

Instruction & Examination System in Higher Education in India in the Context of Global Competition

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Abstract

Higher education has special value in the emerging knowledge Society. What are the long-term implications of the trend toward privatization and commercialization of higher education? The thrust of globalization is expected to push Higher education to face far-reaching challenges. Today it is increasingly realized that knowledge is universal and its creation and dissemination cannot be confined within national boundaries. The globalization of economy has led to internationalization of higher education, not merely for economic benefits, but also for increased social interaction and promotion of international understanding.

While a lot of debate has gone on the support of higher education by the Government, the fact remains that in real terms the support has dwindled continually. The demand for higher technical education has progressively and substantially increased resulting in the establishment of a large number of self-financed technical institutions

Fundamental to education is the need to evaluate student learning and the effectiveness of teaching methods and the programs offered. It is a well known fact that any change in methods of teaching, textbook and reference book writing, study habits of students, etc. can be brought by way of changing the examination system. Reforms in the examination system by adopting Continuous Internal Evaluation and well defined Academic Auditing are the need of the hour. This paper attempts to highlight the status of higher education in the context of globalization and suggests a few examination reforms for the betterment of the system.

Introduction

Education, particularly the higher education as a service sector falls within the ambit of World Trade Organization (WTO) and General Agreement & Trade in Services (GATS). Growth of any country's economy depends on well-groomed and robust human resource development, which is invariably linked to a country's planning and management for higher education. Therefore, country's economy is both directly and indirectly linked with the growth of

human resource development which is possible only through a well thought out plan of management in higher education. Higher education is the backbone of country's economy. Investment in higher education is therefore a matter of concern for any country as the human capital so generated is expected to play a pivotal role in a country's economic development and growth.

India has built over last five decades a vast body of human resource equipped with a high

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degree of scientific and technological capabilities. After independence, the number of higher education institutions has increased significantly. Though India has over 9.4 million students in the age group of 18-23 in the colleges, it accounts for only seven percent of the eligible population in that group. Out of these 9.4 million students, 7.4 million are pursuing arts degree. The remaining two million are pursuing science, engineering, commerce and management education. The country has 354 universities and over 16,500 colleges.

Through India has been consistently striving hard for the betterment of economic growth through five year planning, the budget allocations to the higher education remain abysmally low as compared to the funds allocated to the primary and secondary education sectors due to financial constraints as well as political compulsions. The share of higher education in the union budget's total provision has fallen from 28.19% in 90-91 to 17.7% in 2003-04. Allocation for education in the First Five-Year Plan was 7.2% of the total outlay (Valan Arasu, J.G, 2005). In the Tenth Five-Year Plan, it has further come down to 2.9%. Besides the acute paucity of funds, lack of autonomy and burden of affiliation, the general universities also suffer from the obsolete and outdated composition, powers and functions of the university authorities like the Board of Management, Academic Council and the Senate.

Role of Private Institutions in Higher Education

The importance of higher education can't be undermined, despite the Government's obligation and commitment to primary and secondary levels of education. While a lot of debate has gone on the support of higher education by the Government, the fact remains that in real terms the support has dwindled continually. The demand for higher technical education has progressively and substantially increased resulting in the establishment of a large number

of self-financed technical institutions. In 2004-05, according to AICTE records there were 1346 engineering colleges with a total intake of 4,39,689 students. At present nearly 80 percent of nearly half a million annual intake of engineering students is in self-financed institutions. Most of our universities and colleges suffer from poor economy of scale, poor utilization of faculty and other resources.

Shaping of higher education by our planners and administrators is the need of the hour, as human resources generated from the best educational institutions will alone provide leadership and expertise in furthering the growth of the country's economy.

Given the limitation of government support to higher education, private players are encouraged to join in the fray. While in the primary and secondary levels of education, the role of private schools' contribution is remarkable and appreciable, but private universities have still to gain momentum in the field of higher education. All over the world the trend is towards increasing participation of private enterprise in higher education. (Kulandaiswamy, V.C., 2005)

- Japan has 512 private universities out of a total of 684.
- In US, private universities account for 1752 out of a total of 2364.
- More than 80% of the universities in Philippines are private.

