

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: QUALITY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The development of human capital is crucial and necessary since it drives the nation to the envisioned vision and mission. Without a quality human capital, a nation will be weak due to want of human factor that is capable of embarking on new initiatives and perspectives. A quality human capital comes from a quality education process. A carefully designed and well planned education system is vital in developing such human capital. This paper discusses higher education for sustainability and also sustainability in higher education along with brief discussion of Indian higher education sector.

KEYWORDS

Higher education, human capital, India, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources, particularly quality human resources, are considered one of the most important resources for the social and economic development of a country. The development of human capital is crucial and necessary since it drives the nation to the envisioned vision and mission. Without this, a nation will be weak due to want of human factor that is capable of embarking on new initiatives and perspectives. Therefore, the quality human capital is the most valuable asset of the country. Development of human capital and mind shift of the citizens is one big challenge. To become a knowledgeable-based economy and a sustainable country, the development of quality human capital should be a priority. In the context of a global world, a high human capital is a necessity and not a luxury.

A quality human capital comes from a quality education process. Education is a human right and the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development, increasing people's capacities to transform their visions for society into reality. Education teaches people to be better individuals, family members, community members and citizens. It upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world. It takes into consideration the social, economic and environmental context. Quality education is locally relevant and culturally appropriate. It is informed by the past and relevant to the present, and prepares individuals for the future. A carefully designed and well planned education system is vital in developing such human capital. Higher educational institutions play a significant role in this process of improvement by providing a critical input in the form of improved educational

background and professional skills to the nation's development. Thus Higher education is a powerful tool for sustainable development of the nation.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is an approach to the whole curriculum and management of an institution (school, college, universities, organizations etc.). It is important to differentiate between education about sustainable development and education for sustainable development (ESD).

The first is an awareness lesson or theoretical discussion while the latter is the use of education as a tool to achieve sustainability. In higher education, there is a need to go beyond awareness, and in this case, 'for' indicates a purpose whereby all education serves a purpose. Education is central to sustainability. However, the distinction between education as we know it and education for sustainability is enigmatic. Nevertheless, education and sustainability are inextricably linked.

The purpose of education is to change individual orientation and behaviour for the better. To achieve this aim, it is very necessary that the provision of education must be highly qualitative in order to produce a large number of learned scholars who continuously enlarge the frontiers of knowledge and therefore make life meaningful. The purposes of education to its citizens are multifaceted, especially in a civilian and democratic society. These purposes are usually fashioned out to meet the designs and ideals of civil and democratic setting. These include personal self-esteem and dignity, provision of equal opportunity for development etc. Quality education makes its recipients more productive, since education is the transmission of knowledge, information and understanding of man in his social and physical environment in addition to many other things, it is necessary to note that the recipients are capable producers and are agents of sustained development. Quality education is therefore more efficient in effective socialization of the behaviour of its recipients.

There is no doubt that higher educational institutions (HEI) can play a significant role in contributing to a more sustainable world by addressing sustainability through their major functions of education, research and outreach. In order for HEIs to play a role in transition to sustainability, however, HEIs need to go beyond modifying their activities by mainstreaming sustainability components. Modern HEIs have been part and parcel of individual and collective 'development' which has pursued improvement in living standards and often encouraged unsustainable practices at different levels.

Ecological and social changes, ranging from ecosystem changes to transformations of human practices and interactions, dramatically challenge the view that changes which we experience, and will be experiencing in the future, are incremental, predictable and, therefore, to a large degree, controllable. Global environmental and social systems are being affected, often unpredictably, by the way in which we manage resources and govern ecosystem services. It is time to critically examine the kinds of competencies which have been promoted by the HEIs over decades, the type of its engagement with society and its role as knowledge creating, technology transferring and policy influencing institution.

There are numerous programmes of action that can be mounted at improving the provision of quality of education for sustainable development and the need to display sincere commitments to achieve them are herculean. In this manner, there should fundamentally be effective and workable designs, organization and management of quality educational provision. In addition, there must be exist productive and continuous teacher training and retraining for integrated quality education for all children and young people. Furthermore, there must be established unambiguous childhood qualitative education and its widespread provision through specific identification, assessment and interactions of the essential needs, priorities and peculiarities of communities' settings.

