India's Quest for Prosperity Through Impetus on Higher Education

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Abstract:The stakes of higher education in India were never so high as compared to the present times to propel the nation into the next century and provide wheels of momentum. The biggest impediment to the progress and development of modern India is to produce in bulk numbers highly competent and skillful Engineering and Management graduates who can create a difference in global markets with their professional acumen. The current scenario indicates that there exists a huge gap between demand and supply with scope unlimited in higher education. Yet! Ironically an unmeasured quantity of youth in the nation with higher education degrees is unemployed. Merely speaking that the graduate young professionals need to sharpen their skill set to be of value for the employers is quite erroneous. The prospects of higher education are quite gigantic and in its pace lies the prosperity of the nation and a new dimension to the global nations. This paper explores the multifaceted dimensions of utility and feasibility of giving a thrust to the scope of higher education in the country and the benefits deriving out of it with special reference to engineering and business management.

Keywords: Higher Education, Propel, Momentum, Skillful.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a century of hope, optimism, progress and prosperity for Indians without any doubts. In 1947, the First Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru envisaged and emphasized upon the need for the rapid progress on the fronts of infrastructure and industrialization to stand tall amidst the developed nations and he was instrumental to build the basic nuts and bolts of India's current booming economy. The phenomenal growth of IITs coupled with focus on science laid the firm foundation for the growth of software industry in the later years. He envisioned a robust India that was self reliant and self sufficient by blending education with industrial growth and producing quality output meant for the domestic and global class with modernization of techniques ever changing and ever improving. [1] Thereafter, the Indian education system has travelled a long distance; especially the wheels of progress of higher education ran at a faster pace. The Indian higher education system encompasses engineering, visual arts, performing arts, vocational courses, professional higher education such as architecture, business management, pharmacy, human medicine, pediatric medicine, scientific dentistry, law, journalism etc. The out of the ordinary growth of private Engineering and Management Schools is simply amazing with millions of students getting the opportunity to be a vital cog to the progress of the nation in the 21st century.[2]The numbers are on rise with every passing year and counting is still on. Indian higher education system has expanded at a fast pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges (increased from 12,806 in 2000-2001 to 33,023 in 2010-2011) and more than 8 million students in a decade from 2000-01 to 2010-11. [3]

Also, the number of universities has increased from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014 – a phenomenal growth in the higher education system in India. [4]

This is the third largest higher education system in the world after US & China. [5] Though the crop of professionals through Higher Education Program has gone high, yet this number falls short of nation's requirement. The statistical figures still present a gloomy picture on a larger canvas. India produces 0.6 million graduate engineers [6] and 50000 doctors every year. [7]

The developmental plans of the nation call for more number of engineers, doctors, chartered accountants, and management graduates to ignite the progress on all fronts, but quality of pass outs is to be ensured and standards of higher education need to be taken to the next level.

2. MARKET SIZE

India is poised to take a giant leap in the field of education as she will have the world's highest young population between the age group of 21 to 30 years and it will churn out second largest number of graduates by 2020 from its current pipeline. The total market worth of Indian education sector is currently pegged at US $100 billion and its break up in four major segments is as below[8].

3. NEED FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The statistical figures as per 2011 census tell us that more than 40% population of India are youth i.e. 422 millions, in which 333 millions are literate.[10]

We can't undermine the importance of youth and their education. They are the spring of life. It is the age of rarified dreams and towering discovery for those who acquire higher education and put their heart and soul to be at their creative best. India has the distinction of having the largest youth

population in the world. It has become the cynosure of the world to provide technical manpower and rare talent at low costs. The further propagation of higher education will transform youth dreams into reality and will take them from stars and galaxies to the far corners of the unknown. The rapid spread of higher education in India has to play a vital role to create a world free from poverty, unemployment, inequality and exploitation of man by man. This will open up vistas of creative challenges and opportunities to conquer the adversities for the betterment of mankind. There are plenty of challenges on way to improve the status of higher education. There are reasons as mentioned below to think positive about the same.

