
Higher Education in India - Challenges and Opportunities

*Dr. Vijayaraj A Sahu

Introduction

The exponential population growth in India has created many challenges ranging from child mortality to economic boom of the industries in the 21st century, one of which is providing proper higher education to the increasing population.

The history of Indian higher education system is dated back to around 6th Century BC, the modern concepts of universities were established in Thakshashila and Nalanda these education centers were the nerve centers of different dynasties and kingdoms prevailing those days and providing knowledge and skills for trade, agriculture, literature, art, architecture, astronomy and warfare strategies.

The traditional education system was changed during the European rule; their main focus was the development of European language for speaking and administrative services, the British established formal education system of higher education in India which still continues.¹

India with high ambitions to become one of the developed countries in the world, It still lags behind the world's standard in best universities. In the QS world university rankings 2015-16, only 2 Indian universities ranked among top 200 best universities list and a mere 10 in the top 700 universities. The government continuously trying to improve the higher education system in India, Some of the government's initiatives are as follows.

- a) Rs. 100 billion was given to improve the infrastructure of universities to the 'Higher Education Financing Agency' (HEFA), a nonprofit organization responsible for improving the infrastructure of universities.
- b) Developing India's 20 institutions to world-class institutions was the proposal in the last budget.
- c) Permitting the establishment of new medical colleges and engineering colleges.²
- d) Establishment of Innovation universities with world-class standards.
- e) Establishment of new central universities.
- f) Setting up of 374-degree colleges in backward districts.
- g) Providing states with incentives for developing higher education.
- h) Interest subsidy on educational loans to students.
- i) Construction of girl's hostels.
- j) Supporting uncovered state universities and colleges.
- k) Interuniversity research institutes for policy and evaluation and strengthening science-based higher education and research universities.³

Objectives

- a) The present paper focuses on the challenges of higher education in India
- b) To study the opportunities in providing higher education in India.
- c) To Analyze the growth of higher education in India from the Year 2012-2017
- d) To study the factors affecting the overall trend of the higher education system in India and the measures taken by the governments.

Research Methodology

The study was based on the secondary data and the information collected from various books, journals, thesis, Government reports etc. The information collected for the study was from the year 2012-2017.

Limitation of the study

- a) The study is mainly based on the Secondary data.
- b) Time and cost were the major constraints
- c) The study concentrates only on the data related to Higher education.

Major Challenges of Higher Education in India

- a) **Enrolment of Students in Higher Education:** The enrolment of Students in the higher education in India is too low compared to the developed nations.

* Faculty Member Department of Studies and Research in Management Gulbarga University Kalaburgi

b) **Economical Condition:** Due to the poor economic condition of the families the rate of enrolment in higher education is not only poor is also the major problem of dropping out of their higher education.

Gender differentiation: Gender differentiation has also affected the reduction of female literacy rate in Indian higher education system.

c) **Facility:** due to lack of infrastructure and other facilities the student's enrolment ratio is declined. Less number of colleges and universities in India compared with the population is one of the major challenges in higher education.

Lack of Information: the majority of the students were not aware of the opportunities through higher education. Because of the elders in the family are illiterates are they have studied under secondary education.

Guidance: Failure in providing proper guidance to the students at the school level and by the family members about the benefits of higher education and economic benefits associated with it.

Fear and Time: the fear of failure and spending of time in studying was also one of the factors which restrict the enrolment of students in higher education in India.

Faculty-student Ratio: The faculty-student ratio in higher education is very high in India which affects the concentration of the student by the faculty in analyzing the students learning capacity.

Outdated Curriculum: The curriculum used in higher education mainly concentrates on providing knowledge to students in getting their degrees and is not designed based on employment requirements of the industries.

d) **Geographical location of universities and colleges:** the accessibility of colleges and universities by the rural students is still a problem in higher education normally the colleges were located in towns and universities are in district places and the problem of the transportation facility in India contributes to the problem.

e) **The validity of Foreign university degrees/diplomas:** the restriction on eligibility for government appointments in India is a valid degree/diploma certificate from Indian government recognized universities and colleges and the degrees/diplomas obtained by the foreign universities are not eligible to get the employment.

