the problems relating to education have also multiplied. Despite of doing all these things India lags far behind major developing and developed nations of the world. Table 3 given above throws light on this aspect.
2. **Politicisation of Education:** Problems like corruption, casteism, red-tapism, academic incompetence, etc. have plagued the present higher education system. In 2007, while delivering 150th anniversary address of Mumbai University, Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India, observed that our university system is, in many ways, in a state of disrepair...In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrolments are abysmally low. Almost two third of our universities and 90 percent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters..... I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of vice-chancellors, have been politicized and have become subject to caste and communal considerations, there are complaints of favouritism and corruption.
3. **Skill Gap:** There is a huge skill gap between the students produced by institutions like IITs and IIMs, the gap between the quality of students of these institutions and of other institutions is huge and that is visible through the level of placements the students of these institutions have achieved. This also shows that the labour market policies and predominance of public sector employment opportunities did not put enough pressure on the educational system to change as the degree was more important than the acquired knowledge and skills. India's higher education sector has failed to map the future demand for various skills and it has not kept pace with industries' growth. For instance, a Merrill Lynch report Feb, 2005 suggested that 75-80% of India's graduates are not employable in

IT enabled services and which has led to shortage of qualified labour. As a result in a trade-off between quality and quantity, only the quantity has won.

4. Lack of Adequate Faculty: It is another important problem of higher education system. The numbers of student enrolment show that there is an almost 100 times increase in student enrolment in higher education; but the increase in the strength of faculty is less than 40 times. This shows that there is a decline of 2.5 times in the student teacher ratio. This also shows India in poor light internationally, as is evident from the following table:

Table: 3

Student Teacher Ratios in Selected Countries

Name of the Country	Student Teacher Ratio
India	24
China	16.8
Argentina	16.3
Brazil	22.2
Canada	17.4
Sweden	9.5
Russia	18.1
UK	18
USA	13.6

Source: UGC Higher Education at a Glance-June-2013, UNESCO Institute for Statistics of Higher & Technical Education in India, 2009

5. Lack of Regular Up-dation of Curriculum: Students complain that the curriculum taught in universities and colleges has little connect with work related environment. Students and parents feel that the present higher education is providing them with nothing but with irrelevant degrees rendering them unfit for employment.
6. Absence of Proper Guidance and Counseling Services: There is lack of providing guidance services to students. As a result the students are blindly following the same old streams of subjects many of which have rendered lesser relevant in modern day system.

7. Lack of Adequate Budgetary Allocation: One more important hindrance in the way of improving quality of higher education is lack of adequate budgetary provision for education in general and higher education in particular. It rose from 0.64% of GDP in 1950-51 to 4.29% of GDP in 2012-13 which is quite meager amount keeping in mind the vastness of the higher education system and size of population in India.
8. Access: Another roadblock in the way of quality higher education is the issue of access which means that not all the eligible people have the access to higher education. The following table gives a comparative picture of enrolment in higher education:

Table: 4
GER of Developed and Emerging Nations

Name of the Country	GER %
India	24.50
China	26
Japan	55
UK	59
Brazil	36
USA	95

(Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database)

The above table makes it clear that India is having 24.50% of the 17-23 age group population in the country is presently enrolled in higher education institutions which is even less than its other counterparts like China and Brazil in emerging nations category and what to talk of the developed nations like Japan, UK and USA. Thus access to higher education is still a big issue in India.

Suggestions: The following are some suggestions for improvement in quality of higher education:

1. Attracting talented individuals towards teaching
2. Arranging mandatory training programmes for enhancing quality and effectiveness of teaching

3. Role of faculty to be changed to become facilitator
4. Regular revision of curriculum every 4th year so as to make curriculum relevant for changing circumstances
5. Examination reforms with adoption of regular and continuous evaluation of students instead of annual/semester system
6. Student-centric education where faculty should inculcate the habits of self study in students
7. Developing critical thinking among students
8. Increased spending on higher education in general and research in particular
9. Role of monitoring agencies like NAAC, DEC and UGC etc. to change and stricter norms for monitoring and evaluation of HEIs

Conclusion

‘The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms’- this is what the Education Commission of 1964-66 had to say about the need of spreading education in India. As a matter of fact spreading quality of education in general and higher education in particular has become the need of the hour. We need to shape our education system in such a manner that not only, Indian students should be able to compete with their counterparts around the world but also the students of foreign countries should start coming to India to seek higher education. For this to happen there is an urgent need for improvement in curricula, improvement in teacher quality, increased use of ICT in education, linkage of curriculum with market workforce requirement, expansion of educational infrastructure etc. measures should be considered. Apart from this a comprehensive planning for education is required in which all the issues from KG to PG classes should be deliberated upon seriously. However, history suggests that India was a place known for its supreme learning institutions and people from around the world came here to attain knowledge centuries ago. This can be done again but only with improving the standard of higher education in India.

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