Quality Of Higher Education in India

Dr. G. Gopalakrishnan*

Abstract

This article is an attempt to highlight the quality that needs to be maintained in the HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions) in India. In recent years during the last decade there has been a mushroom growth of HEIs and Universities in India, in the private sector. Most of these have reached a stage of churning out graduates in various programmes. However, we find that many of them have ventured into the field of education, some to promote education in the rural and other areas of the country and some to be profit making machines. Unfortunately, many of them need to recognize the urgent need to produce quality graduates capable of facing global competition, and this can only be through having a quality educational system in the country. The Indian diaspora needs to understand that in a competitive world, our graduates need to face global competition, and just not be educated alone!

I.   Introduction

India has been in the forefront of education for the past 2000 years – Vedic, Brahmanical, Buddhist, Muslim, British - and has been seen through diverse aspects, due to the various invasions India had been subjected to. British rule in India gave us the English language, which now seems to be the common language, and also being the media of instruction, in most of the States of the Indian Union.

According to the 2018 Official Census across India almost 19500 languages or dialects are being spoken as mother tongues. It has also been indicated that 96.71% of the population of the 140.76 Crores (2021) people had at that time one of the 22 scheduled languages as their mother tongue. This had been a major hindrance at arriving on a single unified language as media of instruction, right across the country. As a result of which, the quality of education suffered badly, in that no common standards could be established. In India, there are at the moment 1,113 Universities, 43,796 Colleges, 149 Institutes of National Importance, with about 4.4 crore students in attendance, of which 43% of the Universities and 61.4% of the colleges are in the rural areas. There are 23 IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) in India, and recognized as National Institutes of importance by an Act of Parliament in 1961. Apart from the 33 IIITs in existence now.

*Former Vice Chancellor / Provost, Dr. M.G.R. Educational & Research Institute, Maduravoyal, Chennai 600095, India

An Institution of Higher Education, other than universities, can be declared by the Central Government on the advice of the UGC as an Institution 'Deemed to be University', under Sec.3 of the UGC Act of 1956; which can enjoy academic status and privileges of a university. A State Private University is a University established by a sponsoring trust registered Under the Societies Registration Act 1860 / Sec. 25 of the Companies Act, 1956. Such of these institutions, could formulate their own curriculum and syllabi, conduct examinations, appoint their own faculties and also collect fees from students. They are however to concur with the operational guidelines of the UGC and other statutory bodies, which could stand amended from time to time. Most of the HEIs have their teaching learning processes oriented towards Outcome Based Education (OBE), many are adapting Blooms Taxonomy!

Outcome Based Education and the Traditional Method of the Teaching Learning Process

Outcome Based Education or the OBE System has come to be adopted widely by leading institutions across the world, while the HEIs have already shifted to this system in India. OBE is an educational methodology, by defining outcomes, the student realizes what he is supposed to know, where to concentrate and how the programmes he has chosen fits into the final requirements of his future plans; the method where each aspect of the education process is being organized around a set of goals (Outcomes)!

However, the major disadvantage of pursuing OBE lies in the fact, that the student does not focus on really knowing anything on a long term basis; making it difficult and unfair to assess teachers by this.

Current Systems of Ranking and Accrediting Institutions for Quality & Excellence

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, to rank institutions of higher education in India, to *promote excellence in education in a competitive environment*, based on verifiable criteria in the five core basic areas of "*Teaching, Learning and Resources, Research and Professional Practices, Graduation Outcomes, Outreach/ Inclusivity, and Perception*".

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is the accrediting body for all colleges and Universities and HEIs in the country. "The National Assessment and Accreditation Council is a government organization in India that assesses and accredits Higher Educational Institutions. It is an autonomous body funded by the University Grants Commission and headquartered in Bangalore". All HEIs interested in getting accredited are free to volunteer for accreditation by the NAAC.

NBA was established by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 1994 and operated as an autonomous body since 2010. "In 2014 it was granted a full membership status in the Washington Accord. Accreditation is a process whereby a programme in an approved Institution is critically appraised to verify that the Institution or the programme continues to meet and/or exceed the Norms and Standards. It is a kind of recognition which indicates that a programme or Institution fulfills certain standards".

