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HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT- India boasts the largest educational system globally in terms of the number of institutions. Since gaining independence, the country has made significant strides in education. Education is highly valued in every society, seen as a remedy for various challenges and a means to address life's problems. It is also considered a pathway to personal and societal awakening. This piece explores the state of higher education in India, examining the roles of university departments, affiliated colleges, government and government-aided institutions, private and self-financing colleges, and open universities. Additionally, it discusses the challenges faced by higher education and proposes potential improvements.

Keywords: Advancement, Advanced Education, Post-Autonomy, College.

I. INTRODUCTION

Advanced education holds significant value for every nation, and India is consistently working towards enhancing the standard of its educational system. Education plays a crucial role in shaping a society that is knowledgeable and skilled for the challenges of the modern era. Given the growing variety within the realm of education, it is imperative to create a solid structure and firm groundwork for higher education.

The current state of information regarding higher education is lacking and outdated. The fragmented data available in higher education suffers from insufficient coverage and significant delays, leading to inaccuracies in calculating the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER). The GER, as per the existing data, fails to provide an accurate representation of the country's advancements and growth in the higher education domain. The objectives outlined in the Twelfth Plan-Document aim for a 25.2 percent GER by 2017-18 and a 30 percent GER by 2019-20. As reported by AISHE 2017-18, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education rose from 24.5 percent in 2015-16 to 25.8 percent in 2017-18. Various measures have been implemented during this plan period to enhance the GER. It is imperative to establish a robust and comprehensive database to assess the actual GER and implement necessary measures for its enhancement. Furthermore, a well-structured database for higher education is essential for strategic planning, meeting international obligations, policy development, research, and other purposes.

To increase student enrollment in higher educational institutions, the Government of India has taken various initiatives and measures, including:

1. Issuing new regulations by the UGC for Open and Distance Learning, allowing reputed institutions to offer education through distance mode.

2. Utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) through platforms like NPTEL, MOOCs, and SWAYAM to reach more people and provide high-quality education.

3. Establishing more centrally supported and funded institutions.

4. State governments are being encouraged to open institutions under the Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) in order to promote equity, access, and excellence in higher education. This initiative includes supporting the transformation of autonomous colleges into universities, grouping colleges to form universities, establishing new professional colleges in underserved areas, and offering infrastructure grants to universities and colleges to enhance their capabilities.

5. Various scholarship programs are being implemented to alleviate the financial burden of education. Furthermore, the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) has been established in accordance with the Companies Act, 2013, to generate funds from the market and provide financial aid for infrastructure development in leading educational institutions.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed was subjective exploratory in nature.

Auxiliary optional information was collected from various sources such as articles, books, websites, and diaries.

Challenges faced during the investigation:

1. The study was limited to India only

2. Time-consuming

3. The research heavily relied on optional data, which may not be entirely accurate.

Table 1: (As on 31-03-2019) Number of Universities in India

Type of Universities	Enrolled University
State Universities	399
Deemed to be Universities	124
Central Universities	49
Private Universities	334
TOTAL	906

Issues in IAE (Indian Advanced Education) Framework

- National enrollment in higher education is only 20%. There are significant disparities in access to education among various groups based on economic status, caste, and religion. Upper castes, Christians, and Jains have notably higher enrollment rates compared to Muslims, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST), who fall below the national averages. Economically disadvantaged individuals across all groups are the most severely affected, with very low enrollment rates. There are also considerable urban-rural and gender gaps. Private, unaided universities are unaffordable for most Indians due to high fees.

- Reforms are necessary to strengthen both central and state universities, as well as to regulate the high fees charged by private universities. It is crucial to provide credible financial support to economically weaker sections and to encourage higher education among SC, ST, and Muslims.

- The quality of education in Indian universities is reflected in their rankings at global and Asian levels, which show a poor state of educational quality. This lack of quality and poor access creates a vicious cycle for students.

- The adequate use of technology to provide Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) by IITs and IIMs can help standardize and enhance education quality.

- Improving infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, strengthening regional language resources, and building a global network of academicians, such as through the recently launched GIAN project, can lead to a brighter future.

- Knowledge and skills should translate into employability. Pursuing the objectives of the National Skill Development Mission and fostering industry-academia relations can make students industry-ready and relevant.

