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A study on Indian higher education system

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Abstract
The purpose of this research paper is to examine the Indian higher education sector. The study adopted a library research method, and data were collected from research papers, articles, government websites, and theses. Indian higher education sector is the world's largest and most diverse education sector in the entire world. It plays a key role in the country's technological, social, and economic development. Serving millions of students in both urban and rural locations, it has grown quickly since independence. In India, higher education aspires to encourage national development, foster research and innovation, and produce skilled people resources. Universities, colleges, and other institutions of national significance make up India's higher education system. While most colleges are connected to state or central universities, there are four types of universities: Central, State, Deemed and Private. High-quality professional and technical education is the focus of institutions of national significance like IITs and IIMs. Students can pursue education in the arts, sciences, business, education, engineering, administration, medicine, and research thanks to its varied structure. The main objective of Indian higher education is to develop knowledge and skills, promote research and innovation, and support national development. Quality gaps, poor enrollment in some programs, faculty shortages, restricted research output, and the need for digital and AI-related competences are just a few of the issues facing the Indian higher education system. To address these issues and guarantee inclusive, pertinent, and sustainable higher education development, regulatory changes, enhanced teacher preparation, improved infrastructure, and alignment with international educational trends are all necessary.

Keywords: Ancient education, country's development, higher education, innovation

Introduction

The term "education" originates from the Latin word "educatum," which is derived from "e" and "duco." The word "duco" means 'to lead,' 'to develop,' or 'to progress,' while e signifies movement from within to outward. Similarly, "educare" means 'to lead out' or 'to draw out' (Aggarwal, 2010) [1]. Higher Education is defined as the education, which is obtained after completing 12 years of schooling or equivalent and is of the duration of at least nine months (full time) or after completing 10 years of schooling and is of the duration of at least 3 years. The education may be of the nature of General, Vocational, Professional or Technical education (www.education.gov.in ministry of education government of India, Annexure-3). UNESCO has defined higher education as "any post-secondary education, training, or research that is recognized by a state's authorities as part of its higher education system." This includes all types of education, such as academic, professional, technological, artistic, and pedagogical (UNESCO, 2005). In the Indian higher education sector, approximately 400,000 colleges provide undergraduate education, while about 900 universities are entrusted with postgraduate teaching and research. The system employs around 1.285 million teachers to educate nearly 36.6 million students. Of these, about 4.14 million students are enrolled in master's programmes, and nearly 161,000 students are pursuing doctoral studies. Each year, approximately 34,400 PhD degrees are awarded, and around 10,000 research fellowships are granted annually (All India Survey on higher education, 2018-2019).

Developments of Ancient Higher education

The Indian education system was highly developed in ancient times. India has a long history of education and knowledge since the dawn of civilization. Although they were oral, the Vedas and Upanishads, which were the basis of ancient Indian philosophy and thought, were meticulously preserved as a repository of knowledge. Later, well-run educational institutions emerged, the most famous of which were Takshasila and Nalanda.

The Vedas and Vedangas, along with the eighteen arts, medicine and surgery, astronomy and astrology, agriculture, and accounting-appear to have been part of the curriculum at Taksasila. Taksasila flourished as an educational hub until the fifth century A.D. Students at Nalanda, a Buddhist center, frequently studied the Vedas and Upanishads, the writings of Jainism and Mahayana Buddhism, as well as philosophical and logical systems for up to twelve years. Near the end of the eleventh century, Nalanda was destroyed. These facilities were well-known for the tight ties between students and professors as well as for the academics who came from all over the world. Similar facilities for studying grammar and law were also found in southern India. The report continues by stating that during the middle Ages, the Muslim rulers who ruled over a sizable portion of Northern India, from Lahore to Allahabad, as well as in some parts of Rajasthan, encouraged the establishment of colleges (Madrasahs), while some Hindu centers of learning in the East and the South continued to operate. Grammar, rhetoric, logic and law, geometry and astronomy, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and theology were all taught in these colleges, and everyone enjoyed poetry.

