

Concern for Quality in Indian Higher Education

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Abstract: The nations with the best higher education systems will rule the world in the twenty-first century because, in addition to increasing social and personal wealth, education also has a direct or indirect bearing on all other facets of development, including intellectual, social, cultural, artistic, economic, moral, and human resources. In India, the number of universities, college campuses, and university-level institutions as well as the number of students enrolled has increased dramatically. Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched by the Indian government in 2013, aims to improve the state of higher education. As a result, the current enrolment ratio is at 27.3%. The nation has seen a notable gain in enrolment, but as of right now, concerns remain about the quality, which is crucial to meeting objectives and carrying out national policy. Higher education faces a number of challenges, including inadequate facilities, a curriculum focused on exams, memory-based exams, a lack of qualified faculty, subpar teaching techniques, a lack of funding, uneven government policies regarding education, political unrest, vested political interests, high demand from the youth, growing privatization, a lack of access and equity, etc. There exist numerous other comparable difficulties, all of which are rigorously analysed in this work along with potential answers.

Keywords: Higher Education, Quality, Higher Education Institute, Enrolment, Challenges, Solutions

I. Introduction

Any nation's ability to grow and develop sustainably depends on its ability to educate its citizens in the real world, expand their minds, improve their capacity for thought, foster logical thought, and strengthen their analytical faculties. Additionally, it generates employment opportunities, equips students for the workforce, aids in the formulation of the nation's industrial, agricultural, and economic policies, raises public awareness of current sociopolitical issues, and cultivates democratic citizenship while involving them in the process of building the nation. Higher education imparts knowledge that inspires study, which in turn helps uncover new information across a variety of disciplines. Therefore, the University serves as a tool of the State for knowledge diffusion, discovery, conservation, and, most importantly, the production of knowledge-makers. Parallel to this, the First Prime Minister of India stated, "A university stands for humanism, tolerance, reason, the adventure of ideas, and the search of truth," during his convocation speech at Allahabad University in 1947. It represents humanity's continuous progress toward ever-higher goals. Everything is okay with the country and its citizens if the universities carry out their responsibilities effectively.

II. Higher Education in India: Current Scenario

Higher education has many meanings depending on space and period. It often begins after completing the school's final examination. In India, it is now clearly defined that higher education began after the class 12th final test in various forms. Higher education includes general honours degrees or undergraduate courses in colleges and universities, master's or postgraduate degrees in universities, technical education, teacher education, management, and research, among other things. In one sentence, it refers to India's post-secondary education system.

Since India's independence in 1947, the higher education sector has seen tremendous growth in terms of the number of universities/university level institutions and colleges, as well as student enrolment, faculty members, infrastructure, technology, medical, vocational, and technical education, education management, and various national agencies in charge of controlling, assessing, and maintaining higher education quality.

The current scenario of higher education in India is characterized by increased enrolment, especially among marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). However, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for higher education stands at 27.3%, indicating that there is still a significant portion of the population that does not have access to higher education. The government's focus is on improving access, quality, and equity in education through various initiatives under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 ([Stock Market News](#)).

As of March, 2023, the UGC lists 57 Central universities, or Union universities, established by an Act of Parliament and under the purview of the Department of Higher Education in the Union Human Resource Development Ministry. The UGC also lists 456 state universities run by the state government, as well as 126 Deemed universities, or "Deemed to be University" given autonomy under Section 3 of the UGC Act. Currently, there are 432 private universities on the UGC list that are permitted to issue degrees. According to the All-India Survey on Higher Education AISHE (2022-23), there are 161 Institutions of National Importance (created under Acts of Parliament) under the MHRD, as well as five institutions founded under various State legislations. In total,

India currently has 1113 universities. According to this research, there are three categories of institutions, with 43796 colleges and stand-alone institutions listed on the AISHE web portal (aishe.gov.in).

Sr. No.	Types of Institutes	Number
1	Central Universities	54
2	State Universities	456
3	Private Universities	432
4	Deemed Universities	126
5	Institutions of National Importance Plus other Institutions	161
6	Institution Established under State Legislative Act	159
7	Total Number of Colleges	43796
	Grand Total	45,184

