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INTERLINK RESEARCH ANALYSIS



Editor In Chief
Dr. Balaji Kamble

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Balaji Kamble".

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An Analysis of Higher Education in India

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Nanded, Dist. Nanded

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Research Paper - Geography

The growth of higher education in India has been phenomenal. Starting with 1950- 51, there were only 263,000 students in all disciplines in 750 colleges affiliated to 30 universities. This has grown by 2005 to 11 million students in 17,000 Degree colleges affiliated to 230 universities and non-affiliated university-level institutions. In addition, there are about 10 million students in over 6500 in vocational institutions. The enrolment is growing at the rate of 5.1 per cent per year. However, of the Degree students only 5 per cent are enrolled into engineering courses, while an overall 20 per cent in sciences. The demand for professional courses is growing rapidly.

In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. In 2000-01, of the 13,072 higher education institutions, 42 per cent were privately owned and run catering to 37 per cent of students enrolled into Higher education, that is, approximately 3.1 million out of total 8.4 million. It is also likely that most of the growth in the rapidly expanding higher education sector took place in private unaided college or in self-financing institutions. Since grant-in-aid to private colleges is becoming difficult, many governments/ universities have granted recognition/affiliation to unaided colleges and many universities have authorized new 'self-financing' courses even in government and aided colleges. It is felt that as of now more than 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided.

University Grants Commission (UGC) set up under UGC Act 1956 is responsible



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for coordination, determination, and maintenance of standards and release of grants to universities and research organizations. Professional councils that are responsible for recognition of courses, promotion of professional institutions and provision of grants to undergraduate programmes. As of today software development does not have a statutory council. NASSCOM is generally accepted as equivalent of a council. Research Councils: A number of them have been setup under the Central (federal) government.

Government has created 221 Universities of which (6 are central Universities while 156 are state Universities). There is also a concept of Deemed University. This status is given by UGC to colleges of exceptional excellence. There are 39 Deemed Universities plus seven open universities. There are 9703 colleges in India that provide mostly bachelors or sometime Master's level of education. Of these, only 550 are engineering and technical colleges, 655 medical and 600 management institutions.

Insofar as Universities are concerned, only the central or State Government can open a new university and that too by legislation in the Parliament or State. Universities are empowered to award their own degrees and take affiliate colleges. But UGC is empowered under its Act to grant institutes of excellence 'Deemed University' status which they have done in 39 cases. There are, however, no private Universities so far. A Private Universities' Bill has been proposed in the Parliament, but has not been approved so far. All self-financing colleges, therefore, have to also seek affiliation with a University. All of India's higher education is thus managed by the UGC and the various Councils. The UGC, established by a statute 1952, has been empowered to promote and coordinate university education in India and also approve grants to them.

In order to evaluate performance of an institution and bring about a measure of accountability a mechanism of accreditation has been developed by UGC. This is an autonomous council under UGC called National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) with a purpose to carry out periodic assessment of universities and colleges. NAAC has evolved a methodology of assessment which involves self-appraisal by each university/college and an assessment of the performance by an expert committee. Similarly, for technical education AICTE has established its own accreditation mechanism for its institutions through the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). NBA has also undertaken



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a detailed exercise for bench marking the performance of reference for evaluation if performance can be initiated.

Both NAAC and NBA are in the right direction and need to be encouraged and strengthened. However, so far only 47 universities, 75 affiliate colleges and 20 autonomous colleges have volunteered to be accredited by NAAC. Some more universities and more colleges are in advanced stage of finalizing self-study reports. There is a need to link up grants and loans to NAAC and NBC reports. This can be done when NAAC and NBC is made applicable to all Higher Education Institutions. UGC has already indicated that development support will be related to outcome of NAACs report.

One of the streams of higher education is vocational education. For this a network of public and private polytechnics and vocational institutions exists, controlled and supervised by the Councils specializing in each discipline. There are nearly 10 million students in 6500 such institutions. 10.9 Integration of University and vocational education has been attempted in India as it was earlier attempted in Australia. In a recent innovation, vocational curriculum has been introduced at the bachelor's degree level by permitting one of three subjects to be a vocational one. A number of subjects have been introduced including agriculture-related activities. Nearly 1500 colleges have been given facilities for vocational education.

While R&D centres have been established in many disciplines, the concept of centres of excellence in different subjects has led to the establishment of Centres of Advance Studies (CAS), Department of Special Assistance (DSA) and Inter-University Research Centres of internationally comparable standards. The objective of these centres is to provide quality inputs in higher education and research areas. Further, to cut costs of undertaking good research, especially in sciences, Inter University Centres in nuclear science, crystal growth, astronomy and astrophysics, social sciences and humanities have been formed.

With India emerging as a global hub for commercial R&D (*India Today International*, 3 Oct 2005), R&D within the scope of Higher Education has gained greater importance. It has been stated that 150 international firms have set up R&D centres in India and in 2004 US patents office granted over 1000 patents to Indian units




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of US companies. Indian companies have also started to increase their R&D budgets. The demand for high quality researchers will require expansion of postgraduate research and PhDs in Indian institutions of higher learning. According to Saikat Chaudhory, a Management Professor at Wharton, India needs to improve its research atmosphere in its universities. This is perhaps, already happening. If we look at that the CSIR, the number of US patents granted to it has jumped to 196 in 2005 from just 6 in 1990-1. Indian Research Councils should now have the potential to raise research funds through industry and perhaps, capital markets. A mention must be made of SPREAD – Sponsored Research and Development of the ICICI Technology Financing Group which is helping finance commercial R&D. Similarly, Nirma Labs provides up to Rs 20 lakhs as grant. We need to expand such support to R&D activities.

India has also developed an Open University system to encourage distance learning. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was the pioneer and now there are seven open universities in India offering over 500 courses. IGNOU has about 11,87,100 students on its rolls. Modern communication technology can be harnessed to effectively provide education through this medium. A distance education Council has been set up and a common pool of programmes is available for sharing.

Open Universities can be highly cost effective as the cost of teaching through distance education comes down to a third compared to the traditional system. They also maintain a close relationship with the industry and is specially helpful to those who cannot afford a regular university degree due to high cost or lack of time as they are already employed.

Distance education with new information and communication technology promises to expand the frontiers of Higher Education as never before. This is because it costs 66 per cent less and the students need not leave their homes or profession. The internet and satellite technology are being put to use to further the cause of distance education. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is launching a dedicated satellite for educational purposes.



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