Higher education: identifying, understanding, and analyzing critical infrastructure for overall societal development

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Abstract

Education is a sub system amidst many systems of governance in the nation, where the influence of each sub system on the other ranges from limited to significant levels. Interconnection with other ministries and factors such as culture and practical working political philosophy significantly influences the working of education sector. Therefore, it is suggested to remodel the nations' governance to be corrupt-free and transparent with modern orientation to build the quality concept in the education. It is also emphasized to systemic thinking with a focus on wisdom based rule of governance across all the hierarchies of government.

Issues discussed in this paper include, systemic and cultural factors affecting education sector, in addition to providing ways of creating institutions of excellence by bringing radical reforms. Long-term and stability of educational policies are also recommended to create a world-class educational institution where creativity and wisdom flourishes with complete freedom. It is also suggested to create level-playing field for private and government universities, in addition to removing of zero-sum game like policies among employees. Encouraging faculty and student exchange programs with full support are also stressed upon. Quintessential suggestions include bringing radical reforms in general and education in particular is imperative to build the most modern society to ensure livable space for all.

Key Words: Convergence, Higher Education, Integrity, Overall Development, Sustainability, Wisdom

I. Introduction

Education is lifelong and never ending. Increasing levels of awareness in any individual is the result of education. Sophistication and application of education increases with increasing levels of higher education, which is formally governed hierarchical world (Morley, 2003). Moreover, education is linked with almost anything that happens in the society. This paper explores the status of higher education and discusses its interconnections with other subsystems, in order to improve the same for the overall development of the society.

II. Current status of higher education

Education has assumed commercial prominence in several countries despite education continues to be the priority among most of the nations. Quantity game in terms of number of students' intake and degrees produced has suppressed the quality concept. In countries such as India, many educational institutions have been set up in the last two decades, offering professional courses such as engineering, medicine, management etc. Added to the woes of quality issues in education, public funded institutions too have increased seats and the number of courses without appropriate faculty and infrastructure. In addition, governments in various provinces have been giving scholarships directly to institutions in the name of poor students who join them. Consequent issues from this number game is the serious degradation in the quality of educational programs. Students with the professional and other degree programs are unemployable to the extent of 80-85 per cent.
Just because, nation being populous, it does not mean to offer professional degrees without students having quality of education at their schooling and undergraduate levels (Harmon & Walker, 2000). Basic and until graduation, quality of education is utmost important to pursue higher education and consequently to build the knowledgeable society.

There are numerous issues with current educational policies and priorities being followed and continue to be implemented without appropriate planning and corrective actions. Unless immediate action to radically alter the existing educational policies is being taken, the current poor quality of education continues to leave no hope among students even after post graduation and doctoral programs too. There are many fundamental issues to be resolved for the best quality education in the country such as India and other developing countries.

III. Interconnections of higher education

Society is made up of sub systems, which may be classified as various ministries of government, where every sub system is influenced by other interdependent systems. Education is part of larger system of the nation. Like any other sector, education too is influenced by many other sectors and others such as culture of the society (nation). Following are few interconnection of education with other disciplines/sectors/thoughts of school.

a) General culture of the nation

Culture is the sharing common values among individuals/citizens of the nation. Values that are observed and problems faced by students as part of society, have direct bearing on their learning and retaining values in life. If society is corrupt, students too would be impacted with corruption in general and education in particular. For an example, corrupt head of the educational institution, can significantly affect in the behavior of his/her staff and students. India figures among the highly corrupt countries as per the transparency international and its influence is always visible in any sub-system of the nation. For an example, to contest and win elections from village level positions such as village Sarpanch/President, one needs to spend lakhs of rupees and this amount progressively increases to about `10-15 crores for a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and about `30-40 crores for a Member of Parliament( MP). Once, such an amount is being spent by the candidates contesting elections, they are bound to collect more returns than they invest and they will be incorrect in their deeds. Few sources of collecting money include commission or some money, on every project being undertaken in his/her constituency, recommendations for the employment in public sector, including universities, commercial organization etc. When money is being illegally collected, every individual/organization is indirectly bound to be incorrect in their activities. This how many commercial organizations bribe politicians and bureaucrats and being dragged into the corruption. Consequently, these kinds of actions lead to loss of public faith and confidence in the country and trust among individuals decrease significantly. Thus, the systems moves towards chaos where and why an individual is behaving, the others will not even notice. Therefore, unless these basic and fundamental issues are addressed from the core of the issues to be resolved, there will not be any relief nor people will be peaceful in the society. In addition any action of grandeur plan of government to build and or change into world-class educational institutions, it will only remain on the paper and partial success may be achieved and never in full.

