



Growth and challenges of higher education in India

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Abstract

India's vast young population presents a tremendous opportunity for growth. To unlock this potential, investing in higher education is crucial. Fortunately, recent years have seen a surge in university enrollment, reaching over 4.14 crore students in 2020-21. This expansion allows more Indians to develop their skills and knowledge, fostering personal growth. However, challenges remain. India's higher education system, heavily influenced by the government, faces hurdles that need to be addressed. Despite these obstacles, expanding access to quality education is essential for India's continued development. Many commissions and committees created by the government to advise improvements have identified the same barriers in Indian higher education. India's higher education industry has faced various challenges; there are many solutions for overcoming these challenges and enhancing the higher education system.

Keywords: Higher education, opportunity, teaching, students

Introduction

The growth of higher education in India is examined in this paper from a wider angle. Over the past 40 years, higher education in India has expanded incredibly quickly, with an increase in the proportion of the relevant age group enrolling in postsecondary institutions. Quite a bit of this increase has been concentrated in a small number of places. Such as professional disciplines, especially engineering and management have seen the majority of the growth.

India benefits from a large and young population base in terms of demographics. United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) estimates that India would have 142.86 crore people in 2023. India has surpassed China, which has 142.57 crore people, to become the world's most populous nation. The median age of the Indian population is 26.9, which is a notable demographic feature. In addition, by 2050, the median age is anticipated to reach 36.7. Accordingly, it suggests that India can benefit from a young population for at least another 50 years provided it is successful in instilling the necessary skills and providing access to high-quality higher education.

Review of Literature

Ved Prakash (2007) ^[8] explained that the Indian higher education system is dealing with a number of difficulties. His study analyses variances in involvement among states, genders and social categories and provides an outline of development in the growth of higher education. Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017), this report said that responsibility indicators intended to ensure quantity were impeding graduates' quality, particularly in respect to their entrepreneurial and creative abilities. It also made the argument that India's higher education system can only expand in quality and scope through competition and transparent regulation. Kurian, S. (2016) ^[3] outlined the obstacles and prospects facing Indian higher education in the age of globalization. According to the study, the institutional capacity of the higher education sector has

grown significantly since independence. The main obstacles to higher education are low college enrollment, the employability problem of unskilled labor and a lack of sector-wide flexibility in the higher education system. According to Joshi, K., M. and Ahir, K. (2016) ^[2], India has roughly 757 universities and 38,056 colleges. In addition to the vast network of public universities, there is also a sizable private sector that has arisen and grown extremely quickly during the past two decades. Despite this expansion, there are still a number of issues with equality, effectiveness and quality in Indian higher education. Sharma, J. Husain, S. and Nishad, A. K. (2020) ^[7] in their study emphasized that India has the world's 3rd major industry of higher education, trailing only the United States and China. India has made remarkable educational progress as a developed country since independence. Despite the fact that India's higher education industry has faced various challenges, there are many solutions for overcoming these challenges and enhancing the higher education system.

Table 1: Year-wise Growth of Universities in India

Sr. No.	Year	No. of Universities	Growth Index
1	2014-15	760	100
2	2015-16	799	105.13
3	2016-17	864	108.13
4	2017-18	903	104.51
5	2018-19	993	109.96
6	2019-20	1043	105.03
7	2020-21	1113	106.71

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education 2020- 21.

Table 1 displays the overall number of universities from 2014-15 to 2020-21, as well as their growth indices. The figures in the Table show that the higher education universities growth has been positive from 2014-15 to 2020-21. As per the findings of higher education survey in India, there would be around 1,113 universities in the country in 2020-21. The majority of universities in India are state public universities operated and funded by the government.

Table 2: Level-wise Growth of Student Enrolments in India during the Period 2016-17 to 2020-21

Year	Ph. D.	Growth Index	M. Phil	Growth Index	Post Graduate	Growth Index	Under Graduate	Growth Index
2016-17	141037	100	43267	100	4007570	100	28348197	100
2017-18	161412	114.4465637	34109	78.83375321	4114310	102.6634594	29016350	102.3569506
2018-19	169170	104.8063341	30692	89.98211616	4042522	98.25516308	29829075	102.8009209
2019-20	202550	119.7316309	23934	77.98123289	4312535	106.6793205	30647287	102.7430016
2020-21	211852	104.5924463	16744	69.95905407	4716649	109.3706834	32657509	106.5592168

Source: *Ibid*, Table-1

Table 2 displays total student enrollments at various levels of higher education from 2016-17 to 2020-21. Except for a few years, the Table shows that the overall rise of student enrolment from 2016-17 to 2020-21 has been favorable. The table clearly shows that the growth indices of Ph. D. enrolments fluctuate while M. Phil enrolments decrease. Enrollment in different levels of higher education is increasing.

Teaching Position

AISHE reports a rise in the number of teachers in India's higher education system for the 2020-21 academic year. There were over 15.5 lakh teachers, compared to 15 lakh the previous year. Interestingly, there's a growing trend of female representation in the teaching force, with some states even having more female instructors than male. For instance, states like Chandigarh, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Kerala, Goa, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Lakshadweep have more woman teachers.

Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education

Nationally, the GER for higher education is around 27%, but lower for deprived groups. Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) have a GER of 23.1% and 18.9% respectively. There's also a slight gender gap, with a GER of 26.7% for males and 27.9% for females.

