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Quality Improvement of Higher Education in India

Dr Babar Ali Khan

Abstract: ***Higher education in India has been in the news for many reasons. The gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education in India has improved to 23.6 % in 2014-15. India's rise in education faces daunting challenges. The education system as a whole is beset with issues of quality, access and equity, and change is happening much faster in some states than others. The Government has proposed and is also taking several measures to improve the system there are some steps it could take to make the Indian higher education system a role model for other emerging systems. While the Indian higher education system has made considerable progress in the last decade, it lags significantly in terms of "global relevance and competitiveness". There are various dimensions of quality in education, Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today, with few institutes having achieved global recognition for excellence. Improving educational performance ranks high on the national agenda.Though extensive literature exists that links school facilities to the quality of education and to teacher morale and teacher,there is absence in examination of how school conditions affect teaching and learning. To gain a milestone for a successful education system, one needs a high quality teaching staff. Attracting and retaining high quality teachers is thus a primary requirement for an educational institution. For the development of teachers & students there are some points to improve higher education conditions. Teachers and students hold the main responsibility for improving higher education. But they need a lot of help. College and university leaders, state and federal officials, and accrediting associations have the power to shape an environment that is favorable to good practice in higher education***

Keywords: GER, Education, Policymaker, curriculum reform, teacher quality

1. Introduction

While India has made significant progress in ensuring access to primary education, the proportion of students who remain in the education system until higher education is considerably less. Ensuring equitable access to higher education is also a challenge with disparities seen across gender, regions and socio-economic groups. After independence, there have been attempts to review the progress of higher education and to suggest measures to be taken for its speedier progress.

A little more than half a century has passed since the Government initiated a planned development of higher education in the country with the establishment of University Grants Commission in 1953. The policy for the development of higher education has been mainly governed by the "National policy on Education" of 1986 (as modified in 1992) and its Program of Action 1992. The 1986 policy and Action Plan of 1992 were based on the two land mark reports namely, the "University Education Commission Report" of 1948-49 (popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission), and the "Education Commission Report" of 1964-66, (popularly known as Kothari Commission). These two reports, in fact, laid down the basic framework for the National Policy of 1986 for higher education in the country. The Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education had set up goals for development of higher education. While articulating these goals, the Commission put it in following words: "The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values." The National Policy on Higher Education (1986) translated the vision of Radhakrishnan Commission and Kothari Commission in five main goals for higher education, as enumerated below; which include Greater Access, Equal Access (or Equity), Quality and Excellence, Relevance and Value Based Education.

2. New major initiatives taken by the Government of India

The Union Budget 2017-18 has made the following provisions for the education sector:

- The Budget has pegged an outlay of Rs 79,685.95 crore (US$ 11.952 billion) for the education sector for financial year 2017-18, up from Rs 72,394 crore (US$ 10.859 billion) in 2016-17—a 9.9 per cent rise.
- The Government of India has allocated around Rs 17,000 crore (US$ 2.55 billion) towards skilling, employment generation, and providing livelihood to millions of youth, in order to boost the Skill India Mission.

The Government of India has approved an all-time record of over 4,000 post-graduation (PG) medical seats to be added in various medical colleges and hospitals for the academic session 2017-18, said Mr J P Nadda, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, Government of India, has approved the proposal to open 50 new Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) under Civil/Defence sector in the country requiring an investment of Rs 1,160 crore (US$ 180.11 million). The Government of India and the World Bank have signed a US$ 201.50 million International Development Association (IDA) credit agreement for the Third Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP III), aimed at improving the efficiency, quality and equity of engineering education across several focus states. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched the Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana, which will provide entrepreneurship education and training to over 700,000 students in 5 years through 3,050 institutes.

The Government has proposed and is also taking several such measures to improve the system there are some steps it could take to make the Indian higher education system a role model for other emerging systems. Institutions, on their part, would need to adopt a transformative and innovative approach across all levers of higher education: from curricula and pedagogy to the use of technology to partnerships, governance and funding, to become globally relevant and competitive.

While the Indian higher education system has made considerable progress in terms of capacity creation and enrolment especially in the last decade, it lags significantly in terms of "global relevance and competitiveness". The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education in India has improved to 23.6 % in 2014-15 from 21.5 % in 2012-13. While there is no doubt that this will be the decade of change at a transformational scale and pace, India's rise faces daunting challenges. The education system as a whole is beset with issues of quality, access and equity, and change is happening much faster in some states than others. The general standard of education in India is low. There are not enough places in schools, colleges or universities to cope with the enormous and increasing demand. Traditional approaches to meet this demand will not be sufficient in the time-scale needed.

