

**RESEARCH PAPER****Relevance and Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Study****Manoj K. Pathak<sup>1</sup> and Rekha Pathak<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup> DEI (Deemed University), Dayalbagh, Agra<sup>2</sup> Dr. B.R. Amedkar University, AgraEmail: [samridhiagra@gmail.com](mailto:samridhiagra@gmail.com)Received: 18<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Revised: 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017, Accepted: 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017**ABSTRACT**

*Growth with unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, malnutrition etc. are present contradictions. The role of knowledge in production system, its accessibility to the largest number of people and sharing the fruits of development have been overlooked. Today, knowledge has been accepted as the most important Capital as its contribution in production exceeds sixty percent. It raises the level of human capabilities. There are several means to acquire and spread knowledge of which education is the most important. Expenditure on education is termed as investment in "human resource" development. The term human resource has multiple meanings. Human resource can be thought of as the total knowledge, skills, creative abilities, talent and aptitudes of the work force as well as the values, attitudes and beliefs of the people in general. The development of human resources is vital from the point of view of economic welfare and equity in the society. It is particularly important because human beings are not only instruments of production but also ends in themselves. Late Nobel laureate T.W. Schultz, rightly known as the father of economics of education gave intellectual inspiration for scientific inquiry on the role of human capital on development. He pointed out that the investment in human capital rests on the proposition that "People enhance their capabilities as producers and consumers by investing in themselves. Investment in human resources is treated for investment and consumption benefits. It enhances the abilities and- skills of individuals and thus results in productivity increase which can be measured through growth in national income and higher earnings in the labour market. In India a large section of people remain deprived of knowledge. Their potentialities for better earnings remain undeveloped. They become deliberately destined to remain economically and socially marginalised. "Knowledge is power and monopolisation of knowledge is the cause of all kinds of monopolies." Entering into the global market with borrowed technology negating the cause of empowerment of large sections of people through the spread of appropriate knowledge will not take us far on the path of growth and development.*

**RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION PARTICULARITY HIGHER EDUCATION**

Education is solely responsible for transforming traditional society into a modern and industrial one. The difference in the level of economic development among the countries is supposed as a reflection of the difference in the qualities and capabilities of their people. The skills, values, attitudes, general orientation of the people, the determinants of economic development and social change depend on the quality of education and training. With the pace of economic development the process of production becomes more and more complex. It requires a high level of specialization and skills. Higher educational attainment facilitates the development of all these qualities. Education enhances the potential to produce what is needed for the country. It has been established that "attainment of higher levels of education is the necessary and sufficient condition for alleviation of poverty and further economic progress". Knowledge and skill which make people capable are a major source of development. Development is a continuous process and so should be the process of enhancement in knowledge and skills. If enhancement in knowledge is neglected as Schultz remarked, development does not remain rewarding. Basic education improves the impact of health services. Better health enables children to benefit from education. Better education is beneficial in reducing fertility and raising productivity of labour. Late Dr. V.V. Gin has rightly remarked that "education is the principal tool of social development and unless all societies are provided with the right type of education adequate in quality and quantity, it will not be possible to tackle satisfactorily, the problems of ignorance, ill health and poverty which afflict the majority of

human beings in the world". It fosters value system conducive to the national development goals and preserves and promotes cultural ethos of the country. It enhances people's adaptability and creates a social and political environment for stable and progressive government. Educationists and sociologists assign immense role to education for social cohesion in a plural society like India.

### **EDUCATION POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALITY AND EQUITY**

After Independence India has made significant progress in educational development. About 30 to 40 percent of the enrolments in higher education belong to lower socio-economic strata. Women students constitute about 35 percent of the enrolments. But hardly 8 percent of the 17-23 age group population is enrolled in higher education institutions. It is very low in comparison to high and middle income group countries. Higher education is still beyond the reach of poorest groups of population. There exist wide variations in quality and quantity of education. Thus, Quality, quantity and equity dimensions of education need immediate attention.

