

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

The higher education sector in India has witnessed accelerated growth in the last decade and the globalization has changed the competencies required to excel in any field. At no time in the history of India, the need has been greater to scrutinize the quality of higher education in the broader perspective of global challenges. There is a strong market pull from the industry due to globalized economy but technology push from the institutes is missing. This paper presents the concept of globalization of education. It points out the deficiencies in the traditional higher education system of India with an analysis of the present day education sector of India and suggests possible ways of reforms to strike the right balance to be one of the leading knowledge based economy of the world.

**KEYWORDS:** Global Challenges, Globalization, Higher Education, Indian Education Sector.

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently, India has seen a profound evolution from an industrial to a knowledge based society. Society is becoming dependent on our higher education system to create knowledge, educate people, and provide lifelong learning for the citizens. Let us first understand and define the two main ideas here: education and globalization.

Education can be defined as - "building human capital that is going to drive the technological innovations and economic growth of the world in the coming years." (Sagar, 2005)

The term 'Globalization' reflects interaction that is beyond the word Internationalization. Marginson and Wende (2006) have explained the differences between the two terms beautifully in their paper for OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Globalization can be defined as the linking of distant localities by an increasingly free flow of ideas, people, goods, services and capital in such a way that there is a comprehensive integration of economies and societies.

Education sector falls under service industry as part of the globalization process as defined by GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). Globalization of education may mean different things, but in the context of higher education, it means a very competitive, deregulated education system modeled after "free market" to assure that today's students and tomorrow's workers are prepared for the fluid jobs of the 21st century. Dr. Singh of Apeejay-Stya Education Research Foundation, New Delhi argues that

Globalization, no doubt, promises dramatic and rewarding change to the higher education systems of the developed countries; whereas, for the developing and the underdeveloped countries, it has a multidimensional impact on the system of education which is already facing scarcity of resources. Developing countries often have to adjust willingly or unwillingly to the quickening pulse of international change, thereby risking the stability needed to build a well performing system.

### EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

There's a great churning happening in the education field of India today, as attempts are being made to modernize the systems to meet the challenges of globalization. Some of the questions that come up are:

- What will it mean to be educated in 21st century?
- What kind of educational environment must we provide to support 21st century education?
- What will be the societal role of higher education in the 21st century and who will make that decision?

Global challenges require global solutions. Some of the finest minds of our country at one point or another have thought about this and shared their viewpoints. Mr. Azim Premji, Professor Balram, Mr. Narayan Murthy, Dr. Dipankar Gupta, Professor C K Prahlad, Professor Jagdish Seth, ...and the list goes on.

Mr. Subrato Bagchi(2008) talks about "The Five Minds of Future". He says that today's professionals need to master five minds of the future to be successful in this one world,

global village.

1. The Mind of Discipline - you need to build affection for your profession and give it long view of time to completely understand its nuances, rather than taking it as a means to livelihood, or a career or a job.
2. The Mind of Synthesis - developing an understanding of ideas, concepts and problems in interdisciplinary manner while building depth in one's own discipline.
3. The Creative Mind - nobody wants tried and tested of the past any more. Competitive advantage is about innovation and creativity. Creative mind is about building the capacity to answer what is new and different about your solution.
4. The Respectful Mind - in future, all problems will require interdisciplinary solutions. Experts from different fields will have to listen to each other, learn from each other, collaborate, disagree without being disagreeable and put multiple minds together to emerge with a solution.
5. The Ethical Mind - the capacity to certify one's own work without any supervision. This is very pertinent to the globalization issue and challenges the whole education fraternity - the students, the faculties and the administrators. How many institutes are preparing their students for a fulfilling career path, to grow beyond their first job and compete in today's fast changing, interconnected, technology-driven world?

## TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Our traditional education is based on mere memorization rather than development of problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Traditional Indian education focuses more on the theoretical learning and ignores the application. In the Google age of today, information available is plenty and easy to get to. Today's youth come across the same quantity of information in a week (through TV, mobiles and Internet) that their grandparents came across in their whole lifetime. This means information itself is not important anymore. What is more important is one's ability to process that information and leverage it for a solution of the problem on hand. There is also a need to understand how students learn today as opposed to 20 years ago. Learning methods of past, university model and college buildings are not relevant anymore. Education is not just about assignments and

exams, it is about dynamic knowledge teaching and learning. Teachers traditionally have created and delivered content. Today content is created by the best of the best brains on internet and delivery is possible through electronic media. Teachers have to become true mentors rather than just providers of content. There is a need to make learning more engaging and relevant for students, ensuring adequate teachers, learning material and infrastructure, offering greater institutional autonomy along with accountability and authentic feedback and making the bureaucracy more competent and enabling.

Learning happens when you explore and interpret what you encounter. The teacher facilitates this process by choosing what students explore and by influencing how they interpret. Knowing how is superficial, knowing why is deeper. The complexity of projects, breadth of perspective and depth of dialogue increase through college years and students feel more confident about their role in the society. It is obvious that there is an underlying need for reforms in our educational system with particular emphasis on R&D activities and wider utilization of Information Technology.