Analysis of Growth in Higher Education:

Following statistics offer the number of educational institutions providing primary, secondary, higher secondary and Higher education in India,

Table-1: Number of Institutions by Type 2014-15

School Education*	Type		Number
		Primary	
	Upper Primary		425094
	Secondary		135335
	Senior Secondary		109318
	Total		1516865
Higher Education	University	Central University	43
		State Public University	316
		Deemed University	122
		State Private University	181
		Central Open University	1
		State Open University	13
		The institution of National Importance	75
		State Private Open University	1
		Institutions under State Legislature Act	5
		Others	3
	Total		760
	College		38498
Stand Alone Institution	Diploma Level Technical	3845	
	PGDM	431	

	Diploma Level Nursing	3114
	Diploma Level Teacher Training	4730
	Institute under Ministries	156
	Total	12276

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. “Educational Statistics at a Glance” Report 2016. * Data related to school education are provisional.

Reports show that there are more than 15 lack institutions providing education till secondary level and higher education the number drops to 50,000 plus, the sharp decrease in number of institutions can be attributed to the low number of enrolments in higher education by the students, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) data is shown in below table. Encouraging and involvement of private institutions in the development of education sector will improve the competition in the sector and bring out the best practices in the education sector.

There are only 122 private universities among the total 760 universities in India, the establishment of more universities will help in better reach of higher education to the wider geographical areas of the country and tapping the strategic locations which were not covered by the present universities. For a population of more than 1.3 billion the country just had 50,774 colleges for providing higher education, the ratio should be sharply increased by increasing number of colleges. State and Central Government should increase the number of colleges and universities to provide better higher education in the country and to improve the gross enrolment ratio in higher education in all the states and union territories of the country.

Table-2. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) 2014-15

Level	ALL		
	Male	Female	Total
Primary (I-V)	98.9	101.4	100.1
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	87.7	95.3	91.2
Elementary (I-VIII)	94.8	99.2	96.9
Secondary (IX-X)	78.1	78.9	78.5
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	54.6	53.8	54.2
Higher Education	25.3	23.2	24.3

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. “Educational Statistics at a Glance” Report 2016.

The data show sharp fall in students enrolling for higher education in India, 75 percent reduction GER in higher education compared with the primary enrolments. The various factors relating to less enrolment in higher education need to be studied and countermeasures should be established to improve the GER in higher education.

Table-3. International Comparison of Gross Enrolment Ratio

Countries	Gross Enrolment Ratio in Percentage
	Tertiary Education / Higher Education
India	23.0
Bangladesh	13.4
Nepal	15.8
Pakistan	10.4
Sri Lanka	20.7
China	39.4
Germany	65.5
Russia	78.7
South Africa	19.7
UK	56.5

USA	86.7
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Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. “Educational Statistics at a Glance” Report 2016.

The above table shows the gross enrolment ratio in higher education in various countries, USA has the highest student enrolment in higher education with 86.7 percent followed by Russia with 78.7 percent student enrolment, the lowest enrolment countries are Pakistan 10.4 percent and Bangladesh has 13.4 percent enrolment in higher education.

Reforms required in higher education

- Need for international collaborations of institutions to develop curriculum and impact of education.
- Updating curriculum of higher education in line with global standards.
- International collaborations in research and development.
- Improvements required in policy framework for higher education.
- Reduction of underemployment by creating skill and knowledge-based vacancies.
- Reduction of fee structure in higher education to increase gross enrollment ratio.
- Time duration reduction of courses to attract more enrolment especially in Higher education, Ph.D. degrees and other research studies.
- Enhancement of private partnership in higher education to provide an upgraded curriculum with respect to industry standards.
- Improving ratio in higher education is required. And student-faculty exchange across national and global universities will help improve the higher education system.

Future opportunities

- The overall socio-economic condition of the country will improve with the increase of literacy through higher education.
- Awareness of people will increase in all the aspects of life including improvement of health, hygiene and proper utility of natural resources.
- Creation of awareness about the benefits of higher education will improve the enrolment ratio in India.
- Use of digitalization and online courses in higher education will benefit the people.
- Higher education will be beneficial for creating upcoming entrepreneurs.
- It helps in properly preparing students for employment standards of the industries.
- Faculty and student exchange in national and international universities will improve the sharing of knowledge and research activities.
- Student and faculty exchange programs can help in employment in domestic and international markets.

Conclusion

The country with more than 5000 years of history was changing with the pace of an elephant; the growth in last two decade can be attributed to improvements in higher education and growth in information and technology. Development of a country can be scaled by the knowledge society and skilled manpower, higher education is the key to shaping and building superpower economies and knowledge economies. There is a need for providing application-based study approach in higher education than only providing knowledge-based outdated curriculum, whether it may be in social science, literature or in applied science studies.

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