

Redefining Higher Education In India In Terms Of Quality

¹Dr. Sarika Sircar

¹Associate Professor, History, NSCB Govt. Girls' P.G. College, Aliganj, Lucknow, India

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Abstract

‘The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.’ - Rabindranath Tagore.

Quality Education is a prerequisite for the overall development of any human being. Education plays a crucial role in balancing the socio-economic fabric of the country as well as ensuring growth of any country. The Government of India is working round the clock to bring positive changes in the education system in the country so that world-class education can be provided to the students. Efforts are being made to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge. Quality infrastructure is also being developed by the centre and the states for better education prospects. Digital literacy is an important part of education, especially in a world where technological development is the flag-bearer of progress. Development of any nation is dependent on the education of its citizens.

Keywords:- Redefining Higher Education In India, Terms Of Quality, Quality Education.

Introduction

The numerous policies and schemes aimed at providing education to all shows the Government's endeavour towards inclusive development. Education in its hands shows the promise of a prosperous future, a future where even the last citizen of the nation enjoys the fruits of its progress. 1

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has announced a new PPP Scheme, National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT), for using technology for better learning outcomes in Higher Education on 19th September 2019. The objective is to use Artificial Intelligence to make learning more personalized and customized as per the requirements of the learner. This requires development of technologies in Adaptive Learning to address the diversity of learners. There are a number of start-up companies developing this and MHRD would like to recognize such efforts and bring

them under a common platform so that learners can access it easily. Educating the youth is a National effort and MHRD proposes to create a National Alliance with such technology developing EdTech Companies through a PPP model.

MHRD would act as a facilitator to ensure that the solutions are freely available to a large number of economically backward students. MHRD would create and maintain a National NEAT platform that would provide one-stop access to these technological solutions. EdTech companies would be responsible for developing solutions and manage registration of learners through the NEAT portal. They would be free to charge fees as per their policy. As their contribution towards the National cause, they would have to offer free coupons to the extent of 2r5 percent of the total registrations for their solution through NEAT portal. MHRD would distribute the free coupons for learning to the most socially/economically backward students. AICTE would be the implementing agency for NEAT programme. The scheme shall be administered under the guidance of an Apex Committee constituted by MHRD. Independent Expert Committees would be constituted for evaluating and selecting the EdTech solutions. MoUs will be signed with the shortlisted EdTech companies. Awareness programmes would be taken up by MHRD to create awareness of the NEAT solutions to teachers and students 2.

Over the last few years, major reforms have been initiated by Government of India to improve access, equity and quality in the education sector. In higher education, the emphasis has been on setting up new premier institutions across the country, marking the highest ever such expansion in history after Independence. Moreover, there is a conscious effort at rearchitecting the higher education regulatory landscape to ensure quality without compromising the autonomy of institutions.

The Government has also recently put out a draft of the National Education Policy which aims to systematically transform higher education in the public domain for comments. Further, financial allocations for education have evolved over the years. Since the Millennium Budget in the year 2000, spending on education has increased around 17-fold from Rs. 5,635 crore to Rs. 94,853.64 crore in Union Budget 2019-20. Of the total education budget, Rs. 38,317.01 crore has been dedicated for higher education. This represents a 14.3 percent Year-on-Year (Y-o-Y) rise in budgetary allocation for higher education.

The New Education Policy is set to transform India's Higher Education System to one of the best global education systems, creation of National Research Foundation to fund, coordinate and promote research, 'Study in India' Programme to help India attract foreign students to make India a global Higher Education Hub. As highlighted by the Union Finance Minister in her Budget Speech

2019-20, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) legislation has been drafted for repealing the UGC Act, 1956. The legislation proposes to completely overhaul the regulatory framework governing higher education; moving from an intrusive, fragmented, input-based regulatory system to a more open, outcome and accreditation-based regulatory system.

India's higher education sector is grappling with a twin burden of expanding access to cater to the ever-growing aspirations of youth while maintaining quality to ensure graduates become a part of the productive workforce. India has now 864 university-level institutions, 40,026 colleges and 11,669 stand-alone institutions³. The number of university-level institutions has grown by about 25 percent and the number of colleges by about 13 percent in the last five years. India's higher education GER (calculated for the age group, 18-23 years) increased from 11.5 percent in 2005-06 to 25.2 percent in 2016-17. However, we lag behind the world average of 33 percent and that of comparable economies, such as Brazil (46 percent) and China (30 percent). Further, quality remains a challenge as does employability of graduates.⁴

In order to increase the enrolment in higher educational institutions, various steps have been taken including issuing of new University Grants Commission regulations for Open and Distance Learning that allow the entry of reputed institutions for offering education in the distance learning mode and the expansion of centrally funded institutions.

Additionally, State Governments are being encouraged to set up institutions through the 'Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). The key components of the scheme include upgradation of autonomous colleges to universities, clustering of colleges for setting up a university, establishing new professional colleges in underserved areas and providing infrastructure grants to Universities and colleges for ramping up capacity. Quality enhancement has been prioritized during the second phase of RUSA (2017-20) along with addressing concerns of access and equity in the aspirational districts identified by NITI Aayog.

