

Quality Perspective of Higher Education in Globalised Era

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore and analyze these issues in three parts. First part deals with the Quality Perspective of Higher Education, the Second part takes into account the Current Scenario in Higher Education, and the Third part suggests possible policy options. In any economy, education is an integral part of the social infrastructure and an essential component of social consumption. Until recently, education was mostly produced and consumed within national boundaries and was a non traded area. The last two decades of liberalised era have transformed the world of higher education almost beyond recognition. In the world of higher education, markets and globalisation are influencing universities and the shape of education. Ever since the concept of globalisation entered the higher education policy context, there has been the political emergence of variety of challenges. While many old issues like standards of teaching and research, autonomy and accountability, financing and infrastructure shortages remain unresolved, new issues, like trade in educational services, entry of foreign capital and of foreign universities, commercialization and role of private universities have come up. The challenge before academia is also before the nation. Indian academia is hardly responding to the challenges confronting it. The principal task of the academic institutions is knowledge generation and by failing in this task they are letting society down. They are at best recycling knowledge generation in the West, a colonial legacy, and this has substantially reduced their dynamism (Arun Kumar 2004). But a lot of recycled knowledge may not be relevant to the Indian context. Today society does not seem to be expecting Indian academic institutions to generate knowledge and is bypassing them resulting in their marginalization. These institutions are functioning like government offices leading to growing bureaucratization of the universities. In the process the quality of education, has become a casualty. Role of knowledge is to understand and make society change for the better; to promote equity, overcome prejudice and nurture quality. But the recent policies have been quite disturbing. Either the higher education was ignored in the policy planning exercises of the governments and of the international organisations, or specific measures were initiated to reduce the intensity of public efforts in higher education or both.(Jandhyala BG Tilak 2004)

Key words:

Introduction

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India's Policy and Action plan for higher education as mentioned in the 1986 Education Policy Document and subsequent policy announcements including the 1992 Action Plan have been governed by five broad goals, which include enhancement of the enrolment rate

in higher education, provision for equal access to all, particularly to educationally backward classes, quality education and promotion of relevant educationⁱ. However the strong wave of globalization and trends in internationalization of higher education stresses the need to develop a strong and vibrant higher education system. Global competition in higher education put additional emphasis on the need for serious efforts to improve the quality of higher education. It is in this background that one needs to understand quality issues in higher education in the right perspective in order to suggest the policy options.

Quality perspective

Quality is said to be related to the input parameters. Among other parameters of quality is the lack of infrastructure-physical and human is closely connected with the low quality. Quality control and assurance framework believes that such mechanism will promote quality through transparency and induced actions such as internal quality assurance measures. Thus varying perceptions lay at the root of understanding on quality in higher education. Quality needs to be understood in objective terms to

make necessary interventions. Besides the changing context of teaching learning process, the technological breakthrough in communication and the new roles in the context of knowledge economy need to be taken into account to make appropriate interventions.

Excellence, on the other hand, is the striving for the best. Excellence flows out of quality. A critical mass of good quality institutions will only produce excellence. Excellence is the progression to achieve the greatest heights. Excellence, therefore, requires the gravitational pull to attract best talents. Some higher education institutions need to strive for the best in some frontier areas of knowledge. Excellence, therefore, also needs investment in institutions of higher learning.

Two very different perspectives on higher education existⁱⁱ. The first perspective sees higher education as a tool that enables students to improve their skills and get better placements in the job market. The success of a university can be measured by the success of the trainees coming out of it in getting good placements in the job market. Also, since placements in the job market can be hierarchically ordered as being better or worse, an ordering that transcends national boundaries, the universities too can be hierarchically ordered across the world as being better or worse. Therefore, when people lament that so few Indian universities figure among the top 200 in the world, underlying this lament is this first conception of higher education, the

conception that believes in the possibility of ordering universities as one orders natural numbers..

As against this, there is an alternative conception of higher education. This sees higher education as an activity in which students and teachers are jointly engaged on behalf of the people of a society. The purpose of higher education according to this conception is, to produce "organic intellectuals" of the people.