Attitude towards communalization

Community feelings are very much present among many individuals despite being well-literate. This is more so among people occupying higher positions in the hierarchical society of India. Official decision making very often involves religious politics which is totally unwarranted. This being one of the most denigrating factors of humanity and people affected with this, develop a negative or become insensitive to many other things in the life. This has to change in totality to reap the benefits of modern education and development.
b) Governance of the nation

General governance of the nation significantly affects his/her thinking levels and value system. The more issues of corruption, bribery, scandals, etc, the more impact on the values and culture among the youngsters. For an example, in the following case of former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, his MLA-son Ajay Chautala and 53 others were convicted by a Delhi court for the illegal recruitment of over 3000 junior basic trained (JBT) teachers in the state. Special CBI Judge Vinod Kumar held Chautala, his son and others guilty of offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA). Apart from the Chautalas, Sanjiv Kumar, the then director of primary education, Chautala’s former officer on special duty VidyaDhar and Sher Singh Badshami, political adviser to the then Haryana CM were convicted by the court in the case. (Times of India, 2013).

This sort of corrupt politician will have chain reaction kind of impact on the society where teachers who have honestly prepared could not get selected but who bribed. This will forever, have indelible imprints on the minds of the people in general and teachers who witnessed this. In long-run, some of these people may turn against the nation.

What is desirable is

c) Pre and post graduate Linkages

Education whether it is primary or higher cannot be professional and quality oriented unless one has received quality education throughout his/her education period. For an example, poor primary schooling has significant impact on the ability to learn at higher levels. Moreover, higher education is not stand alone, where learners can be completely professional, unless they had quality educational programs prior to higher education. Therefore, it is emphasized to focus on the quality of education at all levels. In most of the developing countries, education is very poor on account of varied reasons, including corruption, mediocre policy makers and vested interests.

d) Private and Public sector institutional connections

There has been a vast difference in terms of compensation to faculty and staff working in the public and private institutions in countries such as India. Public institutions are financed out of government revenue and hardly institutional policies allow them to increase fee according to the expenditure required to run institutions productively. In contrast, private institutions charge low fee, often prescribed by various state governments, that is hardly sufficient to pay one fourth of the salaries. This being the scenario, private institutions charge more fee from ‘management quota’ seats and in medical educational programs, the donation, (un accounted fee) of `40-50 lakhs for MBBS degree and ` 1-2 crore for PG program.

Government medical educational institutions charge very nominal fee, often it is in thousands per annum. Now those who are paying the above fee in medical education, often need to be premium doctors who can charge very high amount of fee for the services. Or, they will be corrupt in many ways. For the corrupt practice of doctors, they alone cannot be responsible. Because the alternatives available to study medical education are simply missing, therefore, government must think of correcting the root cause of the problem and not merely correcting the erring institutions on select basis. For an example, government can set up modern educational institutions which run on ‘no profit, no loss’ basis, instead of fee being a pittance compared to the cost of setting up an institution and running it successfully.

Present gap on numerous fronts between the private and the government educational institutions should be minimized to the negligible levels (Marginson, 2007). Government is not proactive in setting up more institutions. In comparison to the increasing population, many new institutions need to come up and create a level playing field. Moreover, the public funded institutions need to change and charge fee on par with that of foreign institutions and offer the best quality programs.
e) **Convergence of educational policies of various ministries in education**

Various ministries such as Tourism, Maritime, and predominantly, the Ministry of Human Resources in India govern educational institutions. Policies in these institutions differ for the faculty recruitment, other benefits and priority. For an example, technical education governance is by AICTE and large sums of funding happens to IITs, NITs and IIMs where the faculty are being provided `1 lakh per annum as the development for self apart from many sources of skilling themselves and attending conferences and other academic activities. Work culture in IIMs and IITs is more professional compared to NITs and much undesirable work culture is prevalent in other Universities both at the central and state levels.