The Function of the Government Following Independence

In 1947, India gained its independence. In 1950, it gained its own constitution and became a democratic republic. Higher education in India changed from being an elitist endeavor to a potentially formidable tool for development and change throughout the post-independence era. The Radhakrishnan panel, the first post-independence panel on higher education offered recommendations on every facet of higher education, including from the objectives of higher education in independent India to the quality of instruction, courses, postgraduate training and research, professional education, rural education, women's education, exams, and finance. In the midst of uncertainty, it offered a clear path. One of the Commission's most important proposals was to create the University Grants Commission by converting the University Grants Committee, which was first established in 1945 to handle Central Universities before being expanded to include all universities. The Commission believes that the proposed UGC should be an expert organization capable of evaluating the universities' financial needs and allocating sufficient resources, rather than merely figuring out how much public funds can be allocated to them. Additionally, the planned UGC would be in charge of establishing higher education standards. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established and the UGC Act was passed in 1956 because of this recommendation. Since then, the UGC has directed the growth of higher education in India through a number of initiatives. The UGC's main duties included promoting, coordinating, determining, and maintaining university standards; evaluating universities' financial needs and allocating and disbursing grants to them; and advising universities and the federal and state governments on actions required to raise university standards. Since 1947, India's higher education policies have evolved significantly to address changing national priorities and global trends. The major education commissions and national policies in India since independence (1947) can be broadly categorized.

1. Radhakrishnan Commission 1948-1949 (University Education Commission)
2. Dr. Mudaliar Commission 1952-1953 (Secondary Education Commission)
3. Kothari Commission 1964-1966 (Education Commission)
4. Chattopadhyay Committee (National commission on Teachers – 1983-1985)
5. National policy of Education (NPE 1986)
6. National Education Policy Review Committee/Acharya Ramamurthy Committee 1990
7. Plan of Action - 1992
8. Yashpal Committee 1993
9. National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2000-2005)
10. National Knowledge Commission (NKC – 2005-2008)
11. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE 2009-2010)
12. Justice Varma Commission 2012
13. National Policy on Education (NEP 2020)
14. National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE 2023)

The Development of India's Higher Education

Over the past fifty years, India's higher education infrastructure has grown astronomically. In terms of the quantity of colleges and universities, the number of students enrolled, and the diversity of programs and courses available, India's higher education system currently offers an image of the perplexing intricacy of optimism and despair, achievement and failure, and brightness and shade. The numbers are high, but there are also significant unfulfilled social demands, significant regional disparities, a sizable portion of society that the system still fails to adequately serve, and, finally yet importantly, concerns about the relevance and quality of what the system provides. Major industrial houses entered the field of education mostly through their own charitable endeavors as Western education caught up. There were new establishments that concentrated on teaching science and technology. Additionally, numerous institutions were established by religious charity. The UGC Act of 1956 made it impossible for a private university to exist in India since it required legislation to establish a university with the authority to grant degrees. Nonetheless, the private sector may set up schools that need to be affiliated with universities in order to offer degree-level courses and prepare students for university exams in order to issue degrees. This arrangement secured private funding to build infrastructure, but universities in the public sector continued to be solely in charge of the curriculum, procedures, and awarding of degrees. For the private sector, it was an act of charity or philanthropy since it involved social improvement without yielding profits on investment.

India's higher education system is stable. However, some institutions are not ready to change their policies in line with global changes. Therefore, industry and other employment sectors often complain that a majority of recent graduates fail the fitness for purpose test in the job market and do not have the skills and competencies that employers require.

