

GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In this age of globalization, the overriding challenge is to develop an internationally competitive higher education system against a backdrop of low per capita income and a continuing legacy of centralized planning. There is an urgent need to reflect on the purpose of higher education, to develop an effective workable strategy of institution building and sustained growth and improvement of the education system. The challenge of the hour is to create a more productive teaching learning environment, enhancing quality and building research capacity, and working on financial affordability of plans for future growth and reforms. These challenges, if not addressed, will definitely undermine the nation's capacity to achieve rapid global integration. Therefore, sharing information on developments in our institutions, keeping abreast with the impact of new technologies, redefining the roles of those who design and fund activities, reworking the efforts of those who shape and staff these institutions, formulating new goals for the students and employers served by the institutions, and those who conduct research on their effectiveness. To assess the relevance of current models at different stages of development around the world, and to consider how these models might better incorporate and reflect changing assumptions about and vehicles for human capacity development is an uphill task that needs to be accomplished at a priority basis.

Keywords: Globalization, legacy, Integration, Technology.

It is a well known fact that human beings always strive for perfection and a higher and more meaningful existence. Education has always been considered as the most powerful medium to improve and ameliorate the fate of human race. As change is the only constant thing in all aspects of life, the nature of education too has always been changing. To be more precise, Higher education has profoundly changed in the past two decades, and those involved in the academic enterprise have yet to grapple with the implications of these changes. In this age of globalization, the overriding challenge is to develop an internationally competitive system. It is very important to understand the importance and relevance of the concept of transition to an understanding of how the system came to be as it is. We cannot overlook such key factors as direction of the higher education policy, the role of the market, the shape of the curriculum, and the division of authority between universities and states.

Academic institutions and systems have faced the ever increasing pressures of increasing numbers of students and demographic changes, demands for accountability, reconsideration of the social and economic role of higher education, and the impact of new technologies, among others. While academic systems function in a national environment, the challenges play themselves out on

a global scale. And lessons learnt from past can always help to frame more effective plans for the future.

Since academic institutions worldwide stem from common historical roots and face common contemporary challenges, a comparative and global approach to thinking about higher education benefits everyone. It's very important to highlight issues in higher education that face many countries. It can be useful to attain the goal of the internationalization of higher education through discussion of international initiatives and linking of people and institutions committed to a global perspective and expanded international programs. An open and comprehensive view of issues can be immensely helpful to create a network of colleagues and centres working in the field of higher education worldwide in order to foster a better exchange of ideas and resources, progressive communication, and possible collaborative research.

Another important objective can be linking policymakers, key administrators, and the higher education research community in a creative dialogue on the central issues facing contemporary higher education. An open discussion about the extent of difficulties in trying to develop an internationally competitive system against the backdrop, low per capita income and a continuing legacy of centralized planning may eventually lead to some concrete solutions.

While it may not yet be possible to think of higher education as a global system, there is considerable convergence among the world's universities and higher education systems. Now, with more than one million students studying outside their borders, with countless scholars working internationally, and with new technologies such as the Internet fostering instantaneous communications, the contemporary realities of the universities appear similar.

Higher education systems have also been moving from elite to mass to universal access. But we have to admit that in developing countries like India and China, despite dramatic expansion, under 10% of the age group attends post-secondary institutions. And it is a well acknowledged fact that developing economies require skilled personnel. A very important prerequisite for reforms and growth is their financial affordability. Higher education is an expensive undertaking, and there is much debate concerning how to fund expanding academic systems. Current approaches to higher education funding emphasize the need for "users" to pay for the cost of instruction, as policymakers increasingly view higher education as something that benefits the individual, rather than as a "public good" where the benefits accrue to society. This thinking may constrict the public expenditures in many countries, but can mean severe financial problems for academic environment. These difficulties come at a time when higher education systems are trying to provide expanded access.

The basic education was most cost-effective—as a result, higher education was not prioritized by major agencies. Now, higher education is back on the agenda of governments and multilateral agencies just as bridging the gap between the industry demands and academic environment has become one of the most serious challenges. Academic systems and institutions have tried to deal with these financial constraints in several ways. Loan programs, the privatization of some public institutions, and higher tuition are among the alternatives to direct government expenditure. Conditions of study have deteriorated in many parts of the world including many industrialized countries in response to financial constraints. Academic infrastructures, including

libraries and laboratories, have been starved of funds. Less is spent on basic research. The links and transition points from initial education to the work force are weakly articulated. This is true in the developed world as well as in the developing world. Educators and business leaders rarely discuss, let alone agree upon, a set of skills and orientations that are prerequisites for successful employment. The formal structures by which education systems prepare students for tomorrow are similarly weakly developed. Professional education often links well to employment in many countries, but education in the arts and sciences is less well articulated.