## NEED FOR REFORMS

### The Top Down Approach with the help of Government

The reforms can take place in two different ways. One would be the top down approach where government needs to take action. Government of India has consistently increased its share in the total expenditure on higher education-from Rs. 140 million in the 1st five-year plan to Rs. 27, 300 million in the 11th five-year plan (see the website of planning commission of Govt. of India). Despite this increase in funding, Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Singh(2011) says that the system caters to hardly 6 percent of the relevant student age group. Compare this 6 percent with 80 percent being catered to in the developed countries. As of today, we have total 602 universities in India, making India's system of higher education the second largest in the world. - 275 are state universities, 42- central universities, 129 are deemed universities, 90 private universities and 66 autonomous institutes. At the time of independence, we had 19 universities in the country (See Fig. 1). This means that our education system has grown fourteen-fold in terms of the number of universities and thirty three-fold in terms of the number of colleges, since Independence (See Fig 2).

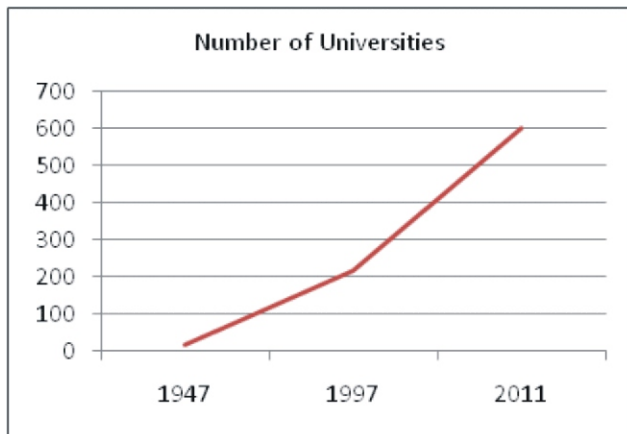


Figure 1. Growth of Universities in India since Independence.

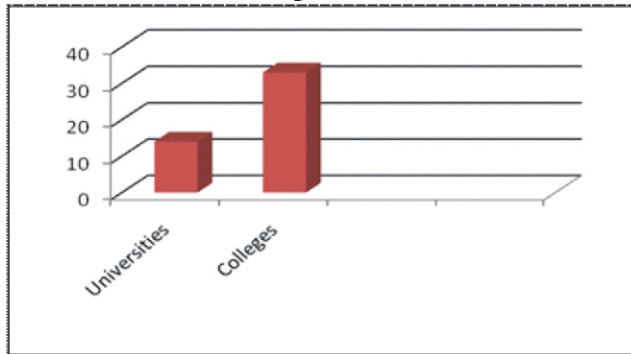


Figure 2. Growth of Indian Higher Education System since Independence.

The numbers illustrate how difficult it is for developing countries to bridge gaps and to keep pace with the developed world. Resource constraints are severe, and the quality of education available to most Indian students is questionable in terms of preparing them to face the challenges posed by further education as well as employment market. The government needs to bring about a generational change, not just incremental change.

Mr. Sam Pitroda(2008) says:

Government alone is not capable of meeting today's needs and by holding on, it is delaying the process. We need a systematically planned deregulation, just as we did in the telecom sector for over 10 years to provide a level-playing field and create a public-private partnership.

Prof. C K Prahalad who developed the concept of India@75 has emphasized that developing India's educational infrastructure can turn the country's massive illiteracy into a knowledge hub of the world. This means India would have to educate 200 million college graduates

and 500 million professionally trained technicians. The quality of skill development and college education must be world class and should be done in a short period of 15 years. This calls for a fundamentally new approach to the delivery of education - not just creating quality controls and improving. We need to combine unprecedented scale, speed, world class quality, universal access and affordability and all simultaneously. This in turn requires institutional innovations which can be achieved through public-private partnerships. Today's models of such partnerships are just in building hard infrastructure or funding but we also need to create soft infrastructure partnerships. Private sector must participate in confronting educational issues. Public sector must recognize that flexible and adaptive systems are needed to cope with these problems. Both must collaborate, focusing on application of advanced technologies, innovative solutions and transparent transactions.

Professor Jagdish Seth(2008) proposes one more idea on the table - Reinvent the Indian tradition of welcome and get globally integrated. Historically, most nations have flourished when they have welcomed outsiders, who have often unlocked a nation's potential more than the locals. It will mean every ordinary citizen of India becoming aware of the world and having the curiosity to experience it. Let us have a desire to learn from the world with humility.

**4.2 The Bottoms up Approach from the Individual**

The second type of reform can be brought about with a bottoms-up approach. Biggest challenge for education providers today is that they are preparing professionals of tomorrow. The technology is changing rapidly. What kind of skill-set do they provide to these students who have 40+ years of career ahead of graduation? The debates will go on but the actual change begins from each individual, whether it is a question of voting, volunteering or even voicing an opinion. If everyone involved in this field puts in little extra time and effort to teach and learn new concepts, new tools, soft skills and digital literacy beyond the requirements of curriculum, we will have a transformed educational system that will be ready to face global challenges.

## CONCLUSION

The government needs to recognize that higher education outlays are an important investment in the nation's future. There is a definite connection between society's aspirations and education. School/College is a microcosm of larger

society. What unfolds within a classroom today will become the new Indian reality tomorrow through the employment of graduates and through the research that gets produced. Universities need to reflect on the impact of globalization. They must engage with the issues of globalization, both theoretically as analysts and researchers, and practically as academic workers involved in an increasingly globalised enterprise. Too many Indian colleges are places for lectures, rote-learning, memorizing and regurgitation. You learn to answer the questions there. Some colleges will teach you to question the answers. Do we have any institute that goes a step further and make you question the questions?

The most effective way to cope with change is to help create it so let us work towards the change, singly as well as collectively.

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