The Government has also undertaken reforms in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as part of which accreditation of higher education institutions has been made mandatory. Crucially, the reforms signal a departure from an intrusive system to a more enabling, mixed method of assessment and accreditation. Additionally, greater emphasis has been placed on self-assessment, data gathering and validation by third-party evaluation as well as objective peer review.

Further, an autonomous and self-sustaining National Testing Agency has been established to conduct entrance examinations for higher education institutions thereby relieving agencies like the

Central Board of Secondary Education from their responsibility of conducting entrance examinations as well as ensuring greater standardization and reliability in the methodology for assessing students. In another major reform, a three-tiered graded autonomy regulatory system has been initiated, with the categorization of institutions as per their accreditation score by the NAAC or other empaneled accreditation agencies or by their presence in reputed world rankings. Category 1 and Category 2 Universities will have significant autonomy. Similarly, the University Grants Commission has also issued new regulations for granting autonomy based on accreditation scores for colleges. These colleges will have the freedom to conduct examinations, prescribe evaluation systems and even announce results but are not allowed to grant degrees.

On a similar theme, the IIM Bill was passed by both the houses of Parliament on 19 December, 2017, to provide greater autonomy to the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and strengthen their position as institutions of excellence. As per the provisions of the Bill, IIMs will be instituted as body corporates and governed by a Board also comprising alumni. The Board will have the authority to take decisions with respect to administration, curriculum design and granting of degrees. With the passage of the Bill, IIMs will also be able to award MBA degrees instead of diplomas. As highlighted by the Union Finance Minister in her budget speech 2019-20, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) legislation has been drafted for repealing the UGC Act, 1956.

In the recent past we have seen the inclusion of three institutions from India in the QS World University Rankings (IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi and IISc.), an achievement which has eluded us thus far. A sum of Rs. 400 crore has been allocated for the development of “World Class Institutions” in the 2019-20 financial year, a substantial increase from the Rs. 128.90 crore allocated in the 2018-19 RE. Furthermore, a programme called ‘Study in India’ has been implemented to attract foreign students to higher educational institutions and make India a “hub of higher education” The Global Initiative of Academic Networks has also been developed for encouraging international scholars to pursue visiting professorships in Indian universities.

Finally, research and innovation has been given due priority in the Union Budget 2019-20, with an allocation of Rs. 608.87 crore compared to Rs. 243.6 crore in RE 2018-19. Research output and citations are pivotal for building world-class institutions. The Government has therefore taken various measures for the promotion and growth of research in the country including establishing Institutions of Eminence, creating centres of excellence and encouraging public-private R&D partnerships, among others. In this year’s budget speech, the Union Finance Minister has announced a

National Research Foundation (NRF) for funding, coordinating and promoting research in India. NRF will assimilate the research grants being given by various Ministries, independent of each other, thereby reducing the duplication of effort and expenditure as well as allowing us to focus on the thrust areas relevant to our national priorities. Successive national policies have accorded due importance to the higher education sector in charting India's development trajectory. 5.

Statistically speaking, India for its 1.25 billion people offers higher or tertiary level education through nearly 800 universities (including central, state, private, deemed and all other categories) who are mostly governed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and nearly 100 Institutes of National Importance (INIs) which were created through special Acts of the Parliament or State Assemblies who directly report either to the Central or State Government. The latter group includes the famed Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) etc. The chain of IITs and National Institutes of Technology (NITs) represent the top echelon of technology institutes in the country which can boast of the most modern curriculum and infrastructure, though many state level university engineering departments are no less eminent in terms of their contributions and track record. Like all other seats of higher learning, engineering institutions too primarily deal with and focus on a single entity – knowledge, which they either disseminate (by teaching) or create (by research). In order to remain relevant and serve the society, engineering education needs a special outlook or approach different than conventional pedagogic style only consisting of lecture, discourse, monologue, text books, notes and examination leading to a degree without practical training for invention and innovation.

In recent times, the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has launched several new and innovative programmes to make higher education more pervasive and effective and usher in significant positive changes in the higher education system, particularly in engineering and technology. Some of the notable initiatives are thus:

Research and innovation – Start up India Initiative for HEIs ; To promote the culture of 'innovation' in tune with the declaration of 21st century as the century of innovation and our Prime Minister's desire to dedicate 2010-2020 as the 'Decade of Innovation.'

Global Initiative for Academic Network (GIAN). MHRD initiative on creating a new programme titled Global Initiative of Academic Network in Higher Education. It aims to connect the Indian academia with the international talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs.

Scheme for Academic Research and Promotion by Collaboration (SPARC) ; SPARC is new and logical follow up initiative of MHRD after GIAN for improving the research ecosystem of India's HEIs by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian academia and best institutions in the world. 6.

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