The distinction between the two perspectives outlined above lies in the fact that one looks upon the higher education system *exclusively* as a means of imparting skills, while the other sees all activities of skill-imparting as being informed by a concern for, and an awareness of, the social ambience within which the skill-imparting is taking place. It means a break from exclusive preoccupation with marketability; it means a rounded education going beyond the narrowness of technical disciplines; it means inculcating in students a sense of the society to which they belong; and it means focusing within particular disciplines on research themes that have relevance for society instead of being merely copied from abroad.

One observes that whereas efficiency was the key word of the 1980s, quality is the touchstone of the 1990s. Concern about quality is not new in the educational context, although much of the debate outside of the sector has focused on standards. Indeed, part of the difficulty which educationists experience in their attempt to

demonstrate the quality of the services they are offering rests on the tendency to use quality and standards interchangeably.

During the last two decades, many countries have experienced a growing concern for quality in higher education. The manifestations of this concern and the reasons for it vary from country to country. Much depends on the culture and history of the country and its state of economic development.

The concern for quality in higher education comes from several quarters including governments, citizens, employers, students and their parents, university teachers and researchers. More does not mean worse', but those who pay, and those who study, want evidence to support this assertion, and those who teach and manage in universities have a responsibility to provide the evidence. The reason for the concern ranges from financial one that is 'value for money', to effectiveness. In many countries the expansion of higher education has not brought the prosperity some promised it would. There are well-known examples of developing countries that undertook massive expansion of higher education only to discover that there were many unemployed, underemployed, or misemployed graduates who were disillusioned and often a focus for discontent. In other countries, employers complain about the inability of graduates to contribute to their enterprises. One often comes across evaluation of Indian

engineering graduates by MNCs putting the formers' employability at 20 percent.

Improved communications, nationally and internationally, and more openness in many other fields of activity have meant that universities can no longer hide behind the defence of academic freedom. Universities need to take the accountability and to explain to society at large what they are about and how well they are doing it. In summary, quality in higher education is important because universities must be accountable to society, to employers, to students, and to each other. The accountability is not merely financial. Universities exist to generate new knowledge, to disseminate knowledge and to safeguard and transmit a cultural heritage and to bring a social change.

Debate around Issues of Quality higher education in India:

The research on higher education has mainly revolved around the major themes of equality, quantity and quality, which are interrelated but treated by some as if they compete with each other. An ideal system of education should be rich, vibrant and strong in all these three dimensions. As Amartya sen (1999) has remarked, excellence in education should be inclusive of equity. J.P.Nayak (1975) has referred to this as the equilateral triangle that unfortunately continues to elude Indian education. Emphasis

is laid on quantity or quality or equity, but not on all three at the same time.

Philip Altbach (2006) has done extensive work on Indian Higher education (HE). He has examined the various attempts India has made to address issues of access and equity, instructional quality and research performance. His many insights have not only helped scholars around the world appreciate the complexities of Indian higher education but have also contributed to policy analysis, planning, and evaluation within India. In his paper published in 2006 in the *Wilson Quarterly*, Altbach observes, that while India is now among the front ranks of emerging economies, its universities and colleges remain mired in the past and might even be moving backward and quality of its universities and colleges are deteriorating. Altbach points to the paradox of India succeeding in the global economy despite the poor infrastructural quality in its universities, together with the absence of an adequate research culture.

A.M.Shah (2005) traces the declining standards in higher education to the long established basic structure of the university system in India with its regulating Acts and rules and governing bodies; the parity accorded to government servants and university teachers in promotions; multiple schemes and programmes such as the personal promotion scheme, the M.Phil programme, the National

Eligibility Test and refresher courses; model syllabi; dismal infrastructure such as ill-equipped libraries; and ,above all, the declining priority for research.

Errol D'Souza (2004) feels that contractual appointments of teachers in institutions of higher education has also contributed to the decline in quality of higher education. Contractual appointments have now become common and are advocated as they promote managerial and financial efficiency.

The external efficiency of education is measured by economists in terms of performances of graduates in labour markets. Graduate employment is considered as an important measure of the external efficiency of education, or the final measure of quality of education. GD Sharma and MD Apte (Jandhyala BG Tilak ed 2013) examine the incidence and pattern of unemployment among graduates. They have based the study on 1971 census data.