Unless, there is convergence, and radical changes in funding, growth and development will be negligible given the present scenario of education.

f) **Sustainable policies with practical outcomes desired**

Convergence of political thought towards the quality and the best education among the numerous political parties is inevitable for the progress of the nation. Present political culture of Indian political parties is undesirable and promotes only hatred vindictive actions rather than societal interest. Unless, there is convergence of interests of all political parties, there cannot be sustainable and uniform educational policies in vast nations like India and consequently, this chaos leads to anarchy like situation with serious social issues with far reaching effect on the society in the long-run.

g) **Convergence of provinces educational policies**

In countries such as India, education is in the concurrent list where both the states and central government can make policies. Many state government educational institutions have varied policies and priorities and even within the central government, various ministries have different policies on education. Most of the educational rules and regulations in most of these institutions are archaic and have no relevance.

In addition, if one government brings good policy, the other government may not support and follow in that state and students from such states are affected in the long-run. Hence it is emphasized to have convergence in educational policies, preferably if education is under the single, central government, there can be uniformity on many fronts.

h) **Interconnection with NGOs**

Many Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been providing free education to the poor and others too at nominal fee. In fact, the English language improvement among many Indians is the result of convent and missionary schools. Given their due share, government can connect and complement the services by suitable networking with them.

i) **International Linkages with educational institutions of other countries**

Networking with other institutions of global importance especially from advanced and well developed countries must be encouraged wholeheartedly. These are the days of globalization where the most intelligent and swift in action are thriving and therefore, in areas such as HR policies to retain the best talent, course structure for continuous update and faculty and student exchange must be taken with priority. Faculty and students’ exchange program will significantly enhance the global exposure which is inevitable in the context of present networked world.

### IV. Prerequisites for the best quality of education

a) **Exceptional long-term policies**

There is no substitute to the exceptional long term policies. Educational advancement is the prerequisite to the development of the nation. Unless there are very good educational long term policies, no quality research and scientific development will happen in the country. For an example, many scientific institutions are being set up in India; however, their role in enhancing the scientific
temper is not remarkable. This is primarily because, there is no appropriate ecosystem for the people working in them, especially for faculty members and other scientists. There has to be competitive salary structure and employee-friendly work environment, or else quality professionals will move to best paid destinations such as the US, Europe, Australia, and the Middle East to some extent.

Current malaise in India’s educational policies is the lack of systematic efforts in the educational planning and treating this sector as just another ministry which could be headed by any politician. Since, independence of India, there was no serious systematic effort to evolve the educational policies for the best quality education. Moreover, in the last couple of years, there are undesirable educational policies designed by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the highest regulatory body for higher education in India, which has been affecting seriously to the profession of teaching, especially at the levels of Assistant and Associate Professors.

b) Short-term corrective policies

Change is constant however, if for some reasons if change are not affected there will have to be serious changes later. Radical changes need to brought in countries such Indian educational policies and in the process of bringing such changes, there can be short as well as long term policies. Short term policies will address the corrective issues while long term policies will focus with appropriate guidance to the profession of teaching and research. Many African nations, the Middle East nations, India, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh need to bring radical changes in their education policies for the overall development of the nation.

Education involves mind games and real intent of the teachers and the students. If teachers are forced with unnecessary rules and regulation, they will not be fully committed to the profession of teaching. With the present workload of teachers in the universities, it is never possible to maintain professionalism but to take care of clerical work, involving how many hours each faculty has worked and how to account the same for promotion. Present workload is totally unsustainable to maintain the quality of teaching which involves 16 hours of teaching in the classroom by Assistant and Associate Professors and 14 hours for Professors. Because teaching involves huge amount of preparation by the faculty and sometimes the preparation time is two to three times the actual class work. From the present system it is interpreted that faculty have to just go to class without preparation sufficiently.

c) Exceptional training and development

Training and development of faculty is utmost important for the quality of teaching and research. For this, faculty recruitment by individual institutions should not happen as if skilled faculty members are readily available as in advanced countries. After appropriate educational qualification, there has to be suitable screening test (better than the present UGC’s NET/JRF) and compulsory training in the reputed institutions under the guidance of globally reputed professors.