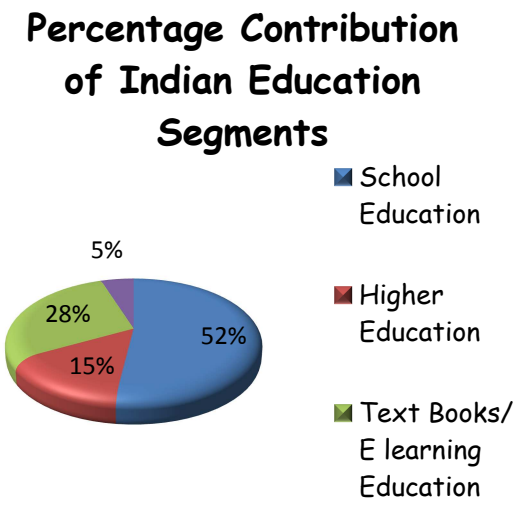

Figure 1: % Contribution of Indian Education Segments in 2016-17

Indian higher education system in the present times is the largest in terms of enrollments in the global market with a figure of 70 million[9].

4. POPULATION EXPLOSION

The Indian population has risen from a meager 36 million in 1951 census to 121 million in 2011 census. [11]This has given huge scope for basic and higher education to the Indian youth to get involved in the developmental process. This is the century of innovations and creations by throwing up new paradigms in whatever we think and do. The present population of 60 million youth with proper higher education can play a very positive role to build a new world. However, the statistical figures suggest that only 18% of Indian youth are enrolled for higher education vis a vis 26% of China and 36% of Brazil. There is a big unmet demand-supply gap, which needs to be bridged by promoting the concept of higher education. The Indian Govt. aims at touching 30% population by 2020. [12] Hence, the coming three years are going to be very crucial to give a thrust to higher education and check drop outs at 10th & 12th standard level.

With the escalation of strong middle class in India, India's youth have a massive craving for education. Needless to mention, that Indian Higher Education system is under considerable pressure.

5. GROWTH OF TEACHING INSTITUTIONS

The phenomenal growth of teaching institutions to promote higher education is a big leap forward to improve the attractiveness of higher education and to make it more meaningful and evoke greater impact. The promoting bodies, namely, UGC and AICTE are leaving no stone unturned to act as stimuli to introduce vocational courses to be more practical and job oriented for the youth. [13]

It will be pertinent to mention that the spurt in numbers of students has come at the cost of quality which has in turn has produced graduates who are not having jobs due to skill set deficiency. It is felt at all levels that if India has to emerge as skilled labour intensive nation, then skill development is going to be one of the major factors for next generation students. Success in near future hinges upon the availability and adequacy of eminent quality trainer, exquisite infrastructure needed for imparting top quality training and effective state policies and their efficient implementation. [14]

It is yet to be seen if MHRD's proposed Higher Education Empowerment Regulatory Agency (HEERA) after merging two major regulatory bodies of higher education i.e. UGC and AICTE and bringing them under one umbrella becomes a reality or not for the holistic development of the Indian higher education system.[15]

The Indian higher education scenario has undergone sea change between the periods of 2008 to 2016. According to UGC, the growth status of universities under different categories is as below:

However, the concept of resurgent and vibrant India loses its sheen in the gloom that has been caused by the unmindful flourishing growth of colleges and universities without having the basic congenial facilities to promote teaching learning process in a healthy and accomplished atmosphere. The higher education promoting institutions are handicapped severely by acute shortage of faculty members [16], poor quality teaching [17], old-fashioned & inflexible curricula [18], lack of infrastructure [19], systems and accountability [20]. The worst part is that the promoting entrepreneurs of higher education have ventured in to this to earn profits at the expense of sacrificing imparting quality education [21-22]. No wonder, there is no integration of teaching with research work and the produced output is less competent and less knowledgeable.