G. Srikanthan, John Dalrympleⁱⁱⁱ, (2003) Suggests the quality in higher education (HE) debate is currently narrowly focussed, essentially around adapting industrial quality systems. Traditionally, the notion of academic freedom was seen as the requirement of excellence in education. In more recent times (pre 1990) measures of quality control were imposed on HE, but their adoption was superficial compared to industry. The post 1990 period saw the need for a considerable increase in the quality systems

activity in HE, in view of the dynamism in the sector. The adoption of quality management (QM) was preferred, because of its extensive practice in industry. Presently, its practice in HE is deteriorating into managerialism in institutions, because of lack of development of a shared vision and lack of a match between QM techniques and educational processes. Proposes a new approach to quality systems in HE. QM can still be the broad management methodology but should be adapted to educational processes and be made to preserve the traditional values of academic freedom and collegial modes of operation.

It would be proper to wind up the debate section with the words of Dreze and Sen (1995), 'Somehow the educational aspects of economic development have continued to be out of the main focus and this relative neglect has persisted despite the recent radical changes in economic policy....Even lucid discussion of the challenges of economic reforms is entirely silent on the subject of education [and health] and their possible roles in promoting the use of economic opportunities that may be created by the reforms. Their discussion of the problem of "infrastructure"...is confined effectively to transport and power generation. An opportunity is missed here^{iv}..

Current Scenario:

India has opened up its higher education sector to foreign providers and thus initiated end public

subsidies, with adverse consequences for the quality and affordability of higher education. This has significant implications for people and for the country. It has implications for higher education and for development. In this context, evidence suggests that some of the concerns about opening up education services may not be so misplaced. While there are reputed foreign educational institutions operating, there are numerous less reputed, second or third tier ones as well who charge high fees for programmes of dubious quality. Given India's capacity constraints in higher education, substandard foreign institutions are able to survive in India.

In fact, the economic reforms have resulted in freezing the public funds to many institutions and in stagnating the expenditure on education. Thus, educational sector has been more commonly described as, not service sector, but education industry. The free market philosophy has already entered the educational sphere in a big way. Commercialization of education is the order of the day. Commercial institutions offering specialized education have come up everywhere. In view of globalisation, many corporate universities, both foreign and Indian, are encroaching upon our government institutions. Since these institutions have turned 'self-financing', their prices have been benchmarked against their global counterparts, which would be affordable to the same top layer of the society. As the job markets

become acutely narrow, the polarization between the elite and non-elite would be clearly discernible. Meanwhile, various kinds of price barriers would be imposed to prevent the entry of the non-elite like the downtrodden and poor communities. Further, Corporatisation has transformed the education sector into an enterprise for profits. This marketization process is relegating academics to the position of poor cousins, effecting the intake into academia, attitudes of the administrators and the morale of faculties.

Vital Statistics:

A) Faculty shortage - there is 40% and 35% shortage of faculty in state and central universities, respectively.

B) Accredited institutions - 62% of universities and 90% of colleges were average or below average in 2010, on the basis of their NAAC accreditation.

C) Low citation impact - India's relative citation impact is half the world average.

D) India's GER of 16% was much below the world average of 27%, as well as that of other emerging countries such as China (26%) and Brazil (36%) in 2010.

E) Wide disparity in the GER of higher education across states and the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) in urban and rural areas, and gender- and community-wise

1. Inter-state disparity - 47.9% in Delhi vs. 9% in Assam.
2. Urban-rural divide - 30% in urban areas vs. 11.1% in rural areas.

3. Differences across communities - 14.8% for OBCs, 11.6% for SCs, 7.7% for STs and 9.6% for Muslims.
4. Gender disparity - 15.2% for females vs. 19% for males^v.(XIIth FYP Document)

Recent Initiatives

During 11th FYP (UGC) called for a major thrust for expansion of higher education and promotion of greater regional and social equity and the provision was made for setting up of 16 new Central Universities and 374 Model Colleges in low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) districts. The Government of India (GoI) provided for concomitant expansion with equity through implementation of the recommendations of the Oversight Committee. There was also a continued focus on achieving quality and supporting reforms in higher education and promoting excellence. During the Eleventh Plan period (2007–2012), India achieved a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 17.9%, up from 12.3% at the beginning of the Plan period.