In the present system, merely on the qualification of Masters’ program, one is engaged as the lecturer/assistant professors who hardly have inclination for teaching nor have skills. Especially pedagogy will not be learned by individual faculty members on their own, and it needs to be with systematic training especially in underdeveloped countries by institutions (Harris, Mishra and Koehler, 2009).

d) Effective and efficient governance of the institutions

a) Integrity: Integrity is utmost important in order to bring the best in whatever the category of outcome. More so, it is vital in education, because faculty and staff with integrity are likely to affect the culture of students through their individual and collective organizational work practices. Higher administrative offices such as Vice Chancellor, Directors, Deans etc need to be occupied by persons with very high order of integrity and values in the personal and professional spheres.
b) **Quality of governance**: Indian Universities are plagued with irrelevant and politically motivated HR Policies, both for the faculty and staff. Promotion is denied on the name of quality by mediocre people occupying higher positions which significantly affects the productivity of such people who are denied promotions. In addition, the difference between the salaries of assistant professors and professors need to be marginally different and in the promotion too. For an example, if someone is promoted for being the quality of publications, the other without quality of such work necessarily be promoted with a year of delay.

If delay of promotions indefinitely will never enhance the productivity. Corruption in any section/department of the institution, affects the entire educational institution in directly. Unless corruption is totally rooted out from institutions, the efforts of building quality educational institutions will only be partially successful.

c) **Responsiveness**: educational institutional administrative processes and procedures are very rigid and archaic at present. In no way they are capable of meeting the needs of faculty members, staff or students. Premier institutions such as IIMs and IITs and may be few others have much better, however, not better than the best educational institutions from advanced countries. Most of the rules of processing the files are clerical and are rarely objective.

e) **Uniformity in intra-institutional policies**: Most of the institutional policies are individual specific and institutional and larger societal interest is never served in the present scenario. Few heads are so poor and of mediocre nature that they hardly fit in any modern workplace, however they continue to make rules for others to follow.

f) **Avoiding zero-sum/ win-lose**: Attitude towards other fellow beings in most of the educational institutions is a game of zero-sum where ‘I win, you lose’ is prevalent. This situation will never allow group cohesiveness, and overall organizational productivity fall below normal output levels. This nothing less than a human rights violation. Unless there is a peace and prosperity among the co-workers of an institution, there will never be a remarkable achievement with the best quality.

g) **Excellent Infrastructure**: Quality faculty, infrastructure and the most relevant and sustainable administrative policy are the three pillars of creating an excellent educational eco-system. Without an eco-system, nothing survives and education is also no exception to it. For an example, IIMA, MDI, IIMK are known to have created their own eco-systems, where students and employees feel secured and fulfill their objectives peacefully. Infrastructure has to be sustainable and convey a message and give confidence to students, current and prospective employees, and other stakeholders (Mothilal, 2012)

Excellent facilities with scientific planning including the interconnected facilities such as schools for the children of employees, shopping facilities, accessibility of all modes of transport, and good weather etc. are vital for enhancing the productivity of an organization. When, some facility is missing, employees run after that spending time, however, if the same facility is accessible well within the institutional campus, the time save is great.

h) **Rigid quality policy**

For the last two decades many new educational institutions have come up, offering professional programs with hardly any quality. Most of these institutions are owned by politicians or their close associates. There are very serious systemic issues in the educational quality policy of underdeveloped and few rich countries too. Quantity can be never be the equation factor with the best quality. Japan is known for the best quality although the quality concept was taught to them by Americans. In the last
few years government of India had legislated to provide central universities in all states of India, and continue to set up them without any reforms in educational policy.

i) Focus on current and future needs
While planning long-term educational policies, government must take it seriously and work with advanced countries in planning long-term educational policies. Immediate, intermediate and future needs of the human power must be taken into account.

j) Research, Publications and Innovation:
Governments are worried that there is no innovation and why Indian Universities does not figure in the World’s Best Institutions. Since there are no support systems for research and its accountability, research will not be of great scale. In addition, there is no funding for quality research. Even if funding is available for some projects, faculty members do not have adequate or fully dedicated time to carryout projects. Along with regular class-work one has to do research.

Moreover, quality of publications will come from quality of project work. Since, there are no good projects given to teachers, they often resort to lower quality/theoretical studies in order to meet the UGC” requirements in the profession of teaching.

