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Quality of Higher Education In India: A literature Review

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Abstract:

Recent times have witnessed an explosive growth in the number of students graduating every year in India. But with rising automation and high volatility in the environment, the organizations put a higher demandfor different skills on the workforce and clearly this leads us to think about the growing mismatch between the required skills and the ones possessed by an individual. To understand this skill gap, this paper examines the current state of higher education in India and attempts to discuss out factors that point towards lack of investment in this sector. The paper also discusses the problem of low student enrollment in higher education level. Such an analysis will help provide a policy perspective and inputs to reforms that can be potential in addressing the skill gaps relating to higher education in the country.

Background: Higher Education Infrastructure in India

India classifies its universities as follows: Central, state, deemed, and 'Institutions of national importance'. This includes 43 central universities, 312 state universities,185 private universities and 115 deemed universities as listed by the University Grants Commission (UGC), which is the apex body for higher education in India. Only universities are legally entitled to grant degrees, the state universities are only allowed to affiliate private as well as public colleges under them. These affiliated colleges which are provided grants by the UGC are called 2f and 12 b colleges. According to the latest figures, there are approximately 9,195 such affiliated colleges in India supported by the UGC(Unni, 2016).

According to a 2014 United Nations report, India has the world's largest youth population of 356 million 10-24 year olds despite China's largest population, and by 2020 around 64% of the total population (in the age group of 20-30years) will be in the working age group. They are popularly called the millennials. So it is very important to ascertain whether they are ready to take up a job in a corporate with their present skills.This chasm between their skills/education andjobs/occupations is being widely emphasized in current debates all over.

Though there is no problem as far as the demand and supply of skilled manpower is concerned in terms of quantity as emphasis is placed on capacity creation and then-the quality aspect is a factor that concerns organisations operating in India. According to the reports provided by MHRD, university level institutions have gone up 18 times, but the numbers are still way below the required. A research in 2006 showed that India required at least 3,000 more universities each having a capacity to enroll not less than 10,000 students each to meet its requisite manpower requirements (Bhargava, 2006). Anothersurvey conducted by McKinseyGlobal Institute revealed that multinationals find only 25 percent of Indian engineersemployable. A shortage of 500,000 knowledge workers is foreseen in the next 2 years (NASSCOM Report). It says that from around three million graduates each year, less than one-third from the engineering field and merely 10% to 15% of regular graduates are employable.

A country can be classified on the basis of the stages of development of higher education with respect to its gross enrollment ratio (GER). A country with GER less than 15 % is said to be in its elite stage of higher education,if GER is between 15 to 50 per cent, a stage of massification is said to exist and a stage of universalization is achieved if the GER goes beyond 50 per cent.India, is in theinitial stages of massification of higher education with a GER of about 24.5(NITIAayog, 2017). These numbers indicate that the overall scenario of higher education in India does not match with the globally competitive quality standards. Hence, the crisis confronting the current education system as described by government committees and institutions such as increasing educated unemployment, deteriorating standards, red tapism and inefficient bureaucracy, and above all, the irrelevance of what is being taught as practicality is far from reality.

With a growth rate touching almost 8 per cent every year, India tends to be the most promising economy in the world. And the present state of its higher education system may prove to be a major deterrent in terms of getting an edge of other economies of the world.

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Factors responsible for skill mismatch in India:

The first and most important factor responsible for such a low count of employable workforce is the focus of institutions on theoretical knowledge rather than hands on practice which ultimately leads to lack of soft and technical skills when they enter the corporate world. It has been seen that when corporates want to collaborate with institutions and universities to provide training opportunities and exposure to students, universities are often unwilling as they want to stick to a tight curriculum, instead of keeping with up industry changes. They believe that since technology and skills are constantly changing, it is difficult to readjust the curriculum every time it happens. Academicians on the other hand also believe that industry expectations are misguided and unrealistic.

As estimated, India needs well over 10,000 PhDs and twice as many master's degree holders for meeting its huge research and development requirements, but India is only able to produce 4% of them.(FICCI & NMIMS, 2013). India's only institute to make its way into the top 100 institutions in the global employability rankings is Indian Institute of Science at number 38 while all other IITs, IIMs and other reputed institutions could not qualify to the list (Rankings, 2016). And According to the London Times Higher Education (2016) - Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University rankings, only IIT Kharagpur has managed to make its way in the top 100 universities in terms of employability.

IBM and Infosys, companies among the big IT giants last year screened applicants to find out that only 2-3 per cent were qualified for jobs.Another major challenge that sticks to the system is the shortage of qualified faculty in these institutes, half of the graduates and post graduates are lured for a job in corporates outside India leaving very few who are employed in a job equivalent to their skills. Thus only 2 .5 per cent of the total employed individuals join academic institutions (though the number is rising) but this number is too low to cater to three million graduates who join these colleges every year.

At present, the world-class institutions in India that can be considered equivalent to Harvard and Cambridge are meagre. Among these colleges and universities there is a persistent lack of high-end research facilities. Under-investment in libraries, laboratories and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top quality instruction.

Most academic institutions and universities (private and public) operate under the quota system and increasing political influence added with the profit making motive due to which quality is a lost characteristic. Thus, the present system is in need of an immediate reform system focused on improving the higher education system in the country.

Suggestions:

Whilethe center and state both realize the blockage in the system, they are faced by the dilemma of shortage of resources. While some believe that privatization and increased autonomy to the private sector would help to solve the problem, the others argue for a greater role of the state in fostering and promoting higher education in the country. In a bid to bridge the skill gap between industry and higher education, FICCI has set up three regional 'knowledge hubs' in the north, south and western regions of India.The objective is to identify institutions and collaborate with them in improving the curriculum, expanding investments in research projects, teacher training and student exchanges as well as facilitating international tie-ups. It suggests that students should get an opportunity to work on industrial projects to improve their employability.

Also, a central platform needs to be introduced where students and employers can easily reach each other, and can interact in order to understand what kind of skills are the ask of the hour and students can then prepare accordingly. According to Skill Development in South Asia, a recent Economist Intelligence Unit report commissioned by the British Council, cited surveys by India's National Skill Development Corporation, or NSDC, which reveal that the largest job growth in India would be in sectors like construction, automotive, retail and healthcare. Construction and Automotive industry alone account for almost 100 million new jobs to be created in the next 4 years. Also, the creation of software like BigData is expected to help the government and other sectors of the economy to manage demand and supply side of the labour market by creating a central labour market information system.

There is also a need to focus equally on the development of vocational skills among students to ensure employability, thus more and moreinstitutions should turn towards introducing vocational courses to facilitate specialized programs being offered to students for generating more employment.

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As Kapil stated "Equity is at the heart of a good educational system. We don't have equity." The higher education system of the country is classified by large rural-urban divide with GER at the rural level being just 8per cent and that at the urban level being 23 per cent when 23 per cent of its population is still living below poverty line(World Bank Group, 2016). This cavity needs to be treated, without which India cannot emerge as a world class leader of higher education. Another important step to be taken in this regard is to ensure that the grants provided by central and state bodies are utilized in the most effective manner and for the purposes sought. Therefore, the government can set up a committee that can act audit the funds of the institutions. Thus, with a collaborative effort and increased participation of the public and private bodies, India's higher education system is bound to improve and will let it emerge as a world class leader.

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