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CHALLENGES BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION: PRE AND POST COVID -19 IN INDIA

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Abstract
Before Covid -19 there were number of challenges in higher education Sector. But Due to pandemic challenges are increases before HE. The corona pandemic has made all the schools and colleges across the country to adapt online teaching through various apps like Zoom, Google meet, cisco WebEx meetings, team's app and many more. Institutes like IIM's and IIT's have an infrastructure to connect students but the experience shows that not all students had a good interaction due to various reasons. The present research work based on secondary data .In the present paper focus on the challenges in higher education sector before the pandemic and during covid-19.
Keywords: Pandemic, HE, Digital Infrastructure.

Introduction

Education is nation's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. In Indian scenario access in higher education has significantly improved in the past few decades, but is still not sufficient to reach all our young citizens because number of challenges in higher education. The global health pandemic has shined a harsh light on the vulnerabilities and challenges humanity faces. It has provided a clear picture of existing inequalities—and a clearer picture of what steps forward we need to take, chief among them addressing the education of more than 1.5 billion students whose learning has been hampered due to school and colleges closures.

The corona pandemic has made all the schools and colleges across the country to adapt online teaching. The experience shows that not all students had a good interaction due to various reasons in online teaching mode.

Objectives:

1. To Study the challenges before HE in India.
2. To study the challenges during Covid -19 in Higher education.

Present Scenario of Higher Education in India: It has a large higher education sector — the third largest in the world in student numbers. There are 1043 Universities, 42343 Colleges and 11779 Stand Alone Institutions listed on AISHE web portal and out of them 1019 Universities, 39955 Colleges and 9599 Stand-alone Institutions have responded during the survey.

Challenges before higher Education:

India's colleges and universities have become large, under-funded, ungovernable institutions. Under-investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories, and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top-quality instruction or engage in cutting-edge research. Indian Higher education facing the number of challenges such as

1. Fragmentation of the higher education system:

India has over 1043 universities and approximately 42343 colleges, reflecting the overall severe fragmentation and small size of HEIs currently in the country. Remarkably, over 40% of all colleges in the country run only a single programme, far from the multidisciplinary style of higher education that will be required in the 21st century. In fact, over 20% of colleges have enrolment below 100, while only 4% of colleges have enrolment over 3000 (AISHE 2016-17). To make matters worse, thousands of the smaller colleges hardly have any teaching faculty at all, and there is little or no education taking place - thus affecting severely the integrity of the higher education system in the country. This fragmentation of the system leads directly to severe sub optimality on various fronts: resource utilization, the range and number of programmes and disciplines, the range and number of faculty, and the ability to carry out high-quality multidisciplinary research.

2. Too many silos; too much early specialization and streaming of students into disciplines: India's

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higher education has developed rigid boundaries of disciplines and fields, along with a narrow view of what constitutes National Education Policy 2019 education. As already mentioned, its most harmful expression is in the enormous number of mono-field institutions that have been developed, most notably in the professional and vocational fields. For example, there are thousands of standalone teacher education institutions, and most engineering and medical colleges are also standalone institutions. Even in institutions that offer programmes across more than one discipline, there are silos that separate disciplines within these institutions, e.g. students in engineering are generally not encouraged or even allowed to take courses outside of their single programmes (e.g. in the arts, humanities, social sciences, or even in the pure sciences), thereby producing thousands of students with identical educations rather than true individuals and humans exercising their own creativity, and developing their own talents and interests. Such rigid boundaries and silos violate the basic requirement of good higher education.

3. Lack of access, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas: Access in higher education has significantly improved in the past few decades, but is still not sufficient to reach all our young citizens; equity in and quality of education still remain a big challenge. While the GER of higher education has risen over the last several years, to around 27.1%, and notable progress has been made, this Policy aims for GER to reach 50% by 2035, in order to fulfil the aspirations of our youth and to form the basis for a vibrant society and economy. This implies more than doubling enrolment, from the present base of 35 million students, and including increased opportunities and access for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and areas.

4. Lack of teacher and institutional autonomy:

The lack of teacher autonomy has led to a severe lack of faculty motivation and scope for innovation. In order for faculty members and institutional leaders to innovate and explore in their teaching, research, and service, they must have the individual autonomy that allows them to do so. In particular, the system of affiliated colleges which are required to follow a central syllabus, curriculum, pedagogy, and textbook makes it very difficult to provide teachers with such autonomy. In the same manner, most institutions and institutional leaders are unable to take bold and innovative steps to enhance their educational offerings or research related and community outreach programmes, because they too do not have the academic, administrative, or financial autonomy to do so. A final challenge in recent years is that the very word 'autonomy' has come to mean 'reduction of public funding.

5. Inadequate mechanisms for career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders: A further reason for lack of novel initiatives from faculty and institutional leaders, besides the lack of autonomy, is the lack of a suitable structure for career management of faculty and of institutional leaders. The system of selection, tenure, promotion, salary increases and other recognition and vertical mobility of faculty and institutional leaders is, at the current time, not based on merit but tends to be either seniority based or arbitrary. This has had the negative effect of severely disincentivising quality and innovation at all levels.

6. The lack of research at most universities and colleges, and the lack of transparent and competitive peer reviewed research funding across disciplines:

The separation in higher education between teaching institutions and research institutions post-independence has caused much harm, as most universities and colleges in the country today conduct very little research. This is problematic on two fronts. First, so many members of the Academic community of the country not conducting scholarly research is an enormous lost opportunity for research and innovation in the country. Secondly, on the education side, it is difficult to have outstanding higher education and teaching in an environment where knowledge creation is not taking place; indeed, how can students be taught to innovate in a location where innovation is not on the agenda. In addition, very little funding is available for novel research ideas and proposals at most HEIs, especially for research in important multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary areas (e.g. relating to clean water, renewable energy, education and pedagogy, health, etc.).