3. Challenges for Quality Education

There are various dimensions of quality in education, including content, mode of delivery, infrastructure and facilities, employability, etc. Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today, with few institutes having achieved global recognition for excellence. Some of the challenges affecting quality of education are:

- Curriculum and Pedagogy: A key concern cited by higher education institutes is the lack of autonomy with respect to framing course curriculum resulting in a course structure that is often outdated. The curriculum is often not oriented to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation among students. Additionally, the adoption of new modes of delivery, such as technology-enabled learning, has not yet become widespread.
- Infrastructure: Higher education institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. The higher education system also suffers from misalignment of supply in the sense that while there are courses in which the demand is in excess of the available number of seats, there is excess capacity in others
- Faculty: Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. The quality of teaching is also often poor and there are constraints faced in training the faculty
- Accreditation: As per the data provided by the NAAC, as of June 2010, "not even 25% of the total higher education institutions in the country were accredited. And among those accredited, only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level"(Compilation Based on the Deliberations of the Working Group for Higher Education in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-17) University Grants Commission, Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education)
- Industry Linkages: There are insufficient levels of meaningful industry participation in aspects like curriculum development, research and faculty exchange programmes. Placement services in many universities are very limited resulting in a lack of co-ordination between employment seeking graduates and prospective employers who are looking for suitably qualified candidates
- Employability: The Indian education system on the whole is not aligned to the skill and manpower needs of the market. Skills shortage across sectors is accompanied by high levels of graduate unemployment, highlighting the need to include employment-linked modules in courses. In addition to job-related skills, graduates are often reported to be lacking adequate soft-skills such as communication and inter-personal skills
- Research and Innovation: There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. The causes include insufficient resources and facilities, as well as, limited numbers of quality faculty to advice students (Anitha Kurup and Jagdish Arora, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Trends in Higher Education: Creation and Analysis of a Database of PhDs in India)

Improving educational performance ranks high on the national agenda, with educators and policymakers focusing on testing, accountability, curriculum reform, teacher quality, school choice, and related concerns. Though extensive literature exists that links school facilities to the quality of education and to teacher morale and teacher, an examination of how school conditions affect teaching and learning has been clearly absent. To gain a milestone for a successful education system, one needs a high quality teaching staff. Attracting and retaining high quality teachers is thus a primary requirement for an educational institution. For the development of teachers & students there are some points to improve higher education conditions.

4. Quality Assurance in Higher education

Over the last few decades, a new paradigm of the function of higher education in society has emerged. While universities still maintain their role as the "conscience of society," more pragmatic roles have been evolving over time: universities no longer pursue knowledge for its own sake; rather they provide qualified manpower and produce knowledge. With this new economically oriented paradigm, comes accountability. Higher education will be judged in terms of outputs and the contributions it makes to national development. Criteria to assess the quality of the work and of the teams which carry out research in this new university will differ from those of more traditional, disciplinary science. In the past, quality was determined through peer review. Control was maintained by careful selection of those judged competent to act as peers, which was in part determined by their previous contributions to their discipline. In the new university additional criteria are added through the context of application which now incorporates a diverse range of intellectual interests as well as other social, economic or political ones. To the criterion of intellectual interest and its interaction, further questions are posed, "Will

the solution be competitive in the market? Will it be cost effective? Will it be socially acceptable?

Quality assurance will be more complex as universities move to broaden the range of their knowledge missions. Until now, quality control in teaching and research has been exercised through essentially the same type of peer review system. Quality has been a matter for academics and academics alone. It has been up to them to determine when quality in both teaching and research has been achieved. Hybridization of the disciplinary structure "Quality Assurance in Higher Education" is likely to continue to be the main mode of expansion in teaching provision in the future. If new research practices diffuse more widely throughout universities, entirely new assurance mechanisms will be necessary for the problem-oriented teaching that will accompany it. One can expect to see the development of new bench-marking methodologies and the production of a range of benchmarking studies across the higher education sector. These studies will help rank universities according to various quality indicators by region, by country and even globally; not only according to teaching and research but across the entire range of knowledge missions (Schofield, 1998). In the quality assurance processes which are now emerging, a much wider range of factors is being considered. Universities will not be able to insist on criteria which reflect their intellectual interests alone rather they will be one actor among several and the challenge for them will be to ensure that their legitimate interests survive the negotiation process.