The Effects of Technology on Education

India has one of the world's fastest-growing economies and the greatest concentration of impoverished people worldwide (World Bank, 2005). An estimated 38% of the population roughly 380 million people live below the poverty level. Approximately 300 million people in India lack literacy. However, contemporary technology have been deeply ingrained in India. It boasts one of the fastest-growing internal information and communications technology networks in addition to its status as an information technology superpower, with billions of dollars' worth of Indian IT products exported annually to the developed world. Over 600 million people are reportedly connected to cell phones; more than 80% of people have access to satellite or cable TV. India has its own communication satellites, including a dedicated education satellite that transmits educational broadcasts across various channels. There is a developing internet-based education delivery system. Although broadband and internet connectivity are still in their infancy, the majority of universities have wired campuses that offer simple access to library networks and the Internet. Comprehensive understanding of how ICTs have affected Indian education as you study more about the country's rapidly expanding Open University and distant learning system. These technologies are being used by traditional colleges for more than merely enhancing their efficiency in teaching and learning transactions as well as in governance (including procedures pertaining to admissions, student record management, exams, administration, and accounting). Many

educational institutions employ Internet-based interactive sessions to deliver their teaching services, and e learning is rapidly becoming a popular educational tool.

All Indian institutions that offer higher education are classified into three broad categories,

1. University/University Level Institutions
2. Colleges/Institutions - affiliated/recognized with University
3. Stand-alone Institutions - not affiliated/recognized with University

1. University/University Level Institutions

Under the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956, "University" means a University established or incorporated by or under a Central Act, a Provincial Act or a State Act, and includes any such institution as may, in consultation with the University concerned, be recognized by the Commission in accordance with the regulations made in this behalf under this Act.

The following degree awarding Institutions are covered in this category,

1. Central University: A university established or incorporated by a Central Act.
2. State University: A university established or incorporated by a Provincial Act or by a State Act.
3. Open University: A University, which imparts education exclusively through distance education in any branch or branches of knowledge.
4. Private University: A university established through a State/ Central Act by a sponsoring body *viz*. a Society registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, or any other corresponding law for the time being in force in a State or a Public Trust or a Company registered under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.
5. Deemed University: An Institution Deemed to be University commonly known as Deemed University refers to a high-performing institute, which has been so declared by Central Government under Section 3 of the Commission (UGC) Act, 1956.
6. Institute of National Importance: An Institution established by Act of Parliament and declared as Institution of National Importance such as All Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), National Institute of Technology (NIT).
7. Institute Under State Legislature Act: An institution established or incorporated by a State Legislature Act. There are five such Universities, Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad; Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati; Shere-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, Srinagar; Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Patna; Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow.
8. Other Institute: An institution not falling in any of the above category but established through State/ Central Act and are empowered to award degrees e.g. National Institute of Fashion Technology established through an Act of Parliament.

2. Colleges/Institutions affiliated/recognized with University

These are institutions, which can run degree programmes but are not empowered to provide degree on their own and are necessarily have to be attached with a University/University level institution for awarding degree.

"College" means any institution, whether known as such or by any other name, that provides a course of study for obtaining any qualification from a university and that, in accordance with the rules and regulations of such university, is recognized as competent to offer such a course of study and present students undergoing that course for the examination leading to the award of such qualification. These are the institutions established or maintained by or admitted to the privileges of the University.

Colleges can be of two types,

1. University/ Constituent College - A college maintained by the University
2. Affiliated College Some colleges are given

UGC has introduced a scheme of Autonomous colleges keeping in view the objectives of the National Education Policy (1986-92). All Colleges under Section 2(f) & 12(b) of the UGC Act are eligible under the Scheme. Criteria for identification of institutions for grant of autonomy are as follows,

a. Academic reputation and previous performance in university examinations and its academic/co-curricular/extension activities in the past.
b. Academic/extension achievements of the faculty.
c. Quality and merit in the selection of students and teachers, subject to statutory requirements in this regard.
d. Adequacy of infrastructure, for example, library, equipment, accommodation for academic activities, etc.
e. Quality of institutional management.
f. Financial resources provided by the management/state government for the development of the institution.
g. Responsiveness of administrative structure.
h. Motivation and involvement of faculty in the promotion of innovative reforms. The Parent University awards degrees to the students, evaluated and recommended by colleges. Autonomous colleges that have completed three-year terms can confer the degree under their title with the seal of the university.