Challenges Faced by the Education System in India:

- Enrollment Ratio: The biggest challenge is the enrollment ratio, which is below 20%. Increasing this ratio is a major challenge for the government.

- Access Disparities: Disparities in access to higher education based on economic status, caste, religion, and gender persist.

- Outdated Curriculum: The curriculum content, tools, and techniques are often not relevant or updated.

- Limited Universities: There are only 906 universities for higher education, whereas there should be at least 1500.

- Unreliable Data: The available database on education status is not reliable.

- Lack of Policy Review: There has been no significant review of education policy in the last 50 years.

- Increase in Private Institutions: There is a rise in self-financed private institutions.

New Directions for Higher Education in India: Knowledge-Based Society:

As India transitions into a society driven by technology and knowledge, the involvement of experts will become essential in every aspect of human activity, emphasizing the importance of higher education. Although the objective of providing Education for All remains crucial, the nation must also gear up for increased emphasis on teaching, along with continuous improvement, enrichment, and advancement of educational and research initiatives.

Inspiration for Educators and Researchers:

The industry and students have high expectations for specialized courses that offer top-notch education, ensuring students are prepared for the workforce. It is essential to enhance vocational and refresher certification courses to promote specialized program offerings. Offering financial and non-financial incentives to educators and researchers can help make these professions more attractive and appealing to the younger demographic.

Innovative and Creative Practices:

The latest tools and technologies present vast possibilities for progress across different sectors. They create opportunities for economic development, enhanced healthcare, superior service provision, improved education, and cultural advancement. It is essential to enhance the nation's innovative capabilities, with a focus on leveraging current strengths based on the latest insights into the connection between research and innovation.

Resource Mobilization:

The reduction in public funding over the past few years has resulted in significant impacts on educational standards as a result of rising expenses on non-salary expenditures and faculty salaries, along with diminishing resources. It is imperative to implement proactive strategies to secure funding for education. Additionally, it is crucial to establish a connection between tuition fees and students' financial capabilities

to ensure that individuals from disadvantaged economic backgrounds have access to adequately funded education.

Student-Centered Education and Dynamic Methods:

It is essential for higher education methods to align with the needs of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to become. Teachers will need to embrace new attitudes and skills to support student-centered education and dynamic teaching methods. This shift will involve moving away from traditional lecture-based teaching towards approaches that prioritize self-study, one-on-one teacher-student consultations, and interactive seminars and workshops. Additionally, there is a growing need to implement distance education methods on a broader scale.

Need-Based Job-Oriented Courses

The primary goal of education is the holistic development of an individual's mindset. However, today's education system often fails to impart genuine knowledge of life or enhance the skills of students in areas of their interest. To address this, there should be a blend of arts, applied sciences, and humanities in the curriculum. Such courses can prepare students for specific careers, reducing unnecessary competition for academic degrees. Emphasis should be placed on postgraduate studies and research, creating techniques for the efficient and effective implementation of knowledge to address the requirements of both local and national levels. Exceptional students ought to be acknowledged by means of assistantships accompanied by stipends. A comprehensive education nurtures an outlook towards a sustainable career, ultimately resulting in rewarding employment and notable accomplishments within the selected area of expertise.

Global Collaboration and Cooperation

Indian universities are essential for the progress and spread of knowledge through research, innovation, teaching, human resource development, and continuing education. Global collaboration has gained importance recently. With advances in transport and communication, there is increasing pressure for international cooperation to find solutions to global issues, including higher education.

Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs

After formal education, extensive travel across India and abroad, in collaboration with experts, is essential. This helps students understand different cultures, peoples, arts, literature, religions, technological advancements, and human progress worldwide.

Academic Activity Plan (AAP) for Enhancing Education Quality

It is essential for institutions to regularly undergo academic and administrative evaluations by external professionals in order to uphold high standards of education. Self-sustaining institutions should proactively address educational requirements. Higher education establishments need to acknowledge the significance of quality education and strive to enhance standards within their institutions.

Privatization of Higher Education

Education plays a vital role in the economic advancement of both society and individuals. In India, the literacy rate stands at only around twenty percent. As such, it is imperative for the government to make the provision of high-quality education to the majority a top priority, backed by unwavering political dedication. Given the vastness of the country, privatization of higher education is deemed necessary, as the government alone cannot effectively accomplish this objective.

