Higher Education in India: Current Challenges, Issues and Remedies

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ABSTRACT

Generally, we consider that the education imparted after the junior college education is termed as higher education; which is conferred on the students through the institutions of higher education. Almost all countries provide some form of education beyond secondary schooling. The institutions vary considerably in requirements for admissions in the purposes they serve. As a general rule, however, they undertake to train students for vocations, to prepare them for professions or for the study in advanced professional schools, or to give them a broad cultural background is intended to help the student become a concerned and well-informed citizen as well as to enrich his or her personal life. In the US and Canada, the word college has at least two meanings; one an independent school that offers four year courses in liberal arts leading to the bachelor's degree; and two; division or unit offering courses within a particular field or study. This paper aims to highlight the present challenges to the higher education. It also attempts to highlight theoretical and practical experiences; skill of learning in present situation. It also throws light on what the major issues in curriculum design and set up of syllabi, management of higher education, health consciousness and professional ethics and value education are.

Key words: distances and disconnects, art of learning, curriculum issues, restructuring of syllabus, health consciousness and physical fitness, values, ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, we consider that the education imparted after the junior college education is termed as higher education; which is conferred on the students through the institutions of higher education. Almost all countries provide some form of education beyond secondary schooling. The institutions vary considerably in requirements for admissions in the purposes they serve. As a general rule, however, they undertake to train students for vocations, to prepare them for professions or for the study in advanced professional schools, or to give them a broad cultural background is intended to help the student become a concerned and well-informed citizen as well as to enrich his or her personal life.In the US and Canada, the word college has at least two meanings; one an independent school that offers four year courses in liberal arts leading to the bachelor's degree; and two; division or unit offering courses within a particular field or study.

A true university is a group of colleges under the same administration. Innumerable students are taking their degree and post-degree education through different universities across all over the world. When, in India, colleges for more advanced were first started, there was no difficulty in staffing them. Actually, they were first staffed locally. Obviously there was no specially literate class of Englishmen in India previous to 1854. However, the peculiarly delicate and responsible nature of educational work was not socially recognized, and the only standard of value of accepted is salary and prospectus, the less advantage terms on which 'education' men work, result in real lowering in public esteem, and this disparagement has undoubtedly exercised a somewhat depressing effect on the atmosphere of educational work.

Therefore, at least, let the Indian public acknowledge what it owes to those by whose labour and devotion the educational system has been built up, and by renewed efforts, brought nearer to thoroughness and efficiency. This is said for the men of then higher educational service first, because in them, is vested a certain primacy in virtue of the qualifications demanded of them and of their relation to Government. But it is said also for all classes of educational workers; for the Provincial Service, for the Subordinate and Lower Subordinate Services, all in their places and degrees, and for the numerous workers of all grades outside Government Services in doing faithful educational service of any kind.

This paper aims to highlight the present challenges to the higher education. It also attempts to highlight theoretical and practical experiences; skill of learning in present situation. It also throws light on what the major issues in curriculum

design and set up of syllabi, management of higher education, health consciousness and professional ethics and value education are.

Challenges to the Higher Education

Lack of predominance of the universities in the project of the higher education area in India, erosion of their autonomy, undermining of undergraduate education, the increasing distance between knowledge areas and the separation of universities from the real world outside and crass commercialization are some of the problems, which characterize the development of the Indian higher education system. It is significant that we develop an understanding of these issues before suggesting strategies to renovate and rejuvenate higher education in India.

Distances and Disconnects

As for invisible walls, it is often indicated that our undergraduate and graduate programmes are so 'theoretical', the implication being that they are destitute of 'practical' experiences. Without looking into familiar epistemological issues, we can say that a theory is as good as the power it has to explain the visible world. A theory is put to practice when a student attempts to use it to make sense of what he or she notices in the world. Conversely, by noticing something in the world and seeking an explanation for it, a student feels the need to have a theory. The chasm that exists between theory and practice combined with the fragmentation of the idea of knowledge leads to the confusion that our system of higher education* is suffering from. To outwit this, it would be necessary that the universities adopt a auricular approach which treats knowledge in a holistic manner and creates exciting opportunities for different kinds of interfaces between the disciplines, which is inconsiderable today in most of the universities and institutions of higher learning. It is important that universities relate to the world outside and the walls of disciplines are porous enough to let other voices be heard. It would also be necessary that the university education is treated in its perfection and subject areas have not to be designed in isolation.

Art of Learning

At present, many students coming out from their institutions of higher education have do so without achieving the kind of skills they really need to work in a real world situation. Among the drawbacks many students face are lack of ability to analyze or solve problems, relate problems to different contexts, communicate clearly and have an integrated understanding of different branches of knowledge. These problems can be addressed if the processes by which curriculum is designed and then syllabi are determined undergo improvement.