3. Stand-alone Institutions not affiliated/recognized with University

There are several institutions, which are outside the purview of the University & College. These Institutions generally run Diploma/PG Diploma level programmes for which they require recognition from one or other Statutory Bodies. These Institutions mainly fall under the following categories,

- Indian Institute of Management (IIM) awarding mainly PG Diploma in Management of two years duration whose entry qualification is Graduate.
- Diploma awarding Institutions under the control of All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) e.g. Lal Bahadur Shastri Management Institute awarding PG diplomas in Management of two years duration whose entry qualification is Graduate.
- Diploma awarding Institutions under the control of Indian Nursing Council (INC).
- Government or Government recognized Institutions to conduct Teachers Training courses whose entry qualification is 10+2 e.g. District Institute of Educational and Training (DIET) or similar institutes.

- Polytechnics.
- Company Secretary, Charted Accountancy, Actuarial Science etc.

Levels of Programs

Higher education programs are generally structured into different levels, including,

1. **Under-Graduate:** Programme after 10+2 and generally having the duration of 3/4/5 years, in General or Professional courses.

2. **Post-Graduate:** Programme after Graduation and generally having the duration of 2/3 years in General/Professional courses.

3. **M.Phil:** Programme after Post-Graduation and generally having the duration of 1/2 years and is a pre-research course.

4. **Ph.D:** Programme after M.Phil. Or Post-Graduation and generally having the duration of 2/3/4/5 years.

5. **Post Graduate Diploma:** Programme generally after 10+2 or after Graduation in General and Professional courses and having duration of 1/2/3 years.

6. **Diploma:** Programme generally after 10+2 or after Graduation in General and Professional courses and having duration of 1/2/3 years.

7. **Certificate:** It is a Programme similar to Diploma, but is awarded a Certificate by the Institution.

8. **Integrated/Dual Degree:** It is a Programme leading to Post-Graduate Degree and/or Research Degree. Generally, it is a combination of two degree programmes e.g. M.Tech Ph.D, B.A. LLB, M.Sc. Ph.D, B.Tech M.Tech etc.

Mode of Higher Education

The mode of higher education indicates how programs are conducted. There are three major modes used to conduct these programs.

- **Regular Mode (Formal system of Higher Education):** Education provided in the system of Colleges, Universities and other formal educational institutions where the students getting education in a classroom in direct contact with the teachers and also make use of other infrastructure facilities like laboratories, library etc. to enhance its learning capacity.

- **Self-Financing Courses in Regular Mode:** Government-aided Universities/Colleges/ Institutions conducting certain career-oriented courses without the financial support of the Government. The recurring expenditure to run these courses is being met by students' fees etc.

- **Distance/Correspondence Mode i.e. Non-Formal system of Higher Education:** The system of imparting education through broadcasting, telecasting, internet, correspondence courses, seminars, contact programmes or the combination of any two or more such means of communication.

Conclusion

India's higher education sector is one of the largest in the world, characterized by its vast scale, rapid growth, and ongoing transformation through reforms like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. As of the latest available data (AISHE 2021-22), the system encompasses over 1,168 universities, 45,473 colleges, and 12,002 standalone institutions, serving approximately 43.3 million students with around 1.6 million teachers. Enrollment has risen steadily, from 3.42 crore in 2014-15 to 4.33 crore in 2021-22, reflecting a 26.5% increase and pushing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from 23.7% to 28.4% for the 18-23 age group. This expansion is driven by increasing access, particularly for women (whose enrollment grew 32% since 2014-15) and marginalized groups, alongside government initiatives like scholarships and infrastructure development. India ranks among the top globally in institutional numbers and enrollment, trailing only China in total students while leading in the sheer volume of colleges and universities. Despite these achievements, the sector faces significant challenges, including quality disparities across institutions, faculty shortages, limited research output, and uneven access in rural and disadvantaged regions. Regulatory complexity, infrastructure gaps, and low employability of graduates remain persistent issues. The NEP 2020 addresses many of these through transformative reforms, introducing multidisciplinary education, flexible curricula with multiple entry/exit options, emphasis on vocational integration, technology-driven learning.

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