7. Suboptimal governance and leadership of higher education institutions:

Governance and leadership of HEIs are, at the current time, deeply influenced and controlled by external bodies and individuals. Often these external influences have vested political and/or commercial interests in the HEIs. Public institutions are often operated as extensions of government departments. There is significant external interference in the selection and functioning of leaders of public institutions; this is all too often starkly visible in undeserving and inappropriate people as leaders of HEIs, appointed through

corrupt or arbitrary practices that are not merit based.

8. A regulatory system allowing fake colleges to thrive while constraining excellent, innovative institutions:

There are many fake colleges in existence that run with impunity, while excellent colleges and universities feel constrained academically, administratively, and financially. Regulation has been too heavy handed for decades. It has been the key contributor to the diffused sense of autonomy and accountability in the system. Too much has been attempted to be regulated with too little effect. The mechanistic and disempowering regulatory system has been rife with basic problems, such as a concentration of power within a few bodies, conflicts of interest among these bodies, and a resulting lack of accountability. Regulatory culture has unfortunately stifled innovation and creativity, and unfortunately instead has fostered mediocrity and graft. Moreover, private HEIs have not been treated on an equal footing with public institutions.

Challenges before higher Education in during Covid -19 Pandemic:

1. Teachers' preparedness to Support digital learning:

During the pandemic, remote learning became a lifeline for education but the opportunities that digital technologies offer go well beyond a stopgap solution during a crisis. Digital technology offers entirely new answers to the question of what people learn, how they learn, and where and when they learn. Technology can enable teachers and students to access specialized materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space. Working alongside teachers, intelligent digital learning systems don't just teach students science, but can simultaneously observe how they study, the kind of tasks and thinking that interest them, and the kind of problems that they find boring or difficult. The systems can then adapt the learning experience to suit students' personal learning styles with great granularity and precision. Similarly, virtual laboratories can give students the opportunity to design, conduct and learn from experiments, rather than just learning about them.

Moreover, technology does not just change methods of teaching and learning, it can also elevate the role of teachers from imparting received knowledge towards working as co-creators of knowledge, as coaches, as mentors and as evaluators.

2. Insufficient knowledge of ICT:

Sudden panic arise today, when everyone involved in higher education has access to internet, smart phones, and computers? Attitude of existing educators are partially to blame along with the governing system, which didn't provide a digital infrastructure for teaching and e-learning. Resilience and adaption must be incorporated into our educational systems to make it happen. The Crossover should be fast and smooth for better future of the students. Concept of online education is not clear to everyone too. Teachers across the country need to be thoroughly re-trained and oriented for online mode of education. In the post COVID-19 era, offline or traditional education models will not disappear, all of a sudden of course. According to the context and the content, both the institutions and teachers both need to blend the two skilfully.

3. Critical parameter for the reopening of Colleges:

Social distancing has proven to be one of the most effective measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Within a college context, this means reducing contact between groups of children and maintaining a safe distance of 1-2 meters between students and teachers. In some countries, the safety distance depends on the level of containment of the virus achieved. Guidance in many countries has been to reduce or halve the size of the classes in order to maintain the required distance between students. Ensuring a minimum safety distance between Students and Teachers will depend on many factors such as classroom size, room availability, and the number of students per class. Countries with smaller class sizes may find it easier to comply with new restrictions on social distancing provided they have the space to accommodate the number of students safely.

From March 2020 up to till the date central and state government has been changes their parameter and rules due to covid-19 about reopening the of colleges .so it is one kind of challenge before higher education .

4. Challenge of Enrollment in Rural area:

During and after Covid -19 we face the problem enrollment of students for the different courses like BA. B.com and other courses. Because due to pandemic situation online mode teaching is running at the different level at colleges in all over state and nation .it is observed that in the rural area due to social and economic

reasons student drop out ratio is increases due to marriages of girls of rural area .It is challenge of student enrollment especially in rural area of India.

5. Challenge of Digital infrastructure:

Table No: 1 - Percentage of Institutions Having Digital Infrastructure

Digital Infrastructure	Universities	Colleges	Stand Alone Institutions
Computer Centers	81	86	92
Connectivity NKN	55	23	23
Connectivity NMEICT	40	22	23

Data Source: - All India Survey of Higher Education, GOI

Above table shows the present status of digital infrastructure in higher education sector .In higher education number of universities, colleges and standalone institutions having facility of computer centers with the poor connectivity of internet.

6. Challenge of assessment: In India due to the outbreak of pandemic the external assessments including board exams such as Secondary Education Examinations have been postponed and all the internal assessments have been cancelled. This has made a negative impact on students learning. However, since academic results of year-end tests are used to access the university progress and the allocation of training opportunities of an individual student, the tests must be equal since carried out in a modified way. Authorities should ensure fair conduct and assessment. The decisions and timeliness of the ministry and regulatory bodies should be awaited.

Conclusion of Study:

In India access in higher education has significantly improved in the past few decades, but is still not sufficient to reach all our young citizens; equity in and quality of education still remain a big challenge. In India due to the outbreak of pandemic the challenges are increases like challenge of digital infrastructure, enrollment of students in rural area, reopening of the colleges etc. In higher education number of universities, colleges and standalone institutions having facility of computer centers with the poor connectivity of internet.

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