

Measures to turn around the Indian Higher Education System

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Abstract

In India, education is provided by both public and private sector. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the center and the state. This paper deals with the solutions to turnaround the Indian Higher education system. The solutions are largely structural in nature rather than financial. The focus of the paper is to structurally simplify the higher education system so that it leads to cost savings for the nation and lowers the cost of getting higher education. It also dwells in the future and provides solution to bring in a culture of merit and give every citizen a level playing field by providing them a standard platform.

This paper also proposes an integrated model for knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination. It calls for cost benefit analysis and public accountability of public institutions.

Keywords

Education, knowledge, knowledge dissemination, knowledge creation.

The country has more than 1.4 million schools with over 227 million students enrolled and more than 36,000 higher education institutes. India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. However, there is still a lot of potential for further development in the education system. Currently, higher education contributes 59.7 per cent of the market size, school education 38.1 per cent, pre-school segment 1.6 per cent, and technology

and multimedia the remaining 0.6 percent.

The solace for India is primary education where improvements have been made and enrolments have increased but sustaining those enrolments has been difficult. Business week reports that “While 96% of India's children enrol in primary school, by the age of 10 about 40% have dropped out, says the education department. Just over a third of high school students graduate”. 15% of Indian students reach high school and just 7% of those 15% make it to graduation. The sustainability of the system is at stake. If after enrolments the dropout that is taking place is so high, it gives an indication that something is very wrong with the entire system. This is also creating a bottleneck for higher education. In future the productivity of the entire nation will be lowered and a large pool of unemployable youth will be created leading to dissatisfaction and civil unrest. India holds an important place in the global education industry.

In retrospect for primary education 39000cr was being spent on 31% percent of population. Demographically India has approximately 31% population in the age group of 0-14. 31% of India's population is 36cr (120 cr total population) this

amount roughly amounts to Rs.1083 per year (20\$ approx. per student per year). This amount includes the salaries of teachers, infrastructure and every kind of expenditure related to education.

The scenario is even grimmer for higher education as Rs 13000 cr is being spent on rest 19% population (median age in India is 26) which amounts to 22.8 cr people. Here the spent comes to be Rs 570 per person per year.

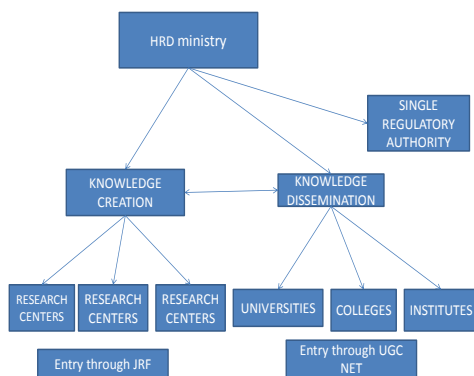
The general solution of increasing the spending on education would not work as already the nation is in debt. It's also seen that there are a lot of leakages in the system due to faulty allocation of resources and no public accountability of the expenditure. The system needs to re-define itself based on the goals that need to be achieved keeping the future in mind. This paper deals with the solutions to turnaround the Indian Higher education system. The solutions are largely structural in nature rather than financial. The focus of the paper is to structurally simplify the higher education system so that it leads to cost savings for the nation and lowers the cost of getting higher education. It also dwells in the future and provides solution to bring in a culture of merit and give every citizen a level playing field by providing them a standard platform.

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Failure of universities to become research centers

World over universities have been pioneers in research and innovation and are engines of new ideas and innovations but it has not been possible in India due to some inherent weakness in the system as such. This is not only in India but most of the developing countries.

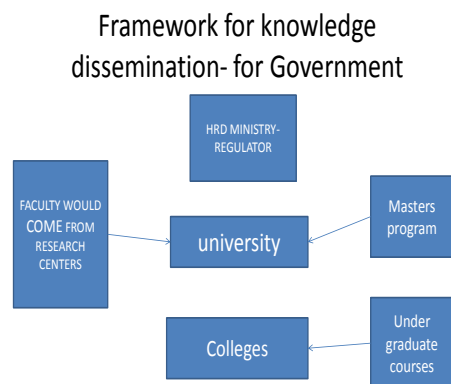
The way out of this mess is that as universities have been unable to give results and contribute much to research and innovation it would be best to mandate them for purely dissemination of knowledge.