Curriculum Issues and Restructuring of Syllabus

It is necessary as to what is the objective of a university, especially at the undergraduate level, and then use the answers to develop a curriculum. Presently, the design of curriculum and syllabi is reflective of the entrenched examination system under which the student is asked to face a question paper at the end of the year, or in some universities, at the end of the semester. This archaic examination system, ostensibly used as a means of certifying the ability of students, unfortunately does not really test the kind of skills they need to be successful in either the pursuit of pure theoretical knowledge or in practical real world situations. The examination system, even in the case of the comparatively better equipped in less rigid institutions, has left quite manifestly traditional and incapable of distinguishing between different talents of students in a tangible manner. Similar to what happens at the school level; university-level evaluation practices also simply widen the scope of memory-based questioning, with tht occasional rote-based 'application' question masquerading as real-world problem solving. In doing so, they entrench the student's lack of ability to examine and understand the real world, as a result of which their engagement with people or issues remains scarce once they enter the world of work, with implications for their abilities as workers and citizens.

Management of Higher Education

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest such systems in the World. It is estimated that during the Xth Five Year Plan period (2002-07), there will be a tremendous pressure of numbers on this system and a large number of additional students will be knocking at the doors of higher education institutions in the country. There are also new challenges of management and regulation being faced by these institutions, which require serious attention, both at the institutions in the public sector and also those in the private sector now developing at a fast step. As a result of which the old structures of management established in pre-independent India and working during most of the twentieth century are now needed to undergo faster changes.

In spite of this, the demands of the society for equity and accommodation cannot be neglected any more. The new chapter under WTO where competence is the cardinal principle of achievement in global operations has made it quite clear that the country should exploit its excellent potential in higher education and training facilities and prepare itself to export the Indian brand of education to foreign countries. Policy planning and evolving strategies for this task are somewhat new for the country. But, this is an opportunity which India should not neglect, as it offers interesting possibilities to strengthen the nation's talent and resourcefulness.

Health Consciousness and Physical Fitness

Physical fitness and sports are two sides of the same coin and are mutually dependent on each other. As the famous dictum goes, mind is the key to man and eyes cannot see what mind cannot perceive. The relationship between mind and body hasbeen acknowledged scientifically. It is generally believed that a healthy body has a healthy mind; but it could be the other way around also, i.e., a healthy mind has a healthy body. However, this requires appropriate training.

Today's education is largely academic. In real sense, this orientation is required to changer a balanced development through inculcating health conscious amongst students. This will cover the development at physical, mental and social levels. With the increasing stress on academics in the world of employment and elsewhere and the rapid progress in science and technology all over the world, parental force has been exercising academic training at the cost of health and physical fitness of the youth. It is in this context that there is now an urgent need to lay a strong foundation and strengthen physical education and sports programmes in the higher education field. This invites the integration of physical education, sports, yoga and recreation activities in the higher education system for the superficial good of the younger generation.

Ethics in Profession and Value Education

The faster developments in science and technology and the challenges of globalization are bringing some more challenges to the education system in the country. This is also the time when parental care to the children is on the wane. The adverse effects of the media on the mental development and moral values of the younger generation are indispensably being felt increasingly in all spheres of life. Gross consumerism has distorted the view of persons into one of equating possessions with richness. Exploitation of natural resources is going on without reference to sustainability. The discrepancy between the rich and the poor is growing wider, While the education system needs to keep step in step with the scientific and technological developments in terms of building the skills and knowledge, it also needs to focus attention on the more fundamental issues of the social and moral consequences of such unregulated activities. In this context, there is now a growing demand to lay greater emphasis on education to inculcate, nurture and develop values, particularly among the youth of the country.

CONCLUSION

Exaggerative emphasis on one at the cost of the other would be counter productive. Hence accessibility and quality upgradation are not separable and indispensable dimensions of higher education. As India is a wide and sub continental in size a population above one billion, the quantitative expansion of education (i.e., dimension accessibility) is of paramount importance to mitigate disparities across regions, gender and social strata in the field of education. This should be given due consideration.

A well-planned and structured interaction to be developed between Centres of Academic Excellence and other Universities/ Institutions; (1) While restructuring the syllabi and courses, efforts should be made to develop an optimal combination of acquisition of theoretical and practical skills. The courses should be so designed that critical reading and interpretation of classics, practical field work wherever relevant, and application of readings and other skills are given importance; (2) Quality of higher education can improve considerably through an extensive and optimal use of audio-visual technologies and Internet. The courses should be so designed to make good use of these modern developments; (3) In restructuring of syllabi, all stakeholders such as students, teachers and users of services should be involved. However, teachers should be given flexibility within the norms and benchmarks decided by the stakeholders and (4) Quality of higher education can also be improved by inducting quality oriented objectivity in merit promotions of teaching faculty. UGC, ICSSR and other research funding bodies should encourage interdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary Seminars/ Conferences/ Research projects. These bodies could allocate at least 50 per cent of their research funds for inter-disciplinary activities. UGC could also take initiatives to open Centres/Schools for promoting multi-disciplinary teaching and research.

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