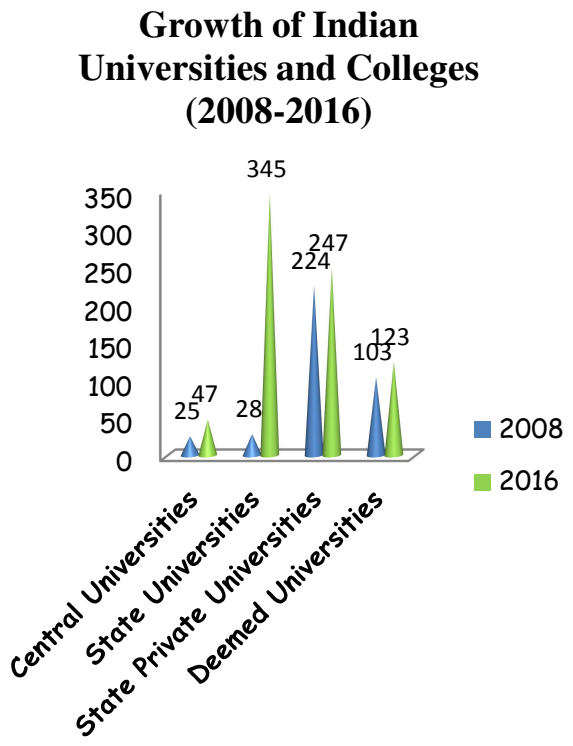

Figure 2: Absolute & % Growth of Universities under Different Categories between 2008 – 2016, Source: UGC

There is a need for the governing bodies to be more rigid while dealing with such institutions and implement the check list for the institutions to be eligible to be a vital cog in the developmental process of the country. Also, the credentials of the promoting institutions must be thoroughly investigated before granting permission to commission higher education institution.

6. RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FACILITIES

According to UGC, the number of researchers has increased by 89% from 95872 in 2008 to 180957 in 2016. [15]

However, this figure is still low and there is a scarcity of quality researchers in the country. The reasons: lack of research promoting ambience in the colleges/ universities; feeble environment for innovation and poor level of industry engagement. There are educational institutions that promote student industry interface, but principally, it is on a less serious note.[23]There is a need to have well stocked library for the researchers.[24]The laboratories must be well equipped and the PhD guides must be those who have scholarly attitude. The poor focus to create a perfect setting for R & D in the institutions need to be stimulated and certain incentives and concessions be given to both PhD scholars and institutions for the robust growth of R & D.[25]

If India's capacity in research and innovation is to be developed, then increased internationalization in research and teaching is to be strongly pushed further. The focus on impetus to quality research education is a goal worth striving for.

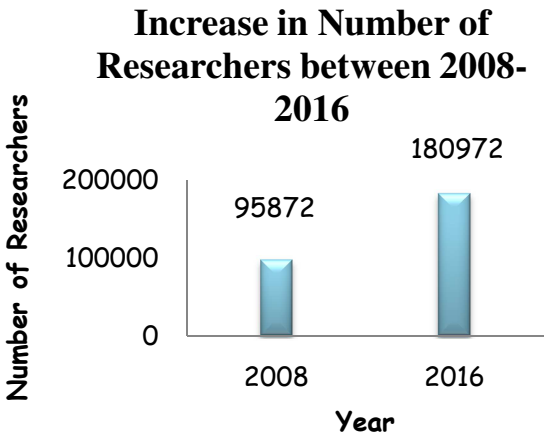

Figure 3: Absolute Growth of Researchers between 2008 – 2016, Source: UGC

7. THRUST ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

In his first ever address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort on 15th August, 2014, the NDA Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi made a special mention of developing skilled India rather than scam India. [26]

Ever since then, there has been an emerging interest to blend skills and higher education to increase the employability factor. The initial focus is on 200 private colleges, universities to build and consolidate the skill market to greater heights.