Government in collaboration with private players start its own

research centers and all research/doctorate degrees be routed through it. The people working are paid salaries at par with counterparts in teaching. The research and development centers will act as integrators of knowledge from diverse fields where doctorates will be exposed to present technologies and will be able to 1st hand comprehend the new things happening in their areas. As there will be collaboration with organizations they will be working in R&D centers of organizations, they will also understand what the requirements of the job market are. They will be at better position to develop the skills of the students they are going to teach.

Segregation of the target segment for colleges and universities



It is opined that there is no segregation between the offerings of the colleges and universities in the education ministry except the autonomy in giving degrees in their names. The same structure be followed but if the quality needs to be improved all **the master programs be transferred to universities where people from research centers** can come and teach while the colleges run undergraduate programs and focus is maintained. The vision and mission of both the college and universities need to be cleared as to what they stand for and what their future would be if we need to truly create quality products of the global level. At this moment none of the Indian universities come in the top 500 universities in the world. (QS worldwide rankings).

Faulty Allocation of resources

Most of the higher education funding is being focused towards IIT's and IIM's though only a fraction of students gets enrolled. The masses are not benefitted from those allocations. The focus of the funding should be towards institutes and courses that are and have the potential to get masses skilled. Most of these IIT's and IIM's can easily increase their fees. The method is they can give guarantees or collateral

for their students and help them in getting student loans. The subsidies need not be there. Fundraising from alumni etc can become another source of income.

The allocations for IIT's and IIM's favour only about 5000 students per year while the majority of the students do not even have basic infrastructure of the classroom and teachers available to them. A nation with such a huge number of enrolments cannot sustain with majority of funding going to premier institutes. These are not the institutes where the real India studies. The real India lies in the obscurity of far flung areas that rarely see the grandness of these institutes. After so many years of funding and teaching business they can fend for themselves in the market place and fight on an equal footing with their competitors. They teach business its time they practice it.

The funding needs to be redirected towards capital expenditure in rural areas in building quality infrastructure and promoting these places as knowledge dissemination centers.

Strengthening in terms of manpower

Around 2million posts are lying vacant in higher education in India, 0.5 million is teaching while the rest are support staff. Even major

universities like Punjab University (900 posts vacant) Delhi university affiliated colleges (4000 posts etc) , if estimates are to be believed 44% of posts in higher education are lying vacant. Thousands of UGC net qualified candidates are without jobs while there is a plea taken to increase the retirement age of professors from 58 to 65 years due to lack of candidates who want to teach. There are lots of candidates who want to teach are qualified but are unemployed. The problem is appointments are not taking place.

Solution to this problem is simple. UGC NET should be based on vacancies available with government universities and colleges. It can be made on the pattern of IAS. Clearing it means you get a posting with it, top rankers go into universities while rest in colleges (preference for region cadre etc can be created)

As of now UGC NET has just become another exam that needs to be cleared without have any significance. If numbers are to be believed more than 70000 posts are lying vacant in teaching at the sanctioned no of 2007 if aggregates, attrition and growth are to be factored in more than 100000 posts are lying vacant in the country.

If the ratio of 1:10 is to be maintained than 1.5 lakh teachers in engineering for 15 lakh students and

80 thousand MBA teachers for 8 lakh MBA students is the strength that has to be maintained

Enforcement of regulations effectively

Enforcement of accreditation bodies on private institutes- most have not applied 6th pay commission and tend to pay minimum of wages often 1/3 of the 6th pay commission, as there are no jobs available most qualified people are ready to work at those wages. But quality goes down and people with potential do not enter unless they are passionate about it.

As low quality teachers work with students the overall level of quality comes down, the students who come out of these colleges are with degrees but without skills. According to recent reports only 2 % finance graduates are skilled and only 16% in marketing are industry ready. Lots of unskilled manpower is being created who have degrees but no jobs of the stature of degree. Also after having those degrees they tend not to work or shun other positions which they feel are below their dignity. On one hand they are not having skills to work for jobs for which they have degrees and on the other hand they are not ready to do jobs which are there as they feel they are below their stature.