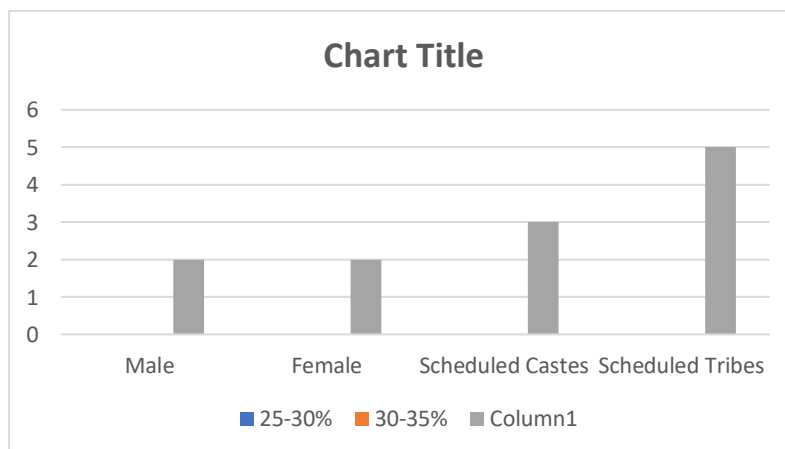
Higher education has grown fast between the XI and XII Five Year Plans (2012-2017). To some extent, its significant credit goes to the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) launched by the Central Government in 2013. The main objectives of this flagship program were to ensure access and equity by providing adequate opportunities for higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently able persons; decrease regional imbalances; reforms in the affiliation, academic, and examination systems; follow proper rules and regulations in institution accreditation; and adequate availability of quality faculty in all This leads to the expansion of the number of higher education institutions.

According to the University Grants Commission's (UGC) Annual Report 2016-2017, at the end of the XI Plan (31.03.2012), there were 573 Universities (43 Central, 129 Deemed, and 397 State Universities (State Public 286 and State Private 111), 4 Institutions established under Special State Legislature Acts, and 35,539 Colleges in the country. During the year 2016-17 (the final year of the XII Plan), there were 795 Universities (47 Central, 123 Deemed, 360 State Public, 262 State Private, and 3 Institutions under Special State Legislature Act) and 42338 Colleges, representing a 38.74% increase in the number of universities and a 19.13% increase in colleges over the previous year of the XI Plan.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education has risen dramatically. According to the 2011-2016 AISHE Report, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was 25-30% among students aged 18-23 at the national level. Male students' GER was 24-30%, female students' GER was 20-25%, Scheduled Caste 15-20%, and Scheduled Tribes 10-15%, compared to the national rate of 19.4%. This scenario altered in 2016-2017 due to an increase in the Gross Enrolments Ratio (GER). According to the AISHE Report 2017-2021, the GER among people aged 18 to 23 in higher education in India is 30-35%. Here, the male GER is, while the female GER is 21.1% for Scheduled Castes and 20-25% for Scheduled Tribes 15-20% respectively, compared to the national GER of 25.2% shown in Table 2.

Table: 2. Gross Enrolment Ratio during the Period of 2011-2016 to 2017-2021.

Sr. No.	Gross Enrolment ratio	2011-2016	2017-2021
1	India	25-30%	30-35%
2	Male	24-30%	30-35%
3	Female	20-25%	25-30%
4	Scheduled Castes	15-20%	20-25%
5	Scheduled Tribes	10-15%	15-20%



As a result, India: As of 2021, India's GER in higher education is approximately 30-35%. This reflects significant progress but still leaves room for further expansion. **China:** China's GER in higher education is higher, around 50-60%, demonstrating a more mature higher education system with broader access. **United States:** The GER in the U.S. is among the highest globally, around 85-90%, reflecting extensive access to higher education.

III. Quality Concept of Higher Education in India.

Quality is seen differently by various individuals. However, everyone understands what is meant by "quality." In a manufactured product, the buyer acknowledges the quality of fit, finish, appearance, function, and performance. The level of happiness expressed by the consumer receiving the service can be used to rate the quality of service. The appropriate dictionary definition of quality is "the degree of excellence." It means that there must be some key criteria, traits, or distinguishing features of a product, organisation, or institution that provide satisfaction to those who use the service. . It is related to people's perceptions and feelings of satisfaction. According to quality expert Crosby (1979), "quality is conformance to requirements." Another often used definition comes from Juran et al. (1988), who stated that "quality is fitness for use." This definition emphasizes the value of the client who will utilize the product. According to W. Edwards Deming (1986), "good quality" means "a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability with a quality standard suited to the customer."

India has made significant progress in higher education and provides a large number of human resources not only in India, but also in the global market. A large number of technicians from various technological institutions, doctors, business managers, scientists, and researchers are conducting business outside of India with excellence as a result of Indian higher education. However, the overall quality of Indian higher education remains inadequate. The inadequate quality of higher education is a big concern. Different stakeholders, academicians, office bearers, politicians, and policymakers believe that the quality of higher education cannot keep up with technological changes, new educational trends, occupational diversity, global market trends, and so on. Students who complete their undergraduate and graduate programs have extremely few work possibilities. Another severe issue is the demand-supply imbalance, which implies that young people are unqualified for jobs. This causes widespread unemployment among higher education graduates.