Objectives must however be set out to be achieved with clear milestones. These objectives will contribute towards the enhancement of the provision of quality education to children and young people for sustainable development. Again, through drawing and designing strategies, policy makers and implementers must adopt certain premise to ensure not only appropriate provision but at same time monitoring and feedback. There are certain very clear and simple basic principles underlying the provision of quality education for sustainable development.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

India has one of the largest education systems in the world. As shown in Table 1.1, there are six main types of institutions of higher education: central universities, state universities, deemed universities, private universities, institutions of national importance (established under state and central legislation), and colleges. Put together, they make for a massive university system.

Universities play an important role in providing higher education. Most of these universities in India have affiliated colleges where undergraduate and post graduate courses are being taught. Private universities and institutions offer higher education and play a critical role in satisfying the increasing demand.

Type of Institution	Number
Central Universities	42
State Universities	295
Private Universities	154
Deemed Universities	130
Institutes of National Importance	38
Total	659
Total Colleges	33023
Grand Total	33682

GOALS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The primary objective of higher education sector is to build human resources that contribute to social, scientific and economic development of the country. It is necessary to recognize that the present approach towards higher education is governed by the “National policy on Education” of 1986 and Program of Action of 1992. The 1986 policy and Action Plan of 1992 were based on the two landmark reports namely, the “University Education Commission” of 1948-49 (popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission), and the “Education Commission” of 1964. These two landmark reports in fact laid down the basic framework for the National policy for higher education in the country. The University Education Report had set goals for development of higher education in the country. From the beginning the Indian higher education is working for mainly three important goals, namely, greater access, equal access and excellence. The progress of Indian higher education system would ensure the expansion and strengthening of the higher education system by maximizing the output /outcome of access, making higher education fully inclusive, and promoting international quality and excellence to achieve the objective of the core of Indian social and economic development planning.

GREATER ACCESS: GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO (GER)

The extent of higher education in a country is generally measured by Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) (Percentage of the 18-23 age group enrolled in a higher education institution) in higher learning. The following figure 1.1 presents the growth of Indian GER, which has increasing growth rate and presently is about 18% and is targeted for 30% by 2020. The government of India proposed a dual strategy to increase the institutional capacity to achieve the target of 30% by 2020. The first component of the strategy involves additional increase in the numbers of universities, colleges, and Second component of the strategy centers on enhancing the “intake capacity” of existing educational institutions.

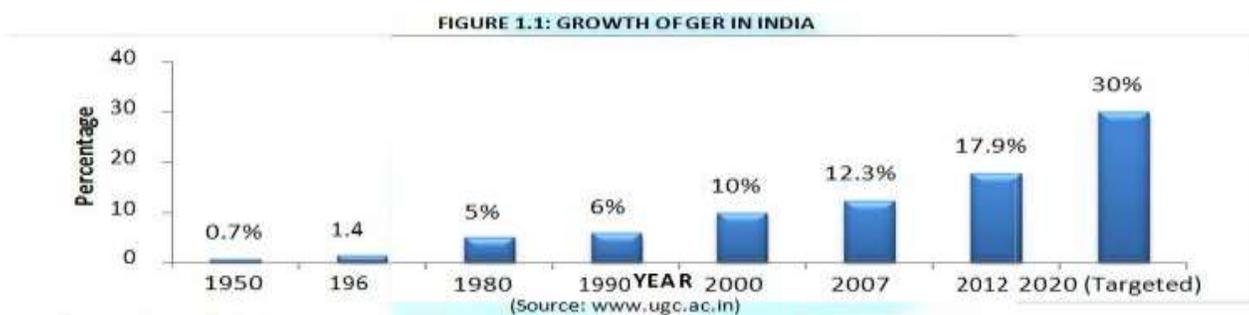


Figure 1.2 presents the growth trend of the universities in the past decade. It can be noted that there is an ample growth in the past decade. In addition, the colleges also have seen a significant growth as shown in Figure 1.3 and can be observed that India has more than 33,00 colleges with one-third of the colleges having been set up in the last five years. However, growth rate solely cannot be a measure of overall development of higher education sector. Accessibility, correcting regional, disciplinary and gender imbalances, lessening the burden of affiliation and working on new models of Public Private Partnership (PPP) are also important factors in measuring the extent of development.