But higher education has been getting apathetic treatment at the level of policy formulations. Many public policy and plan documents have ignored higher education altogether. They have got confined to literacy and primary education. To justify its stand, the government declared. "The higher education system in the country is now sufficiently developed to the nation's requirement. The unmet demand for higher education is not considered economically (Govt. of India draft 1994, P. 76). This approach ignores that growth in primary education will contribute to rapid increase in demand for secondary and higher education. With the introduction of New Economic Reforms Policy in 1991, drastic cut in public expenditure on higher education became visible. Per student expenditure on higher education has considerably declined after 1990-91. This adversely affects the quality of education in the form of less resource for libraries, laboratories, faculty improvement, scholarships etc. The share of scholarship though meagre in total expenditure on education declined from 0.5 percent in 1990-91 to 0.15 percent in 2000-2001. A decline in the share of higher education in GNP has also been marked.

Due to cut in budgetary provisions, many universities have been compelled for upward revision of fees besides introducing different kinds of fees. Financial reforms in higher education can be summed up as (a) raising fee levels (b) Introduction of self financing courses (c) raising resources through consultancy and (d) introduction of student loans. Student loan transfers the cost from present to the future generation. It is not a substitute of scholarship.

These measures are in conformity with the structural adjustment policies which include liberalization, privatization and globalization. Policies facilitating proliferation of self financing capitation fee colleges and private foreign universities are examples of direct privatization of higher education. Privatization and commercialization are two sides of the same coin, which aim at maximization of profit. There does not arise the question of equity and quality which gets compromised. Quantity dimension of higher education remains no man's concern Govt. apathy towards higher education cannot be explained on available and established socio-economic parameters. Economic development ignoring equity dimensions will cause, social and political problems. A vibrant system in general and higher education in particular with adequate quality, quantity accessible to even marginalised sections of people is the need of the hour for faster rate of development and its equitable distribution.

Higher Education is a hotly debated and wholly contested field. Though the issue that is debated world wide today, is the globalization of education, issues that have come up for discussion for ages range from access to quality and particularly quality Vs quantity. This issue has come into sharp focus in this age of corporate globalization. Critics say that in India, higher education has expanded quantitatively at the cost of quality and that the quality of higher education is steadily deteriorating. But democratic and patriotic minded people like us still feel that in a country like India with a huge population, access or quantity is still a priority. At the same time we don't undermine the importance of quality in education. We feel that every struggle should be waged constantly to enhance the quality in education.

But quality as such is too elusive to define concretely. Quality is excellence. It is not static but dynamic. It is also relative. Quality can be assessed on the basis of the broader aims and the general and specific objectives drawn up for a particular course.

### STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In higher Education the enrolment, the total number of students and also the rate of dropouts have all been increasing. Except the elite institutes and universities, the quality and standard of the process of learning have progressively deteriorated. To prevent the sliding down process and to assure quality education, a strategy of development involving reengineering and restructuring is required. This strategy has fourfold component.

**Course Content:** Revision of syllabus periodically keeping in tune with the times and societal values and needs. There are two stages: (a) updating; (b) upgrading. Updating can be gauged with the latest development in the field. But upgrading has qualitative aspect. One can test and review. The end result would give us quantitative assessment.

**Refresher Courses:** Teachers should be subject to do these courses where experts from the field participate and acquaint the teachers about the latest development in their own fields. They will expose the teachers to domestic and international development. This should be made compulsory. Universities should undertake this responsibility to implement the schemes effectively with evaluation mechanism free from pressures from vested interests.

**Conferences, Seminars and Symposia:** Periodic seminars, symposia and conferences are an integral part of teachers' development programmes. Apart from ceremonial aspects, they should be effective mechanism of transmission and interactions among the academics. These activities are really productive in term of qualitative changes among the teachers. This should be an on-going activity.

**Library- the store house of knowledge:** Books and periodicals and its effective use are the criteria for judging Inequality of an institution. Modernization of library extends to the use of website, cassettes and CD ROMs.

This, in brief, is the objective manifestations of the quality of institutes of higher learning.

### STANDARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Standard would mean a norm or level; any educational system or institution is evaluated by this norm or standard. At a static level, it means an irreducible critical minimum level which is maintained. In a dynamic sense, the level is ever-changing in a direction of progress; raising constantly the level of learning and educating process. It has both positive and negative aspects. In a positive sense, competitive system keeps each institution on its toes to innovate, to be creative, to be productive and to differentiate its product from other close competing substitutes. It's a search for self-identity; a progressive movement. In its negative aspect, standardization curbs the spirit of individuality and self identity. There is an inherent conflict. Each society has to find its way and this is manifested in different civilizations. We find on the one hand that case has been made for individual freedom. Religion, mysticism and blind faith have all resulted into fanaticism. In the field of education, one finds their trait both in the East and in the West' Before 1500 A.D. anyone who dared to disagree with.