This will engage the youth for constructive work. The MHRD, Govt. of India has created National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF), under the aegis of which, it has envisioned to create 500 million skilled men power by 2022 to meet the future requirements of industry and other sectors of the employment market. [27]

Paucity of skill intensive education is compounded by a parallel dearth of soft-skills hitherto. The result: a workforce that is too inferior to compete in global markets. The 12thGovernment plan acknowledges and addresses this. [28]

The country has a daunting task ahead as it is estimated that only 2.3% of the total workforce in India has been subjected to formal skill training. In contrast to this poor % figure of workforce, a look at the global markets reveals that68% in UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea are skilled workforce.

There has been a study on skill gap to evaluate demand being conducted by National Skill Development Corporation in 2014, which points out that there is an additional net requirement of 11.92 crore skilled manpower in twenty four key sectors by 2022.[29]

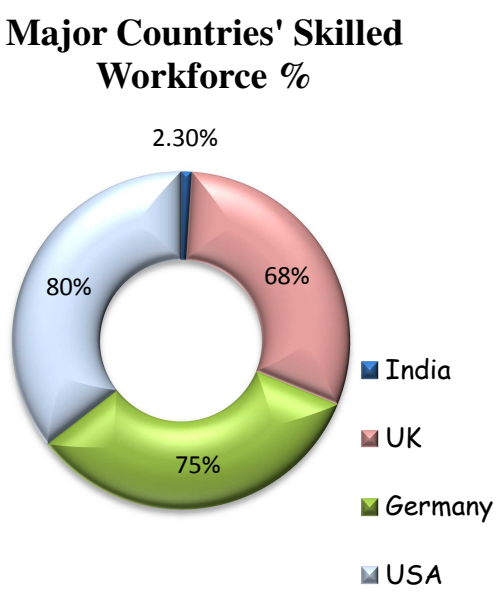

Figure 4: % Skilled Workforce in Major Countries in 2015, Source: Business Standard (February 6, 2016): New "National Skill Development Policy 2015" to reinforce India's Growth Story

8. EMPLOYABILITY UPLIFTMENT

Job creation is one of the major hurdles of modern Indian higher education system. Entrepreneurship based innovation has great potential to address the issue of rampant unemployment of graduate youth in the country. Through entrepreneurship, youth can be attracted to be job creators rather than job seekers to give relevance to Indian higher education system.

The Government of India is giving a lot of thrust on the establishment of business incubators in the colleges and universities to provide necessary assistance and support to the nascent entrepreneurs and reduce to a formidable extent the failure rate of Indian start ups. It is a fact that in the initial stages of any entrepreneur is full of challenges as the start up lacks in terms of experience, expertise, knowledge and funds. The business incubators in the colleges/ universities come to the rescue with variety of services offered to improve the chances of sustainability.

9. INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Raising the quality of teaching and learning has emerged as top priority in Indian Higher Education system. This shifts the focus on internalization of existing education system, where not only that Indian students move to other prestigious foreign institutions, but also invite foreign students to come to India under exchange programme schemes. The MHRD, Govt. of India has already announced an invitation to foreign institutions to open up universities in India and depute their faculty. [30]This will certainly improve the quality of students churning out of the institutions and promote healthy competition.

The government has permitted academic collaborations of institutions with foreign higher educational institutions without seeking any approval from government to improve the quality of academics and benefit students. Many private institutions are showing keen interest to exchange their students and faculty with foreign institutions to drive up India's institutional rankings and increasing the quality teaching and learning. [31]

The policy makers of higher education promotion in India should be liberal to promote induction of foreign faculty more and more in numbers.

10. INDUSTRY COLLOBORATION

The further scope for higher education and its consistent progress demands for strong industry collaboration. There is a need for closer affiliation between Indian academia and industry. The time has come when the opportunities for more and better jobs creation are the need of the hour and the existing gap between academia and industry is to be plugged in. The industry has to step up its investment in skill development and research and development. It is the Government that is funding research and development in India through AICTE, DST and other agencies. [32]There is a need to develop and build more science and technology parks like Electronic City in Bengaluru, Rajiv Ganghi IT park, Pune etc. Also, this is the need of the hour to think of establishing more incubation centers and technology transfer units in state universities. This is possible if institutions have strong extended industry collaboration. So far, the collaboration with industry is restricted and both are hesitant to reach out to each other for more cooperation and support for this cause. [33]