FIGURE 1.2 GROWTH OF UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

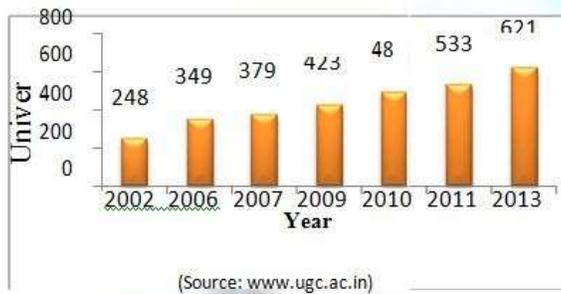
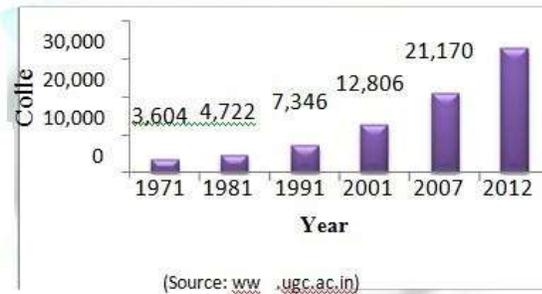


FIGURE 1.3 GROWTH OF COLLEGES IN INDIA



EQUAL ACCESS (EQUITY)

The term equity refers to an individual with talent not being denied access to higher education opportunities on the grounds of economic and social backwardness. This can be achieved by the larger facilitation and promotional role of the state, central and private sector in higher education towards the marginalized sections of the society. The major emphasis on promoting inclusiveness which accommodates more students from the marginalized sections into the field of higher education can be achieved by following practices: elimination of gender inequalities, promotion of inclusion, improving access for differently-abled students, promoting equity in all disciplines of general and technical/professional education and reducing regional/disciplinary imbalances.

QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

Mere attention towards expansion of higher education institutions and providing equal access are not sufficient to achieve the national development goals without concurrent attention to quality and excellence in all institutions of higher education to match up to international standards. The Indian higher education sector ensures quality of educational process with the help of accreditation agencies. Two major accreditation bodies are:

- (1) National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, accredits University and Colleges in general education and
- (2) National Board of Accreditation (NBA), set up by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 1994, accredits technical and programme level education.

Some of the other professional regulatory bodies are attempting to set up their own accreditation bodies, for instance Agricultural education by Accreditation Board (AB), Distance Education Council (DEC) and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The concept of sustainable development incorporates not only an environmental dimension, but also economic and social dimensions, and frequently also a cultural dimension. That education and research play a key role for the long-term development of society is hardly disputed by anyone; but how to integrate sustainability effectively into higher education and, in particular, into the curriculum and the design of research projects is still a debated issue.

In higher education, the level of integration of the concept of sustainable development can range from mere formulations of policy statements to integration into courses, curricula, and other selected activities for a total reform of the educational system. A more practical approach to promote sustainable development is to work with tangible environmental impacts. The higher education declarations on sustainability explicitly acknowledge this and confirm the importance of learning, communication and capacity building for sustainable development. Sustainable development in higher education will enable students to develop a personal critique of society and produce graduates who are ideologically aware and socially critical.

In this era of modernization and globalization, higher education has a responsibility to produce a human capital that is not only professionals of the future but also responsible citizens. Higher education needs to foster the human capital with the skills and attitudes that will allow all people, present and future, to have a decent quality of life, fair and equitable access to the earth's resources and preserve the biological diverse ecosystems on which we all depend on. Helping create a sustainable society is a social responsibility both for the educators of future leaders in society and for our graduates in their professional and personal lives. In India, Eleventh five year plan too is aiming at enhancing public spending, encouraging private initiatives and initiating long major institutional and policy reforms to bring positive changes to the Indian education system. Unarguably, the outcomes will depend not only on policies but also on their implementation. The factors that could obstruct the implementation of the sustainability initiatives in higher education institutions as a way for assisting key players to improve the effectiveness of their potential or current sustainability initiatives: Lack of awareness, interest, and involvement, Organizational structure, Lack of funding, Lack of support from university administrators, Lack of time, Lack of data access, Lack of training, Lack of opportune communication, and information, Resistance to change, Profit mentality, Lack of more rigorous regulations, Lack of interdisciplinary research, Lack of performance indicators, Lack of policies to promote sustainability on campus, Lack of standard definitions of concepts, Technical problems, Lack of designated workplace.

CONCLUSION

For a sustainable development therefore, quality education must be continuously provided by a responsible and legitimate government. The need for quality education for a sustainable development is premised on the grounds that the challenges of development are essentially designed to bring about political stability, rapid transformation of the economy equitable distribution of resources through poverty reduction, food security, reduction of unemployment, administration of justice and rule of law etc. There is no doubt that quality education

provided to all citizens will strengthen the weak structures which inhibit or prevent the delivery of all other services like health care, food and nutrition, shelter, gainful employment etc.

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