OBJECTIVES IN THE XIIth PLAN: The enormity of the challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to ever-growing number of students is also a historic opportunity for correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reinvigorating institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge. The 12th FYP has main focus on utilizing this historic opportunity of expansion for

deepening excellence and achieving equal access to quality higher education. (XIIth FYP Document)

The Plan document highlights priority given to quality and excellence and that it is also necessary to ensure that quality and excellence are sustained and upgraded in all the institutions of higher education to match up to international levels. In this context, the possibility of mandatory accreditation along with supplementary measures would generate pressure on the higher education system to evolve adequate norms and standards and approaches to assessment. Quality enhancing measures and support along with accreditation need to be intensified during the 12th FYP:

(a) Reform Agenda: Continuance of the reforms agenda in higher education will have to be pursued in the arena of academic, administration, curricula, pedagogy, programme offerings, research, etc. as initiated during the 11th FYP so as to ensure excellence in (i) teaching and learning; (ii) discovery and innovation and; (iii) engagement with social concerns.

(b) Structural and Systemic Reforms: The 12th FYP shall emphasize on structural and systemic reforms on a massive scale with robust policies and pragmatic programmes to facilitate all the measures required for enhancing quality and to promote excellence in higher education, including good governance.

(c) Academic Reforms: Providing incentives through funding for

academic reforms like introduction of semester system, grading, choice-based credit system, examination reforms, accreditation, etc. can go a long way towards enhancing quality. Emphasis shall also be placed on higher education institutions so that they are facilitated and empowered to address the challenges of economic and social development planning.

(d) **Generating a Knowledge Society:** Focus in the 12th FYP will be on generation of a new knowledge society from the learners' perspective, satisfying the national and international demands of the society.

(e) **Preserving the Character of a University:** Defragmentation of the university system as uni-disciplinary universities shall be checked by encouraging development of comprehensive university system with multi-disciplinary institutional framework. Development of new models of accreditation and systems for implementation with the twin objectives of national level coverage and mandatory accreditation of all higher education institutions shall be undertaken in a time bound manner.

(f) **Centres for Advanced Studies:** Quality programmes like the Centres for Advanced Studies (CAS) should be supported by the UGC for a longer period and not for a specific Plan period of five years to make bigger impact. The Centre / UGC should have a greater stake in quality advancement in all aspects of higher education as maintenance of standards in higher education should be their major responsibility.

(g) **Internal Quality Assurance Cells:** In order to internalise quality inputs, all universities, government and government-aided colleges are to be strengthened with full-fledged Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) as a UGC-supported scheme, on recurrent basis with the required Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and supportive manpower. It should be made imperative that all private sector universities and colleges (including deemed to be universities) should establish and make functional IQACs through their own resources.

(h) **Challenge of Expansion Beyond Brick and Mortar:** The challenge of how to expand educational infrastructure beyond buildings and the focus of expansion through self-financing colleges/universities in the absence of legislative frames for regulations are pertinent issues for further deliberation during the 12th FYP.

The document also acknowledges that the capacity building of teachers needs to be emphasized further and average per teacher expenditure for participation in the seminar needs to be increased. Universities should also make an effort to mobilize resources, both from within and outside.

Despite the emphatic stress laid on education and training in this country, there is still a shortage of skilled manpower to address the mounting needs and demands of the economy, the government is striving to initiate and achieve formal/informal skill development of the working population via education/vocational education/skill

training and other upcoming learning methods.

(I)Capacity Building of Teachers

The UGC has prescribed a mandatory provision of one refresher and one orientation course for every lecturer to become eligible for promotion as the senior grade Lecturer. Besides, the resources available in the college for participation in national and international seminar and conferences, also helps in the capacity building of teachers. For a particular year, say, 2006-07, 20 per cent of the lecturers had undergone refresher/orientation courses in roughly 80 per cent of universities. It shows that Academic Staff College has been actively organizing orientation courses for the Lecturers.

