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QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA



Siddalinga Vishwanath Chincholi and Rathod Patwardhan

Guest Lecturer, Dept. of Social work, Gulbarga University, Gulbarga.
Guest Lecturer, Dept. of Social work, Gulbarga University, Gulbarga.

Abstract: *The Union Planning Commission's Working Group on Higher Education for the Eleventh Plan proposed the objective of raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from 10.5 in 2006-07 to 15.5 in 2011-12. There are different estimates of the GER: the NSSO estimated it at 13.22, the population census estimate was 14.48, and the Government of India's estimate was 9.01 for 2003-04. The differences are probably because of the inclusion and exclusion of diploma and correspondence courses.*

Key words: Education System , Commission's Working , Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).

INTRODUCTION:

We have not considered the enrolment in unrecognised and non-formal institutions. Most of the unrecognised institutes offer both part-time and full-time para-medical, computer science, commerce and management courses, imparting employable skills. As their certificates are recognised by the private sector, their growth, in recent times, has been phenomenal. There are organisations that certify professionals, who qualify in the examinations conducted by them. The professionals are authorised to verify and certify documents. These organisations conduct examinations in auditing, cost and works accounts, company secretaryship, insurance, engineering, aviation and shipping for aspirants who have at least higher secondary qualification. They are given coaching in a non-formal institutional set-up, often at a huge cost. The certified professionals possess specialised knowledge and skills and earn more than what the highest degree holder gets from universities.

Should we include the unrecognised and non-formal streams in the higher education sector? Without including the students of the unrecognised and non-formal stream, the GER at the higher education level is an underestimate. We may dismiss them as too small today, but their growth rate, consequent to the growing discontent over the quality of formal higher education, is too large for us to ignore. Understanding the various dimensions of these two streams is essential not only to regulate them in the interest of students but also to develop the organised higher education sector more effectively.

The Working Group's report estimated that the financial resources required to achieve a GER of 15.5 by 2012 would be in the range of Rs.54,000 crore-Rs.88,000 crore. Prof. Sulthadeo Thorat, Chairman, University Grants Commission, requested the Government of India to provide Rs.57,000 crore for the UGC to carry out activities in general

higher education during the 11th Plan period. There are separate demands for funds to finance technical higher education.

Several NAAC reports point to the inadequacy of infrastructure, lack of funds to meet recurring expenditure on laboratories and libraries, and unfilled teacher-vacancies as the major reasons for the low quality of higher education. Even to make the existing institutions function effectively, we may need a few hundred crores. If we include the likely increase in the pay scales of teaching and non-teaching staff, consequent to the Sixth Pay Commission award, the total allocation needed for higher education, during the 11th Plan period, to achieve a GER of 15.5 would be much more than Rs. 57,000 crore.

Expansion of access to higher education would involve larger recurring expenditure, (like salary and maintenance expenditure) but with the Fiscal Responsibility Acts con-straining the Union and State governments to balance their revenue budget, it is quite unlikely that the allocation for the education sector will be increased with more or less stable revenue receipts in the short-term. Hence the debate started by the Planning Commission a year ago on the need to relax the conditionality in the Fiscal Responsibility Acts should be revived and resolved.

It appears that in India the size of the higher education sector is just right for its demand. In 2004-05, the all-India GER in elementary education was 93.5, which came down drastically to 51.65 in high school. With high dropout and failure rates, the GER 1 in higher secondary was 27.82. Once again with a low pass percentage, a high dropout rate and increasing enrolment in unrecognised and non-formal higher education and correspondence courses in universities, the I GER in formal higher education was only 9.5 which, given the other factors mentioned here, could be construed as just equal to the demand for it.

Increasing enrolment, improving quality of school education and reducing dropout rates are the prerequisites for increasing access to higher education. Existence of a high school within a radius of 3-5 km of every village/habitation, recruitment of qualified teachers, provision of teaching aids, mid-day meals, uniforms, books and notebooks, and free or subsidised transport are essential for improving access to school. There should be a paradigm shift in curriculum design, teaching techniques and assessment process so that the students are intellectually prepared to take up college education.

In an unequal society, students from the marginalised sections should be given a preferential treatment in terms of reservation in higher education, besides adequate financial assistance. We should resolve the issue of reservation in higher education institutions at the earliest and institute an irreversible reservation system. All new universities and colleges should be located in educationally backward districts, one-fourth of such institutions exclusively for women to reduce the gender gap in higher education.

The extreme disparities in the quality of education are also against the principles of equity and social justice. There is extreme variability in the quality of higher education among various institutions and the average quality of the sector as a whole is low. The central aspect of improving quality is teacher efficiency. With the growth of autonomous colleges and involvement of college teachers in the board of studies in universities, the teacher plays a vital role in curriculum development. Therefore, ensuring teacher efficiency and accountability will be the prime factors for improving the quality of education.

The semester system and continuous internal assessment have not produced the expected results. Most of the universities and autonomous colleges have simply divided the non-semester syllabus for each paper into two, rather than designing an exclusive syllabus for each semester. There is also a lack of capacity — infrastructure and human resource — to utilise the choice-based-credit-system in colleges and universities for making higher learning truly relevant, flexible and inter-disciplinary, and students have little to choose from. Similarly, institutions consider only external assessment for ranking students for admission, saying internal and external assessment marks are uncorrelated. These issues reflect the lack of commitment to design appropriate curriculum and the lack of integrity in assessment.

There is little research on curriculum development and pedagogy for college education. Unlike as in Western universities, we hardly find any serious publication on college teaching in any discipline in India. Capacity-building activities, carried out by Academic Staff Colleges in universities through orientation and refresher courses, are inadequate in terms of imparting teaching skills. The curriculum development boards are totally clueless about identifying and imparting employable skills and the need to impart liberal and critical thinking at least in social sciences and humanities. Finally, the number of students studying in vernacular languages in higher education institutions is increasing. We should constitute a system to translate the

latest textbooks from English into different languages and write new textbooks. The creation of a technical vocabulary and production of a specialised encyclopaedia in every language should be taken up immediately.

An economy, which is propelled largely by market forces, inevitably excludes the poor and impoverishes the uneducated and the weak. Instituting a process that enables the poor and the weak to participate in the economy and empowers them to take their legitimate share in development benefits is essential to achieve sustainable increase in equitable access to quality higher education.

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Golden Research Thoughts
258/34 Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra
Contact-9595359435
E-Mail-ayisrj@yahoo.in/ayisrj2011@gmail.com
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