It is not clear how close an articulation is possible, but the issues are worthy of further consideration. Fed by rapid changes in technology and the creation of employment categories that did not exist 10 years ago, workers and employers must continually attend to the educational dimension. As the nature of work has evolved, so have the needs of those in the workforce to continually upgrade their capacities. Therefore, many short-term courses of study and other training programmes are being rapidly developed. The estimated expenditure on such programmes held worldwide may amount to billions of dollars annually to ensure survival in an ever-competitive and high-velocity business environment.

It has become only a repetition to remark on the changes that technological developments have wrought. Indeed, many of the dislocations and the press for lifelong education are partially the result of these developments. More directly, however, technology has made possible a revolution in distance education that has important implications for the accreditation of educational institutions and assurance of quality in such circumstances. The role of accrediting bodies like NAAC becomes very important in this respect as the adequate use of technology is also central to the communication, storage, and retrieval of knowledge, and perhaps has the greatest potential for transforming higher education.

It is the most promising tool or addressing the issues of internationalizing the curriculum and providing a global consciousness to students. Public universities are in some places being "privatized" in the sense that they are increasingly responsible for raising their own funds. They are asked to relate more directly to society. Students are increasingly seen as "customers." The expansion of the private sector brings up issues of quality control and accreditation and the problems and possibilities of private higher education is in need of urgent attention. It seems, at times that the academic profession is in crisis almost everywhere. There is a rapid growth of part-time faculty members in many countries, and traditional tenure systems are under attack. The body of college and university teachers is being asked to do more with less, and student-teacher ratios, academic salaries, and morale have all deteriorated. The professoriate is being asked to adjust to new circumstances but is given few resources to assist in the transition. Without a committed academic profession, the university cannot be an effective institution.

While academic systems worldwide have expanded dramatically, gender, ethnicity, and social class remain serious issues. In many developing countries, higher education remains mainly an urban phenomenon, and one that is reserved largely for wealthier segments of society. Although women have made significant advances, access for women remains a serious problem in many parts of the world. Accountability is a contemporary watchword in higher education.

Demands by funding sources, mainly government, to measure academic productivity,

control funding allocations, etc. is increasingly a central part of the debate on higher education. With professional administrators gaining increasing control, the traditional power of the professoriate is being weakened. It is also felt at times that due to these factors, the role of the universities is being marginalized. Such rigid controls have to be done away with. The challenge of the hour is to create a more productive teaching learning environment, enhancing quality and building research capacity, and working on financial affordability of plans for future growth and reforms. There is a strong need for the curriculum to focus more on assisting young people to develop skills required in information based global setting, including skills in critical thinking, problem solving and learning to learn.

These challenges, if not addressed, may seriously undermine the nation's capacity as we live in an era wherein the future is happening faster than any of us can imagine. Education is the medium of that positive change which aims at cooperation than competition. This shows a positive approach, which these institutes are showing towards Globalization. Though India has come up with the agencies and committees and other governmental organizations which are chalking out a plan to promote Indian education abroad, a strategic vision is required to lay down a plan for Globalization of Indian higher education, where more and more foreign students join the courses offered by Indian institutions. To gain from the globalization in any field, what needed is foresight, hard work, practicing nationalism with clear understanding of internationalism, strategic thinking and strategic implementation. The process can become advantageous to India and to entire world academic community.

Many nations have formed a single formal network that will continue to share information and provide support as their higher education systems grapple with common problems and undergo transformations. And, it turns out, virtual exchange is no substitute for what we are all working to achieve: the broadening of a young person's cultural horizons, the increasing of their capacity to think and work globally, and the creation of opportunities for them to participate in making the world a less dangerous and a more livable place. Education, in true sense should be the gateway to a better life wherein an individual can live a better life, not only in material terms but also a more fulfilling life in a spiritual sense. The happy and evolved citizens of a peace loving world society will only strive for a higher life. This paper, I hope, will extend the dialogue and exchange of views to a broader perspective and engage new voices in this vital shared enterprise.

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