China had nearly doubled its higher education institutions since 1999 and there are already more than 1000 *min ban* (people run) institutions in China. Whereas India has 247 Universities and 98 deemed to be universities for a total population of 100 crores. We have not thought about seriously the concept of private universities and its responsibilities unlike other developed countries. It shows that private institutions have still to make a dent even in sharing its responsibility towards the development of higher education. It is not out of place to mention that government run

educational institutions alone can't manage the field of higher education in an over-populated country with the limited govt. fund allocation. The privately managed educational institutions should therefore assume responsibility and join hands with the government in providing healthy competition among the aspirants seeking higher education.

The government can only lay down policies and frame guidelines to keep private institution on the right track. The Private Institutions have to assure and reassure the public that their interests lay on imparting higher education only and that they are guided by ethical principles and not solely by monetary gains. There need to be a healthy competition among the institutions run by privately-owned institutions and government-run institutions on one hand and the institutions of repute at international level on the other. This, in a way, has to be wholesome as institutions at international level, be it private or public, is ready for tie-up with any quality institution in the country under W.T.O/GATS.

Reforms in Instructional Programmes

Given the background of Indian conditions in imparting higher education, the universities have to gear up in terms of major reforms in the instructional and examination system. It is recognized that examination is an important process of education, which is intimately linked with teaching and learning. We must therefore introduce reforms in examination system and encourage innovation. To compete with the best in the world-class institutions, it is necessary to upgrade academic curriculum, strengthen infrastructure facilities, and appoint academically well-qualified teachers comparable to world class standard. While conventional system of examination has defects in many ways, it is still accepted due to its simplicity and familiarity. Conventional system can't remain intact if we have to compete with the global requirements of instruction, examination and research. We need to recognize the fact that a conventional

system has to change and features of modern system of instruction and examination, more acceptable globally, will have to be explored.

The use of Information Technology (IT) and networking in the Universities and institutional administration is abysmal at present which should undergo a quantum change. There are several significant national initiatives, employing satellite, web-based and TV/video-based transmissions, such as EDUSAT, NPTEL (National Project on Technology-Enhanced Learning), and the Ekalavya /Gyan Darshan TV channels respectively. Their efficient utilization must be ensured. With technological innovation, modern methods of application need to be introduced in the instruction and examination systems.

Modes of selection of students

The mode of induction of students in universities differs from institution to institution. In some universities the students are admitted on the basis of marks obtained in the qualifying examination and in some universities besides minimum prescribed qualifying examination the induction is on the basis of entrance examination. From experience, it is said that the selection of students through entrance examination is the right mode for higher studies. The selection procedure could be through entrance examination and viva-voce. The examination should be held at all India level.

The paper setting for the entrance examination should provide a fair opportunity to all candidates who intend to pursue higher studies. While designing question papers, the varying curricula/ syllabi of different universities and also varying eligibility requirements should be kept in mind in order to avoid biases. Paper setters should also keep in mind that the intending candidates are from diverse socio-economic background, speaking different languages and from different cultural ethos. The catchment areas should be widespread in order to enable the eligible candidates to avail

opportunities in the entrance examination system.

The university should have competent experienced faculty/staff for conducting entrance examination. The process of selection should be above board and least questionable. The universities should follow secrecy, accuracy and transparency in the system of examination and declaration of results. As far as possible modern techniques viz. computerized checking through OMR sheets should be used in the evaluation process. The idea is to select cream of students from this system and assign them for higher studies. The cream so selected should be trained and retrained vigorously by adopting modern methods of instruction and examination.

Examination Reforms

The universities should have an Academic Calendar for the entire year. It should prescribe Admission/ Examination Schedules, Semester Schedules, Vacations and schedule for declaration of Results, etc. A modern university should adopt the features of semester system and continuous evaluation. The idea of adoption of these features is to have knowledge based system and not examination-based system. A semester has a 90 effective working days including end-semester examination. Equal weightage should be given to both internal and external assessments. In fact, the internal assessment should be vigorous, continuous and training-oriented. Weightage should be given for Classroom Attendance, Library Consultations, Seminars and Quizzes. The evaluation should be done through credit and grading system. The advantage of semester system, credit grading system is that a student is continuously taught/trained, tutorials and class work, library lab work assigned, and the student's grasp is assessed. The act of training should be continuous.