To improve the quality of higher education in India, we must adhere to quality education standards. The parameters of quality higher education include a sufficient number of quality faculty members, the profile of students entering higher education, educational institution infrastructure, curriculum, appropriate teaching methods, examination patterns, learning resources, national agencies, government policies, and institutional leadership, among others. India has one of the largest educational systems in the world. As a result, diverse stakeholders must work on these parameters at their own levels to preserve and improve the quality of higher education in India.

Challenges for Quality Higher Education in India.

India's higher education system, one of the largest in the world, faces significant challenges in maintaining and enhancing the quality of education across its vast and diverse landscape. Despite considerable expansion in recent decades, the quality of higher education remains a pressing concern, influenced by a range of structural, pedagogical, and socio-economic factors. This article critically examines the key challenges impeding the quality of higher education in India.

1. Access and Equity: The most important concern confronting Indian higher education is a lack of accessibility and equity. In some places, towns, or states, everyone has equal access to higher education. However, in some locations, even higher secondary schools and colleges are quite dangerous. Some areas with a reasonable population and need for higher education do not have even one university; for example, the Murshidabad district, which has a population of 8 million, does not have a single university. There are additional variations in higher education based on social caste and religion, as well as regional differences. These difficulties must be addressed as soon as possible.

2. Inadequate Government Budget: A lack of funds is a significant impediment to education. The school system receives very little funding. And the fact is that the majority of the allocated funds are spent on school education, with relatively little being spent on higher education. The number of scholarships is relatively low, and public spending on scholarships has been dropping over time. In India, only a small fraction of graduates take out student loans for their schooling. Fellowships for research academics are not always transacted on time, which causes frustration among scholars. Though considerable quantitative progress has been made, the quality of higher education is under serious threat due to a lack of funding.

3. Outdated Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices: One of the foremost challenges is the outdated curriculum prevalent in many institutions. Educational content often fails to keep pace with advancements in various fields, leading to a disconnect between academic learning and industry requirements. The lack of emphasis on interdisciplinary learning and critical thinking further exacerbates this issue, resulting in graduates who are ill-prepared for the complexities of the modern workforce.

4. Demand-supply gap: India has a large, increasing young population. They seek education after completing their higher secondary education. However, it fails to meet the people's demands. ASSOCHAM's survey found that 93 percent of MBA graduates are unemployed. It is because the supply does not meet the demands of the sector. Another issue is that, due to a lack of work opportunities, students continue their education after completing their term of study. This leads to an increase in the demand for higher-level education.

5. Faculty Shortages and Quality Issues: The shortage of qualified faculty is a critical barrier to achieving quality education. Many higher education institutions, particularly in rural and remote areas, struggle to attract and retain competent educators. Additionally, the existing faculty often lacks access to continuous professional development, which is essential for staying updated with the latest pedagogical techniques and research advancements. This gap leads to subpar teaching quality, directly impacting student learning outcomes.

6. Poor Infrastructure: Despite India's enormous expansion in higher education, there are still a considerable number of colleges, institutions, and universities that lack even basic facilities. There are old classrooms, insufficient buildings, staffrooms, library or resource rooms, laboratories, technological facilities, instruments for practical classes, bathrooms and urinals, drinking water facilities, and so on. The weak infrastructure of institutions directly undermines the quality of higher education. This condition is primarily prevalent in rural settings.

7. Low Research Output and Innovation: India's contribution to global research remains low, particularly in comparison to other emerging economies. The lack of emphasis on research within higher education institutions, coupled with insufficient funding and support, leads to minimal research output and innovation. The absence of a strong research culture is a significant impediment to academic excellence and the development of new knowledge.

8. Over-Regulation and Bureaucratic Constraints: The regulatory framework governing higher education in India is often criticized for being overly prescriptive and bureaucratic. Institutions are required to comply with numerous regulations from multiple bodies, which can stifle innovation and limit institutional autonomy. The focus on regulatory compliance, rather than on quality enhancement, diverts attention and resources away from core academic activities.

9. Improper Teaching Method: At the tertiary level, faculty members have no official training. As a result, faculty members who lack qualifications or training are appointed. Because they lack expertise of pedagogy and teaching strategies, their teaching quality is subpar, and the learning outcome is limited.

10. Exam Ridden Curriculum: In India, most universities have an overloaded curriculum of theoretical knowledge. And this curriculum is primarily concerned with passing the exam. Furthermore, the curriculum does not meet market demands. Most institutions continue to follow an obsolete curriculum, despite the fact that globalization is changing the demand for quality and expertise on a daily basis.

11. Poor Financial Condition of Students: It is a huge setback for Indian higher education that many students are forced to drop out owing to a lack of financial support. This is because, even after 77 years of independence, there is still a significant economic disparity among Indians. While successive administrations have proclaimed financial aid for certain vulnerable groups, many more people continue to get this benefit. Due to budgetary constraints, students are unable to enrol in quality institutions, purchase books, or access available technology.