National Education Policy 2023

The Excerpts from the NEP 2023 read as follows:

"In summary, NEP 2023 or National Education Policy 2023 outlines the framework for the elementary education system, besides vocational training across the country. The NEP 2023 replaces the National Policy on Education of 1986 and spells out a significant shift affecting certain specific changes. The most important among them is the transition from a 10 + 2 structure to a 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 system".{Foundational Phase – 5 years – Ages 3 to 8; Pre-school &(Grades 1st& 2nd); Preparatory Phase – 3 year – Ages 8 – 11 (Grades 3rd to 5th);Middle Phase – 3 years – Ages 11 – 14 (Grades 6th to 8th);Secondary Phase – 4 years – Ages 14 -18 (Grades 9th to 12th)}.

"*At the heart of National Education Policy 2023 lies the objective to realize an innovative, student-centric structure that segments student education into four stages: Foundational, Preparatory, Middle, and Secondary. The stages are considered crucial and in a natural order where students progress from one stage to another mentally, shaping and broadening the thought process in a holistic manner*".

Adaptation of the New National Education Policy is made to ensure that there are no drop outs in the preliminary stages of education. At the Secondary stage it aims to bring in more flexibility, shifting the focus from exam-centric to holistic and experiential, and definite provision of entry/exit options, adjustability of vocational subjects, and portability of academic credits to enable more mobility.

Accreditation of HEIs

In order to be competitive in the global arena, India must have well accreditedinstitutions of higher learning. Perhaps getting accredited is the first step for any HEI to be branded. Futuristic trends in the higher education sector would definitely demand quality. Such of these higher educational institutions (HEIs) are free to get accredited through National Accrediting bodies like the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for Institutions and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) for technical programs. However, the Central government perhaps envisages the merger of these two bodies into the Higher Education Commission, Government of India under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2023. To be on par with international institutions, additional international accreditations like the ABET, AACSB or JCI, for professional Programs/Institutions, may help to survive competition.

Assessment of HEIs – NIRF

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was instituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India to rank institutions across the country. A methodology was framed under which the HEIs would be ranked based on Teaching Learning and Resources, Research and Professional Practices, Graduation Outcomes, Outreach and Inclusivity, and Perception. This was based on a realistic collection of data and questionnaire supplied to all the HEIs and reviewed by a Core Committee appointed by the MHRD, Government of India. This has been in operation since June 2015.

Assessment of Faculties of HEIs

The University Grants Commission and the All-India Council for Technical Education had laid out norms for maintaining and assessing the quality of faculties in HEIs in the country in the form of an Academic

Performance Indicator(API), with specific guidelines, with respect to the qualifications and experiences needed for appointment to posts of Assistant Professors, and Professors of HEIs, and also the necessary performances needed of them in the deliverance of their duties. This is being maintained by some of the HEIs, but however not enforced seriously by the UGC.

Demographic Dividend and Quality of HEIs

Quality improvement is also seen in the public eye as a brand building exercise. Equity in quality building is a tall order! Focusing on the special demands of the disabled, backward classes of the society and laid-back students. A '*Paradigm Change*' is needed if we were to handle the demographic dividend to our advantage. Indian education system stands third in comparison to United States and China, in the number of students undergoing education, number of schools and to an extent the quality! However, in order to sustain the levels of education currently being pursued, Indian education has to be on par with those being delivered abroad. Our students must be on par with those educated abroad, to be competent to secure a place in the global marketplace!

II.   Conclusions

It can be concluded that education is the key to progress- especiallyhigher education which developsskilled manpower. But, quality of higher education is declining and is a matter of concern for all the stakeholders, as well as for the whole nation. Indian higher education has expanded in quantity but lags behind in quality. India cannot progress until its higher education system is qualitatively strong enough, because this poor quality results in low employability, low performance of the specialized individuals, and lack of innovative and creative ideas etc. which are the key elements of success and progress in the present times.

To conclude, there is a need to enlarge the adaptive capacity and quality of the higher education system, so that it is more responsive to the changing world of work, with improved skilling, and meets the diverse needs of the economy – both domestic and global. For that purpose diversification of the Indian higher education and training system has to be pursued as a goal. This can be achieved by having a proper mix of public and private, formal and non-formal institutions.

Acknowledgement

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