Discussion

The plan document acknowledges the challenge of social inequalities and the real issue of quality of teaching-learning in Indian higher education. It has reflected on the ambitious challenge of describing and analyzing remedies for improving quality of the higher education sector, and seeks to keep up the momentum of higher education through upscaling the reforms that began in the 11th Five-Year Plan. The 1500 universities visualized by the NKC, will successfully turn out cheap skilled labour for employment by Indian and foreign corporate groups, but not much expertise for critically comprehending the way the global system functions and impinges on the people (Patnaik P. 2007). It

would in short produce “organic intellectuals” of globalized capital but not “organic intellectuals” of the people. Only someone who believes that the interests of globalized capital and those of the people are altogether identical can rejoice over this prospect

No amount of expansion drive towards improved access, including strategies for inclusion, shall be sufficient unless higher education is made relevant to the contemporary and future economic and societal requirements. Focus on quality and promotion of excellence is, therefore, of utmost significance. Convinced of the fact that the quality and excellence in higher education are not activities, but are products of an environment which has to be built bit by bit at all the levels, the quality in higher education hinges on (a) physical infrastructure (b) adequate number of quality teachers (c) effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes (d) sustained efforts for promoting research and (e) efficient academic governance in universities and colleges.

The one big lesson is that the three challenges of expansion, equity and excellence cannot be addressed in isolation from one another. A single-minded pursuit of expansion can turn into chasing often meaningless statistics, exclusive focus on equity could compromise quality and pursuit of excellence could be confined to a few islands. The 12th Plan needs a more

coordinated and holistic approach, and this focus will be paramount.

Conclusion

The paper concludes with two important arguments. First: the role of the state, The government needs to redefine its role to suit the changed circumstances. The ideal situation would have been full state funding. Most good systems worldwide are financed by the state. The state needs to assume other roles that are equally important, even when it is not in a position to finance all higher education activities. It needs to be more active in developing the rules for establishing institutions, the mechanisms to ensure quality, and the regulations to ensure equity. The state should assume more of a regulatory and role for the private sector rather than simply a funding one for the public institutions and affiliations for the private ones.

There is a need for well laid-out regulations and framework to permit multiple providers to operate. The unregulated growth of institutions, whether private or foreign, is not helpful for the long-term development of countries. Since education is one of the important determinants of earning differentials, it can become a source of intergenerational economic and social inequality, unless well planned. Furthermore, leaving the sector to international markets could lead to a decline in national influence on deciding and designing content and curriculum that could have a long-standing adverse effect

on national concerns and development.

Second: Quality does not come from aping others. We need to have faith in our own human resource and develop policies based on our own needs and requirements. Some of our finest institutions, which indeed have acquired global attention, have done so because of their systematic refusal to ape others, their systematic academic “arrogance” vis-a-vis similar metropolitan institutions, and their strong connections with the Indian reality^{vi}. The notion of quality and the means of achieving it should be our own, that the concept of “excellence” should be defined by us, and that the means of overcoming the crisis of higher education must include increased not reduced involvement by the State, social regulation of the so called “self-financing sector”, better emoluments and conditions of work for teachers, accompanied by greater inducement for research, and other similar steps based on a painstaking analysis of the crisis.

The ambitious plans of expanding the higher education sector during the Twelfth Plan would remain substantially unfulfilled if the supply of teachers does not match the expanding demand for them. All out efforts to liquidate the existing stock of vacancies, through attractive pay packages and better working/service conditions, is the most essential first step. That would be followed by the accountability of university officials for quality functioning of the universities. This

must be complemented by a fool proof recruitment system of teachers in universities and colleges. It is high time that many of the State governments which are reported to have been clamping embargo from time to time, under different pretexts, most noticeably the resource crunch, on filling up the sanctioned vacancies, need to review their 'close-fist' policy, in their own interest and facilitate university experts in contributing in the policy making of the states.

Footnotes

ⁱ Higher Education in India - Issues related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality and Finance; University Grants Commission, November 2008

ⁱⁱ For detail see P.Patnaik, Alternative Perspectives in Higher Education in the Perspective of Globalisation . Lecture delivered on the occasion of the *First Foundation Day* of the *National University of Educational Planning and Administration* at IICC, New Delhi on August 11, 2007. Published by the Registrar, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi

ⁱⁱⁱ See G. Srikanthan, John Dalrymple ,Developing alternative perspectives for quality in higher education, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 2003 Vol 17 Issue 3 pp 126-133

^{iv} Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, India:Economic Development and

Social Opportunity, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1995

^v See XIIth Plan Document

^{vi} Ibid (ii)

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