5. Governance is a key issue in higher education

Governance is currently a key issue not only for higher education institutions but for society as a whole. The way organizations are managed, the directions they take and the values they hold send clear signals about their role and functions in society. For this reason, the governance structures of universities were unquestioned for most of the twentieth century. Yet in the final decades of that century significant changes were starting to be felt. The most important of these changes related to the way universities were viewed by governments. In particular, the role of universities in contributing to national economies was being recognized. Greater accountability and more intense scrutiny from the outside meant that the traditional values of universities were being challenged. The task of universities, and for society as a whole, is to develop strategies that will retain the best of what universities have traditionally stood for while responding positively to new pressures and priorities. The principle of partnership, therefore, is not simple rhetoric. It underscores a set of relationships that need to be reflected in the governance structures of universities in the twenty-first century. There is no doubting the potential of universities to contribute to national economies but equally there is no doubting their record as significant social institutions. Unregulated managerialism is not the answer for universities of the future. Certainly, modern universities need to be managed but that management needs to involve the 'academic heartland' as much as it needs to be guided by broader social purposes. The management of universities in this century needs to be encased in structures that rely on guidance from above in the form of governing bodies and from below in the form of academic staff. These bi-directional processes influencing management have the potential to re-engage an alienated academy and re-establish the broader purposes of universities. It is not too difficult to imagine the kind of structures that will reflect these principles and it would not be difficult to accept different configurations across national systems. In the end, it will be these governance partnerships that will determine not only who and who will not be involved in university decision making, but the very identity of the modern university itself. There is a choice confronting governments and policymakers and it is a choice about the future. Let us hope that it will be made wisely and let us hope that it will focus on the inclusion and participation of key players rather than their exclusion and marginalization.

6. Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

Teachers and students hold the main responsibility for improving higher education. But they need a lot of help. College and university leaders, state and federal officials, and accrediting associations have the power to shape an environment that is favorable to good practice in higher education. Following nine principles, which provide a fundamental basis and starting place to assist in the design of an assessment plan for an academic program was developed under the auspices of the AAHE (American Association for Higher Education) with additional support from the Exxon Education Foundation".

1) The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement
2) Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3) Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process.
4) Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also an equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5) Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative.
6) Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7) Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8) Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9) Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education.

7. A Focus for Improvement

Good practices hold as much meaning for professional programs as for the liberal arts. They work for many

different kinds of students - white, black, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, older, younger, male, female, well prepared, under prepared. But the ways different institutions implement good practice depends very much on their students and their circumstances.

To improve teaching and learning, some practices are intended as guidelines for faculty members, students, and administrators - with support from state agencies and trustees. These practices seem like good common sense. They rest on the way teachers teach and students learn how students work and play with one another, and how students and faculty talk to each other. While each practice can stand on its own, when all are present, their effects multiply. Together, they employ six powerful forces in education:

- Activity
- Diversity
- Interaction
- Cooperation
- Expectations
- Responsibility

8. Conclusion & Suggestion

Teachers and students hold the main responsibility for improving higher education. But they need a lot of help. College and university leaders, state and federal officials, and accrediting associations have the power to shape an environment that is favorable to good practice in higher education. What qualities must this environment have?

The environment requires for good practices in higher education are:

- A strong sense of shared purposes.
- Concrete support from administrators and faculty leaders for those purposes.
- Adequate funding appropriate for the purposes.
- Policies and procedures consistent with the purposes.
- Continuing examination of how well the purposes are being achieved.

There is good evidence that such an environment can be created. When this happens, faculty members and administrators think of themselves as educators. Adequate resources are put into creating opportunities for faculty members, administrators, and students to celebrate and reflect on their shared purposes. Faculty members receive support and release time for appropriate professional development activities.

The role of improved schooling, a central part of most development strategies, has become controversial because expansion of school attainment has not guaranteed improved economic conditions. This reviews the role of education in promoting economic well-being, focusing on the role of educational quality. It concludes that there is strong evidence that the cognitive skills of the population rather than mere school attainment are powerfully related to individual earnings, to the distribution of income, and to economic growth. New empirical results show the importance of both minimal and high-level skills, the complementarily of skills and the quality of economic institutions, and the robustness of the relationship between skills and growth. International comparisons incorporating expanded data on cognitive skills reveal much larger skill deficits in developing countries than generally derived from just school enrollment and attainment. The magnitude of change needed makes it clear that closing the economic gap with industrial countries will require major structural changes in schooling institutions.

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