The official opinion of the Church or State was silenced.' A spirit of free inquiry is stifled. Nero's, Genghis Khans and Hitler's are as much a part of evolution as Oppenheimer, Newton, Einstein and Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore. Any education system which curbs the spirit of inquiry and freedom is invariably producing standardized products; this may result into dogmas and uncritical surrender to authority.

The existing system displays 'low standard equilibrium trap'. All efforts made to raise the standard get neutralized by forces which depress the standard. The result is the perpetuation of the low level of the standard of education.

#### STANDARD DEPRESSING FORCES:

1. Increasing number with no provision for expansion
2. Diversion of the talented and competent persons from education to relatively better paid jobs elsewhere
3. Low priority in allocation of resources

**STANDARD RAISING FORCES:**

1. Competitive system of choice of candidate for admission and employment
2. Diversification and core competence
3. MNCs entry: Foreign Universities
4. Examination and results orientation of evaluation system.
5. Globalization and Privatization process

**RECOGNITION**

Recognition of standard is the stamp of some authority, external to system or internal which undertakes to review the system with a view to suggesting measures for reforms. Continuing assessment within the system under the University Grants Commission with a view to bringing about reforms is one such system. Externally, independent bodies such as NAAC accreditation or ISO 9000 plus recognizes as excellent centers on the basis of various criteria evolved from time to time. India's entry into software production and exports has brought in a large scale expansion in the education of information technology, particularly higher education. This illustrates how excellence can pay rich economic and social dividends.

**APART FROM THIS STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE:**

A serious attempt has to be made from the top to bottom to revamp the system on the basis of quality parameters. Qualitative changes have to be brought in infrastructure, curriculum, teaching-learning process, evaluation, research and administration. These are interlinked and hence any halfhearted, piece-meal and cosmetic change will not help.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure plays a vital role in the quality of education. Our IIs are comparable in standard to any of the leading institutions of the world. One of the reasons is the investment in them. They offer excellent facilities for teaching, learning and research. So any attempt of the government to abdicate its responsibility to provide education to the people will jeopardize education in a knowledge society. Apart from the government, earnest steps should be taken to rope in the local community to mobilize funds for the institutions. Government should also offer necessary subsidies/tax reliefs for the purchase of books, apparatus and other study aids by the institutions.

**CURRICULUM**

The curriculum should not only aim at providing knowledge but also at enabling the student to think logically, analytically and critically and to communicate his views and ideas effectively. It should also kindle the spirit of inquiry and provoke the urge for creativity in a student. It should also instill in the students, proper attitudes and values to become responsible members of the society. The syllabus has to be up-to-date and in accordance with the changes taking place in society especially in industry and agriculture, the curriculum should be so designed to make the teachers and students read exhaustively.

**TEACHING METHODS**

Instruction in colleges comprises classroom teaching and laboratory work and in some universities field based projects. Classroom teaching is confined to only lecturing. Modern methods and instruments are not used because of lack of modern gadgets and the size of the class. Steps should be taken to provide modern gadgets in appropriate quantity to every college. In addition teachers should be trained to use them too. The teacher-student ratio should be such that a teacher should be able to take care of each and every individual and offer academic and personal guidance and counselling.

Learning methods other than listening to lectures have to be adopted. A classroom should be student-centered. Interactive teaching methods should be adopted. Emphasis should be on practical experience, independent and analytical reading and creativity of the students. Medium of instruction should be the mother tongue, which alone could bring out the potential of the students.

**EVALUATION**

Methods of evaluation also have an effect on the quality of education. At present the examinations only test learning. It should test the student's logical, analytical, critical and creative skills. Some experiments have been undertaken to introduce continuous internal assessment. In the absence of proper democratic functioning, transparency and grievance redressal mechanisms, they haven't succeeded.

**QUALITY OF TEACHERS**

The quality of teaching and evaluation depend on the quality of teachers. The teachers should not only be highly competent but also should have a commitment to the profession and the society. So the selection procedure for appointment of teachers should be fair and rigorous. But, unfortunately, in most cases, the highest bidders are appointed as teachers. In other cases, the religion or caste! community of the teacher rather than his academic abilities is taken into consideration. Education is a nation building activity and hence the universities should be empowered to oversee and check the selection of teachers. The UGC has formulated guidelines with regard to constitution of selection committee procedures for selection etc that have not been properly implemented anywhere. Managements should have only a restrictive say in the selection process.