Our universities should even go for adoption of choice-based credit system whereby a student can opt for more credits even though a degree is awarded at the minimum prescribed

credits and grade. Even dual degrees are encouraged by some universities in India which is a trend in the right direction. The idea is our examination and evaluation should find recognition of the system prevailing in leading universities so that our students are able to compete globally for education & employment, in university abroad.

The percentage system is outmoded and no longer practiced in several reputed universities abroad. The study in the university should not be a mere ritual of one time annual examination, but to serve as a training ground for a perfect take-off for employment after completing higher study. The courses offered to the students should get updated keeping in tune with the needs of the society. Inter-disciplinary study should be encouraged and students should have freedom to select optional courses to upgrade their knowledge and skills.

There is controversy looming large in universities/colleges that the answer books are evaluated even by students. This is a dangerous situation. In fact, the answer sheets should be evaluated by the teacher who set the question paper, which is practically not feasible at this juncture. Question paper should consist of 75% of objective type and 25% of short answer to avoid subjectivity. Evaluation of 100% of subjective questions consumes lot of time and energy. Since it is on manual basis more of subjectivity in corrections can't be ruled out. Again at the same time some percentage of subjective questions needed to assess the candidate's suitability.

The Third division as a category should be abolished. There should be a category of First divisioners with distinction say about 70% or equivalent grade and Second divisioners with 55% and equivalent grade. Retention of third class in the system encourages students to pay minimum attention to studies. The existing plethora of admission tests needs to be rationalized. Due weightage should be given to the results of the Board Examinations to improve

the quality of intake. The education policies should be consistent to ensure that the students are not subjected to uncertainty.

Funding

Only six percent of total population in India is enrolled for higher studies. This percentage is inexplicably low in proportion to the total population of 100 crores. Recognizing the fact that the quality manpower has to be carved out of this six percent bracket, it is the responsibility of educational planners and experts to design and ensure quality in education, its sustenance and enhancement. It is, of course, not an easy task. The funding is the real problem in the face of government's limitation in allocating funds. Funds exploration has to be on a large scale and all-out efforts should be made for generating funds for higher education. It is a matter of pride that the present government has indicated increase in funding on education to 6.0% of GDP. It is of course quite a substantial increase from about 3.5% but how much would be the share of higher education is a moot question.

Universities should have adequate funding and facilities for research so as to attract good and qualified faculty members. Teachers undertaking research activities should be given extra incentives. Research should form part of a major component in the university set up, which should be comparable with research-oriented universities abroad.

Conclusion

Considering the increase in population and the requirement of higher percentage for the age group entering higher education, there will be need for a massive increase in opportunities for higher education. The government by themselves will not be able to meet this need. It is necessary to welcome and encourage the participation of private sector, but on a selective basis to ensure quality. Efforts should be made by universities to offer programmes jointly

through MOUs, so that expertise available for various disciplines are pooled together and offered for the benefits of students. For example, Albert Ludwigs University at Freiburg (Germany) has tie-up with JNU (India) and University of Natal (South Africa) for the students to spend a semester in each institution with the provision of credit and grade transfers. Such arrangements should exist even among our own universities in India, be it a state or central University. A student enrolled/registered for a programme should be allowed to spend a semester or two in a university, which has better expertise and infrastructural facilities, with a provision of transfer of credits & grades facilities.

Private higher education has not come to stay and both the government and the public should support its growth because of their great potential to provide quality education with least expenses to the exchequer. The human resource produced by universities should be in a position to compete globally only if we uniformly set standards for instruction, examination and research through training, retraining and following various methods of examination. Universities should lay emphasis on transparency in the examination system and strict adherence to an academic calendar and examination schedule.

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