From the above issues, it is very difficult to innovate. In fact, Indians, will not allow others to come up with innovative ideas or do something differently. Only age is given respect and not the knowledge. If all these change, there will be remarkable development in research, publications and innovation in the nation.

k) Separation of knowledge and wisdom
There is no direct relationship between the knowledge of faculty members and their productive contribution in the classroom to enable students learns with ease. Some faculty have publications in reputed journals however, their time spent with students is of very little use. This is partly on account of UGC’s present workload of counting on quantitative points rather than quality. It is natural for anyone to desire for promotions and therefore what is counted for that is given primary focus.

Moreover, faculty with poor understanding of their subject and general awareness in addition to being mediocre head departments. The guidance from these people is disastrous as the guidance is very narrow in outlook and irrelevant many times. Therefore, heading any department must be on the basis of having not just knowledge but also wisdom, in addition to necessary zeal to drive into the increasing creative world.

l) Promotion of entrepreneurial culture
Some faculty having innovative ideas with respect to teaching, research, and pedagogy may be encouraged with active support to create newer departments and run commercially, with social content wherever desired.

Moreover, every department / school in the institution must be allowed to build their own brand by developing own strategy of revenue generation and social commitment. In the present scenario, many universities’ departments are treated equally, which is never scientific however it is highly politicized. These are the actions of mediocre authorities of the universities.

m) Linking faculty with government and private sector organizations
In countries such as the US and many countries in Europe, faculty members are connected with providing advisory/ consultancy services in their area of expertise (Guskin, A. E. 1994). This practice makes them remain update with the practical work. Whereas, there is a total disconnect between the faculty and the industry and the government or other organizational work. In fact, if someone attempts to provide some consultancy work, the authorities of institutions disturb them seriously until such person gives up such services. Moreover, there is no suitable policy like that of in advanced countries.
Faculty must be actively involved in practical work either with government departments or private sector so that they remain update and there is a mutual benefit to organization to receive valuable knowledge of faculty expertise and sharing the learned knowledge from the practical work in the classroom to create tomorrows knowledgeable human power.

n) Correspondence Courses

Correspondence courses in country such as India have become money making activity for both the public funded Universities and private educational institutions too. In the name of offering educational programs for the working executives and so on, there are very poor and non-serious programs (Meyer, 2014). IGNOU, continues to offer and maintain some standard, which is diluted by other government universities. Therefore, IGNOU may be solely entrusted and some other institutions such as IIMS, IITs, NITs and few in private too may be allowed to offer distance education programs. The rest must be restricted in this space for the want of quality and increasing only pollution by printing material and leading to corruption.

o) Internships and Employability

Internships bring practical exposure among the interns. However, in the name of the quantity game in populous countries such as India, it is taken not seriously. This has to be taken with as much serious as any vital examination (Stasz, and Brewer, 1998).

Students’ employability is not so serious among most of the education institutions in many countries including India. Because job of faculty members are assured and institutional leadership is politicized and or corrupt, which affect the outcome of teaching (Waters, 2009).

Efforts of every educational institution must be with a primary goal of creating and offering professional content to enrich the individuals’ knowledge to enhance their productivity. This has to be a national goal including the quality drive and reducing the corruption levels.

V. Suggestions

Education is a sub system, a part of overall systems of governance of the nation, where the influence of each sub system on the other ranges from limited to significant. General culture of the nation through political agendas and through various governance procedures and policies guide the functioning of subsystems. Education is not a standalone system to be the best quality on par with that of advanced nations’ educational institutions. This is on account of influence of other factors such as general observation of people from the society. If society is transparent and peaceful, there is very high probability of least corruption and meaningful living of individuals and corporations in the society.

Prerequisites for the excellence in education are corruption-free and transparent government with modern outlook. Undo the past irrelevant policies with the best outcomes to nurture the good feel among all stakeholders of the society. There have to be excellent long-term and short-term policies to govern and lead educational institutions. Primary focus has to be on the quality of skills and wisdom of employees rather than merely knowledge. Simplifying the rules of work and employee-friendly policies are likely to contribute towards building the sustainable subsystems in general and education in particular. It is suggested to bring radical reforms with complete overhaul of working of present office procedures and processing files. To reap the benefits of the education, entire nation has to be remodeled along the lines of few advanced countries where the corruption is least such as New Zealand. Addressing issues individually among various ministries without convergence to evolve a national culture and value system, the efforts will deliver only partial success.
References