Quality Enhancement

Quality education encompasses all aspects of teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, infrastructure, equipment, community services, and the educational environment. It necessitates an international dimension, including the exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, academic and student quality, and global research projects, while taking into account national cultural values and conditions. Many educational institutions fail to provide high-quality education and

knowledge. Instead of focusing on quantity, institutions should prioritize quality. Doctoral research in social sciences should be more analytical and comparative, with connections to society, policy, and the economy. A study on research capacity in South Asia (2002) revealed that only a small number of Indian universities contributed significant articles to the Economic and Political Weekly, with just three universities dominating: Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Mumbai, and University of Delhi.

World-Class Education

The Indian government has not placed a high priority on meeting global education standards. India ought to strive for international education benchmarks. Similar to universities in the USA, UK, and Australia, Indian universities should provide educational programs for international students, such as distance learning courses. In order to accomplish this, India should implement a standardized international curriculum in its educational establishments.

Character Development

Education should primarily focus on developing character rather than stifling creativity and innate talent. In today's interconnected world, well-educated individuals have access to a wide range of opportunities. The rise of business process outsourcing (BPO) has intensified international competition, resulting in the creation and distribution of high-quality products on a global scale. This, in turn, contributes to global harmony, economic growth, and productivity by empowering competent and proficient individuals.

Status of Academic Research Studies

India has 119 researchers per million people, while Japan has 5,287 and the US has 4,484. In absolute terms, the number of researchers in India is much smaller compared to the United States, Russia, China, Japan, and Germany. The number of doctoral degrees awarded across all subjects in India is 16,602, with 6,774 in Arts, 5,408 in Science, and the rest in other professional fields. India produces approximately 6,000 doctorates in Science and Engineering annually, compared to 9,000 in China and 25,000 in the United States. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF) - Science and Engineering Indicators (2002), about 4% of science and engineering graduates in the US complete their doctorates, compared to about 7% in Europe. In India, this figure is less than 0.4%. Data on doctorates, especially in science, engineering, and medicine, indicate that only a few institutions have strong research programs. In 2001-02, only about 650 engineering doctorates were awarded, with 80% from just 20 top schools. In science, 65% of doctorates were from the top 30 universities.

Grants for Research Fellows

1. It is imperative to enhance the quantity of Ph.D. holders graduating from Indian universities while maintaining high standards. This is crucial due to the disproportionately low number of Ph.D. holders in India in comparison to M.Sc./B.Tech graduates, especially when compared to countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan. Exceptional doctoral candidates should be acknowledged by providing teaching assistantships with stipends that exceed those provided by research institutions. Recognizing and supporting talented students is vital in order to attract individuals to pursue research and teaching careers.

Effective Quality Assurance System

Educational institutions should establish Internal Quality Assurance Cells and adhere to minimum benchmarks in order to grant degrees. The quality assurance framework must be free from institutional and political interference and should prioritize accountability. It is essential to have financial, operational, and academic autonomy along with responsibility. A free accreditation organization, involving the government, industry, academia, and society, is necessary to ensure that stakeholders, particularly students, are not deceived. They should be able to determine the worth of an institution's offerings, which can bring about some level of organization. It is also vital for all higher education institutions to publicly disclose the credibility of their courses and degrees, including the status, recognition, and acceptability of their courses by other institutions.

Increasing the Number of Universities

India requires additional universities due to the inadequate current number. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was set up by the Government of India on January 13, 2005, to provide recommendations to the Prime Minister regarding the education system in India and the necessary steps for enhancement. Chaired by Sam Pitroda, the NKC presented its findings in November 2007, proposing the formation of 1,500 universities by 2015 to elevate the gross enrollment ratio to 15%. Furthermore, it advised the establishment of an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE) to supervise the standard of education delivery nationwide.

Examination Reforms

The transformation of examination systems should involve a shift from traditional terminal, annual, and semester exams to a more progressive approach of continuous and thorough evaluation of students' academic progress.

Modern Libraries

Indian university libraries boast impressive assortments of books, journals, and magazines; however, their management is frequently subpar. It is imperative for libraries to transition online and enhance user-friendliness in order to cater to all individuals efficiently.

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