11. FUNDING ISSUES

There is a clear cut shift of focus from School Education to Higher Education and Skill Education by MHRD. In 2017-2018, the MHRD has been approved with Rs. 79686/ crore, out of which Rs. 46356/ crore (58%) have been kept for School Education and Rs. 33330/ crore (42%) for Higher Education. There is a substantial rise in the budget allocation for Higher Education System of India, if we study the graph of last five (5) years budget allocation/ actual spent as shown below:

There is no dearth of funding when it comes to "top tier institutions" like IITs, IIMs, NITs Central Universities etc. in the country. IITs have been allocated funds of Rs. 7856/ crore whereas; the outlay for IIMs is pegged at Rs.1030/ crore for the year 2017-18. This is a substantial amount out of Rs.79686/ crore sanctioned for Indian education system for the year 2017-18. [34]

However, it is quite tragic that most premier institutions fail to utilize funds due to lack of research facilities.

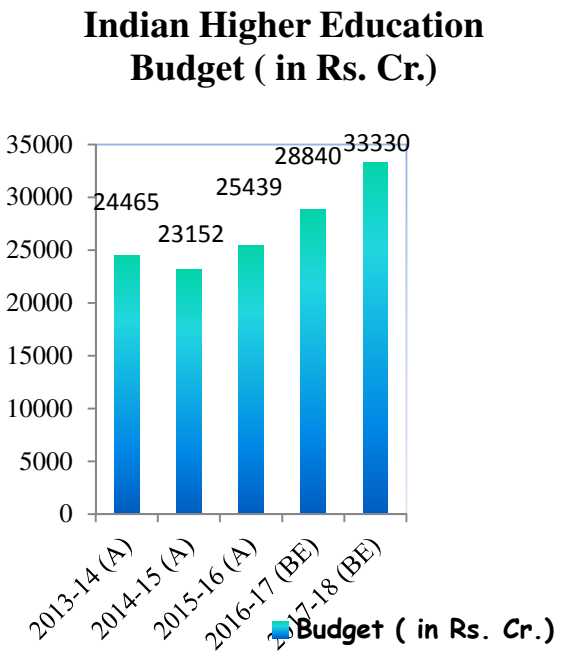

Figure 5: Department of Higher Education Budget in the Last 5 Years; A-Actual, BE- Budget Estimates, Source: What Do the Numbers Tell: An Analysis of Union Budget 2017-2018

The private colleges and universities have realized that if they have to compete with premier institutions of India and come on par, then they have to develop infrastructure and step up research activities. It was a pleasant surprise to know that private institutions cornered about 64% central research funding, which was 27% of the total funding disbursement of central agencies in 2010-11.[35]

However, the private colleges suffer due to lack of funds. In India, AICTE spends millions of rupees on development of entrepreneurial skills among students and capacity building on research and innovation in the private colleges every year. But, the outcome is not so encouraging hitherto. The higher educational institutions will have to pull up the socks and make themselves accountable for the funds received. The governing body will have to create a mechanism through which control may be exercised on private colleges and a strict vigil is kept on these institutions with some harsh steps.

It will not be wrong to say that private universities are still underfunded for want of strong check system and lack of trust between UGC and private universities.

This has made the private universities with NAAC accreditation of not less than 'B' grade or its equivalent grade to look for international collaboration to build up research facilities through collaborations. This is the time when international research partnership should be given emphasis by the Indian private colleges/ universities to achieve the goal to offer students additional choices improve curriculum and the delivery of knowledge and educational content. [36]

12. HIGHER EDUCATION AND INDIAN ECONOMY

Higher Education has seen transformation of mammoth fractions and it has blossomed into a system that is egalitarian and affirmative action oriented. It is hard to establish direct link between higher education growth and economic growth of the nation due to involvement of various socio – economic and technological factors since independence, yet it is paradox that with the shift of manufacture driven economy to knowledge driven, there is an all-round development in the fields of social, political, technical, scientific and economic.