The circle starts with substandard manpower entering the market, the productivity starts to decline (innovation and new ideas don't come). Lots of costs are involved in again training the manpower and recruiting them. Professional institutes need to see themselves as partners of corporate and work towards decreasing the recruiting and training costs of employees.

Due to all the problems the real essence of education is being lost. Education is for the holistic development of an individual and to create moral and upright citizens. Problem of Indian Education System is that we have confined ourselves to reading, writing and arithmetic. The pursuit of excellence and knowledge is lost in structural lacunas or the policies that are being made have forgotten it.

Creation of common entrance test

There are 740 universities and 35500 colleges in India which offer varied courses. These universities and institutes conduct their own entrance tests and also accept scores of others. This also creates a problem for regulators in accessing the demand and supply. Even basic scores criteria fulfilment as mandated by regulatory authorities for particular courses is not maintained. Multiple

agencies and multiple governing bodies the whole system has rules and regulations which never get implemented.

Multiple tests and agencies conducting these tests create wastage of resources in the form of time, money of the applicant. The impact can also be seen on the macro level, the pressure on transport etc the pressure on national resources without a meaningful outcome to conduct these multiple exams. Wastage of human resources for managing all these directly or indirectly affecting crores of individuals

It is proposed that a single entrance test for each of the streams should be made compulsory and universally acceptable. There is no sense with having entrance test for each university and institute. Centrally conducted test will lead to revenue generation for the government and also to control these costs for the students. It will also bring about standardization and merit culture. Government and private scholarships would be able to be passed to the deserving students in a much more streamlined manner. The chaos and confusion that has been created will end.

Infrastructural wastage in higher Education-Most of the times complex problems have simple problems

Due to a gap in demand and supply huge number of colleges has started in the past few years and most of them have not been able to sustain themselves. They do not provide quality and hence students have shunned them. The number of students has increased but these institutes have failed to attract students. The number of colleges and institutes that are deemed to be on the verge of closure is more than 100. On an average of 20-30 crore spent in infrastructure of each of these colleges and institutes the total number comes to be around 20000-30000 crore. Most of them are based in rural areas without roads and electricity on agriculture lands that were converted. The people running them are not competent enough to bring about a turnaround. The solution to it is that government will have to come into picture either they need to be given the status of sick enterprises as such education is a service industry. Those who wish to get out of these business need to be told to do so and consolidation be brought about in the higher education industry as whole.

Even these failing units need to be clubbed their resources collaborated into single units and turnaround management teams be involved. A loss of that size is huge and needs to be stopped. In future such random

opening of institutes and colleges is stopped and the regulatory authority be made accountable if such a thing in future happens.

End of one time exam based system

It's imperative that independence be given to teachers (even lecturers in colleges). Learning goals be involved which judge students around the clock rather than in a single exam. There is a move that is required to move from memory tests to reasoning and creativity. Onus of output from students should be put on college themselves. Let the market forces play. Colleges with better quality will survive as students will start shifting to colleges with better education rather than the guarantee of the university degree.

Universities will act to provide guidelines and degrees under their banner will become the responsibility and accountability of the university itself. If learning doesn't take place in any of its institute or regulations are not there the university will be penalized. This will create a pressure on the university to make sure that all the norms are followed in the colleges affiliated to it. It will also put pressure on colleges to improve their standards and also help in creating

varied courses making them flexible to industry demands.

The evaluation process needs to become year round rather than only at exam time. The interaction between student and faculty needs to increase they need to become close knit group

Compulsory disclosures and enforcement of regulation needs to take place and real data should be provided by the institutes to the students. If any institute fails or misrepresents the information it should be closed down or take over by government. The consumer in the education market is not mature and hence needs to be protected.

Conclusion

If all these measures are carried out simultaneously it would not take much time for India to emerge as a strong educational hub producing quality rather than volumes. Creativity, talent, potential and Infra-structural wastage would be reduced and resource allocation would become more streamlined. Accountability of research projects would increase leading to creation of a research oriented culture.

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