However, there are bright spots. Chandigarh leads the way with the highest GER for females (66.1%) and several other states like Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu also boast impressive female GERs exceeding 30%.

Challenges to India's Higher Education Growth

In India, there are several problems with higher education. These include disparities in enrollment by gender and income, subpar faculty and instruction and even a general lack of interest and excitement among students. The following are some of the main issues facing the Indian higher education system:

Enrollment

Enrollment in higher education improved from 3.85 crore in 2019–20 to over 4.14 crore in 2020–21. Between 2014 and 2015, enrollment grew by almost 72 lakh (21%) points. The majority of those enrolled in higher education are residents of urban metropolitan areas. Enrollment in rural higher education is relatively low. Moreover, the majority of enrollments that are officially documented happen at the undergraduate level.

Politics

Higher education is a highly consequential issue in India. The government has a big say over it. 15.5% of government spending goes into higher education, despite the dearth of

public money. Moreover, a number of prominent political figures are either university management board members or their owners. As a result, the management of these institutions is subject to considerable political pressure. Caste-based reservations make the topic of higher education in India even more divisive. While some contend that caste-based quotas are necessary to solve current socioeconomic disparities, others believe upper-caste people are discriminated against by them.

Accreditation

Many institutions are taking advantage of the loose regulations to offer degrees that are not recognized by Indian authorities. Many of these institutions are motivated by market opportunities and entrepreneurial zeal and many of them are operating as fictitious non-profit organizations and developing sophisticated financial techniques to siphon off profits. Regulators like the AICTE and UGC have been working to close private schools that provide courses without any affiliation or recognition. These postsecondary educational institutions frequently prey on students from semi-urban and rural areas.

Financing

Private higher education has expanded quickly as a result of the government's inability to support the growing higher education system. Furthermore, small and rural educational institutions suffer from decreased government funding. More and more public colleges are being pressured to provide expensive, self-financed courses. The main sources of funding for the private sector are capitation fees, donations, and astronomical fee structures. This, in turn, restricts admission to higher education by serving the interests of a select and powerful few.

Quality

Program quality and structure are lacking, and there are no goals that can satisfy the fundamental industrial need for qualified personnel. But because the courses are thought to be the most crucial indicators of show quality, the evaluation procedures are rigorous and the course ratings are assigned hastily. These flawed methods and the promotion of a survival mentality rather than a growth attitude prevent students from learning. In the Indian system, educators who proved that a three-year degree could provide the same quality as a four-year degree brought about the streamlining of bachelor's degrees.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that India faces numerous challenges in higher education, but resolving these challenges and expanding higher education is vital.

Employ Qualified Teachers

Only the best teachers can deliver the best teachings. Hire teachers who know and care about the things they will be teaching. A good teacher is also capable of capturing the attention of their students and making the class session both engaging and enlightening. To choose an excellent teacher, you must follow a set of criteria while interviewing candidates for a teaching position at your institute. To maintain a better level of education, ensure that the teachers and professors you hire adhere to these requirements.

Make Learning Opportunities

Learning should extend beyond the confines of the classroom. A reputable institution should engage in diverse programs and events that inspire students to learn beyond traditional academic settings. Providing opportunities for students to explore new knowledge not only fosters personal growth but also enables them to apply classroom concepts in practical scenarios. An educational institution that promotes learning inside and outside the classroom undoubtedly upholds high standards of education.

Improve Student Outcomes by Evaluating

Student outcomes in order to increase educational quality, an institute must assess students' performance. Student outcomes reflect how well your educational system teaches them. If their performance is exceptional, you must discover strategies to sustain it. If they need to be improved, you should consider what isn't working in your educational system. Whatever changes are made, keep in mind that the goal is to improve students' learning processes so that they can get a better education and learn something.

Constant Quality Improvement

In addition to the aforementioned points, another crucial aspect to enhance the quality of education at an institution is to maintain its physical condition. By ensuring that your university or college remains in optimal shape, you uphold its reputation as a premier educational institution. As societal needs evolve, it becomes imperative to introduce new subjects and adapt existing programs accordingly. Embrace these changes to provide students with the best possible educational experience. By continually improving every facet of your institution, you solidify its brand as synonymous with excellence in higher education.

Improve Teaching Methods

To remain current, an institute must enhance its teaching methods to provide students with timely and pertinent instruction. One effective approach is to observe classroom dynamics and how teachers conduct their classes under your guidance. Additionally, cultivating a warm yet professional rapport between teachers and students can also enhance teaching methods. This relaxed relationship reduces tension, creating a conducive atmosphere for learning.

Conclusion

Thus, it is possible to conclude that higher education has developed significantly in India during the previous few decades, although the increase has been concentrated in a few places. Higher education is a high-stakes issue in India. The government has a strong effect on it. Many commissions and committees created by the government to advise improvements have identified the same barriers in

Indian higher education. The institutes have all of the facilities that students anticipate, but they can't use them together. Despite these clearly good trends, the Indian higher education system continues to exhibit several structural flaws, which cause obstacles in satisfying future aspirations. Inequity is also prevalent in the system, with women's and backward castes having GERs that are significantly poorer than the national standard. However, meeting India's 30 per cent gross enrollment ratio target by 2030 plans would necessitate solutions that integrate the needs of policymakers, employers and young expectations of many stakeholders - educational institutions, students, parents, industry and government.

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