Speaking at 63rd convocation of Karnataka University at Dharwad on February 15, 2013, the Vice President of India, Shri M. Hamid Ansari also opined that the preference of 21st century global economy is changing towards knowledge based leaving aside spotlight on manufacturing based economy. He added that the fillip in the Indian GDP is coming through cutting edge technology and high value added services and both are knowledge and skill intensive. A focus on exquisite quality infrastructure of higher education is the need of the hour and it will stimulate the further progress. The economic growth of India in the recent years has a lot to do with the shift of Indian government's policy to flourish the higher education system with foolproof measures. However, this has also brought to the limelight an important aspect of upgrading the nation's human capital not only to stay modern, globally competitive economy but also, promote international competitiveness and make the Indian youth skillful with ample of job opportunities. The future success may continue with vastly improved infrastructure of higher education as the time will go by. [37]

The growth in Indian GDP in the last 5 years has increased from 1827.64 Billion US Dollars to 2263.52 Billion US Dollars with incremental rise with each passing year as shown below:

Let us accept a fact that higher the quality of education in universities in the country, the more prosperous and competitive are the people. The Indian evolution as a service based knowledge driven economy has put the human capital on limelight. Higher education is essential to the growth of the Indian economy and to let it be at its constructive best for which, the systemic lacunae must be secluded and set right.

As the nation gears up for the world's largest set of young population by 2020, the working age group can be a huge asset if their potential employability is brought to enjoyment derived from its use to the fullest. In other words, the GDP of India can be brought back to two digits with consistent upward trend with the passage of time.

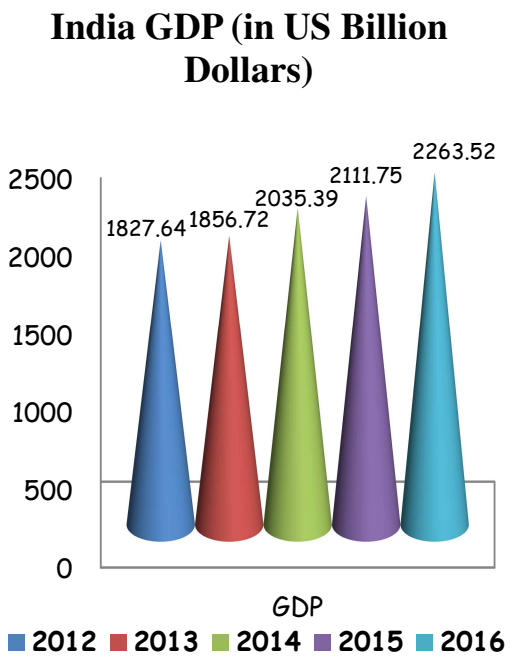

Figure 6: India GDP for the last 5 Years, Source: World Bank (all values in US billion dollars)

13. CONCLUSION

When all said and done, let us accept that there is a sizable growth in the Higher Education institutions and enrolments over years in India. Yet, the scope for higher education is out of bounds and all nations are looking at India with the largest young population to churn out employable skilled workforce to meet out the demands of not only the Indian industry but also, the global markets in future. However, a general precaution would be to check the drop outs every year from colleges and universities, which is alarmingly high.

The present Indian Higher Education has to be vigilant. It has to tackle three fold challenges in the form of access, equity and quality. If the enrollments are increased with proper persuasion of Indian youth, admissions in premier courses are equity based and standards of pedagogy are of global standards, then the erudite skilled class of youth will be the architect of modern India with prosperity galore.

US, UK, and host of other developed nation are all set to give a huge boost of international cooperation and collaboration to Indian colleges and universities with the hope that she would be the largest supplier of skilled people to make the progress in the annals of mankind in the times to come. If the potential of manpower is not utilized as envisaged, it may turn out to be a millstone that can put pressure on India and other nations in this century. A combination of piecemeal and sometimes expedited approach in the realm of Indian higher education would be appropriate in near future.

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