The selection includes the appointment of principals. The principals play an important role in leading, inspiring and motivating the teachers and students and also in planning and executing the academic programmes. But the selection of principals in most cases is quite unfair. Instead of the capabilities of the person only his loyalty to the management or higher authorities and his willingness to pay obeisance to the dictates of all and sundry in the managing committee or immediate head are taken into consideration. Sometimes very junior teachers with no academic credentials are appointed which impinge on the delicate equilibrium within the college, thereby causing serious damage to the academic environment and peace.

Similarly in some cases vice-chancellors of universities and ministers in higher education are political appointees. These people are not able to command respect and are not responsive to academic challenges. Ultimately the system suffers. A foolproof mechanism should be evolved so that academics of high calibre may head colleges, directorates and the universities. Similarly teachers should constantly update their knowledge and should be a guide, friend and even a parent-surrogate to the students. Proper orientation should be given to the teachers regularly on methods of teaching and the latest developments in their field. In this connection the role of the Academic Staff College and the courses they run have to be seriously evaluated.

**ADMINISTRATION**

Another major structure, which has a decisive impact on quality, is the university and college administration. An undemocratic and retrograde administration spoils the campus culture. Most often the members of the college management have little understanding of academic issues. But they decide on everything and the voice of the academics is throttled. Thus, administration structure in both the colleges and the universities must be democratic. Every college should have an academic council with elected representatives of teachers, karaniharis, students, management alumni and the public, which should decide on all academic issues. Autonomy of the teachers and the institutions could be safeguarded only in a transparent and democratic system, which would also ensure the accountability of both the teachers and management. Similarly, the University syndicates are packed with bureaucrats with no understanding of the academic issues and politicians with vested interests. The University bodies should function democratically and should consist of distinguished academics and elected representatives of teachers, students and people so that meaningful discussions on academic issues could be held.

**RESEARCH**

Research is yet another area of concern. Most of the research going on in universities is only for the sake of publication in international journals, award of degrees or for grants. Universities are starved of funds. They are unable to provide for journals and books, chemicals and apparatus.

Hence, they depend on funding agencies. Naturally, such research gets focussed rather on the priorities of the funding agencies than on the needs. With increasing emphasis on tie-up with industries and consultancy services, universities and research institutions tend to become wings of the corporate world. Consequently, basic sciences and social sciences will suffer. In the long run India will have to depend on other countries for these. Hence, the Government of India and other funding agencies will have to suitably fund and encourage the research programmes so that the innovative potential of our intelligentsia could be tapped and brought out, our huge natural and human resources could be exploited and the issues and problems of the people could be studied and solved.

## CONCLUSION

Today, education is facing an unprecedented crisis. With the pace of privatization and commercialization in full swing aided and abetted by the governments and with GATS knocking at the doors of every nation, education is facing a paradigm shift. The assault on education is on every front. Even quality parameters are forced on us. The standards are those set by the western system, which suit their needs. They demand a homogenization and compliance in their favour. So while talking about quality we have to be cautious. It should take into consideration the situation prevailing in our country and the conditions that would transform the lives of the masses in India. Institutions of higher education should be centers of excellence in the process of learning. Excellence means the most outstanding. To excel one is to surpass one's own previous performance. It refers to merit or quality. Its manifestations are reflected in the ability with which social resources are optimally utilized for the around development of personality. In the highly competitive world, there is a challenge for educational institutions to develop a competitive edge over their foreign counterparts. The recognition of this standard can be certified by rating agencies. Five Star institutions, ISO 9000 and plus or national accreditation bodies do perform the function of recognition.

To sum up, higher education, to perform its assigned tasks has to be dynamic, innovative and socially productive. To be dynamic, the course content should be periodically changed according to the ever changing social needs; it has to be innovative and creative, and not merely mechanic and repetitive; it has to be constantly upgraded in comparison with international standards. Students should develop the ability to think creatively and independently in solving problems. The system as a whole must be socially responsible and responsive to the changing needs of the society. In other words, it must be socially productive.

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