12. Privatization: Due to a lack of public funding and declining quality, higher education is rapidly privatizing. Though privatization appears to have the potential to increase quality, it has been discovered that in some areas of education, it leads to extremely inadequate education and management. This also results in a discrepancy in educational quality. The education industry is being taken over by education mafias with enormous financial power.

13. Weak Industry-Academia Linkages: The gap between higher education institutions and industry remains a critical challenge. There is a lack of effective collaboration between academia and industry, leading to curricula that are not aligned with industry needs and graduates who are not job-ready. This disconnect undermines the employability of graduates and the relevance of higher education in the context of a rapidly changing economy.

14. Political Turbulence and Policy Implementation Gaps: These points are related and could be discussed together under a broader heading like "Policy and Governance Challenges." Discussing how political instability affects long-term educational planning and implementation could add depth.

Solutions:

The quality of higher education in India has been a subject of significant concern, particularly given the rapid expansion of the sector. Addressing these concerns requires multi-faceted solutions that target various aspects of the education system. Here are some key solutions:

1. Curriculum Reform and Innovation

Updating Curriculum: Regularly revise and update curricula to align with global standards and emerging industry needs, ensuring that students are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills.

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Encourage interdisciplinary courses and programs that foster critical thinking and innovation.

3. Infrastructure and Resources

Modernization of Facilities: Upgrade physical and digital infrastructure, including laboratories, libraries, and classrooms, to create conducive learning environments.

Access to Resources: Ensure students and faculty have access to up-to-date academic resources, including online journals, databases, and e-learning tools.

4. Regulatory and Accreditation Standards

Stringent Accreditation: Strengthen accreditation processes to ensure institutions meet high standards of academic and operational excellence.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE): Implement OBE frameworks that focus on achieving specific learning outcomes and ensuring students acquire the necessary skills and competencies.

5. Promoting Research and Innovation

Research Funding: Increase funding for research in higher education institutions, encouraging innovative projects that address national and global challenges.

Industry-Academia Collaboration: Foster partnerships between industry and academia to promote applied research and innovation, enhancing the employability of graduates.

6. Internationalization

Global Partnerships: Encourage collaborations with international universities for student and faculty exchange programs, joint research projects, and academic collaborations.

Diverse Student Body: Attract international students and faculty to Indian institutions, enriching the learning environment and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

7. Governance and Autonomy

Institutional Autonomy: Provide greater autonomy to higher education institutions in academic, administrative, and financial matters, allowing them to innovate and respond effectively to challenges.

Transparent Governance: Implement transparent and accountable governance structures that involve all stakeholders, including faculty, students, and industry representatives.

8. Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Regular Audits and Assessments: Conduct regular academic audits and assessments to monitor and improve the quality of education.

Student Feedback Systems: Establish robust feedback mechanisms that allow students to share their experiences and concerns, informing continuous improvement efforts.

9. Technology Integration

Digital Learning Platforms: Expand the use of digital learning platforms and online resources to complement traditional teaching methods, making education more accessible and flexible.

AI and Data Analytics: Utilize AI and data analytics to personalize learning experiences, monitor student progress, and identify areas for improvement.

10. Addressing Socio-Economic Disparities

Scholarships and Financial Aid: Provide scholarships and financial aid to economically disadvantaged students to ensure equitable access to quality education.

Inclusive Policies: Develop inclusive policies that support students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including those from rural areas, marginalized communities, and first-generation learners.

11. Strengthening Vocational and Skill-Based Education

Vocational Training: Integrate vocational and skill-based education into the higher education system, ensuring students are job-ready and able to meet industry demands.

Internships and Apprenticeships: Promote internships and apprenticeship programs as part of the curriculum to provide practical, hands-on experience.

12. Student-Centric Approaches

Holistic Development: Focus on the holistic development of students by promoting extracurricular activities, soft skills training, and mental health support.

Student-Centered Learning: Shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning approaches, where students take an active role in their education.

Implementing these solutions requires a concerted effort from government bodies, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and the broader community. By addressing the concerns of quality in higher education through these strategies, India can build a more robust and globally competitive education system.

IV. Conclusion

The value of a top-notch education is well recognized. It has a direct impact on every facet of a nation's development and elevates it on the international scene. Over the past 77 years, higher education in India has grown significantly in both number and quality. As anticipated, there is still a deficiency in high-quality higher education. The elements of excellent higher education—such as adequate infrastructure, an updated curriculum, qualified faculty, learning materials, financial assistance, and well-thought-out policies—must be the focus of relevant authorities if they hope to raise the standard of higher education. The only thing that will enable India to take the lead in the globe in the twenty-first century is excellent higher education.

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