Unit 20
Crises in Indian Higher Education

Contents

Learning Objectives

This unit is intended to trace the development of higher education in India since independence and identify major issues and problems faced by it. It also analyses the factors responsible for cirses in higher education. At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- identify the major policies related to higher education;
- trace the developments and expansion (both quantitative and qualitative) of higher education since independence;
- analyse the major factors responsible for crisis in Indian higher education; and
- present the future of Indian higher education.

20.1 Introduction

The Indian education system has come a long way from the days of Gurukul Pathashalas in the ashrams of Rishis/Gurus and learned people, where students used to go and stay with the Gurus till they were educated/gained a certain amount of skills and knowledge. Today these are government-funded schools (including residential schools in remote and rural areas) and privately managed public schools. The post-independence era has seen the expansion of education in all dimensions at all levels – primary, secondary and higher education. Expansion of higher education has been phenomenal during the last five decades. The manifold quantitative expansion of higher education facilities has fulfilled many goals and produced manpower required for various sectors. At the same time it raised many issues, posed a number of challenges and problems and resulted in a crisis situation on many aspects. This unit deals with a brief history of various policies related to higher education; presents existing scenario and analyses major issues responsible for crises in Indian higher education. It also suggests a few alternatives to overcome the emerging crisis in higher education.

20.2 History and Evolution of Higher Education

Indian higher education has a long history with universities like Nalanda and Takshashila. However the modern system can be traced back to the establishment of three universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857. The British promoted higher education to produce manpower which suit the colonial administration. After independence in 1947, priorities for national development were drawn up and, accordingly, the objectives of higher education were formulated and the system was expanded and developed. At the time of independence there were 17 universities and 400 colleges. Expansion during the last 50 years resulted in over 300 universities and more than 14,000 colleges with about 10.5 million students and around 0.35 million teachers, representing one of the largest higher education systems in the world.

The growth of institutions, enrolment and teachers in higher education is given in the table below:

Table 20.1: Number of institutions of higher education, Enrolment and teachers (10th Plan, vol. II)

Year	Number of colleges	Number of universities*	Students (In 000)	Teachers
1950-51	750	30	2,63,000	24,000
1990-91	7,346	177	49,25,000	2,72,000
1996-97	9,703	214	67,55,000	3,21,000
1998-99	11,089	238	74,17,000	3,42,000
2003-04	13,500	304	105,00,000	3,50,000

* Includes institutions that are deemed to be Universities, but excludes other institutions.

Source: UGC Annual report 1996-97 and 1998-99 and Selected Educational Statistics, Ministry of HRD

In addition to that there are many professional institutions – agriculture universities/institutions, medical institutions, technological and engineering universities/institutions established during the post-independence period to produce professionally trained manpower in respective areas. There were only 46 engineering Colleges and 53 Polytechnics in 1947 with an annual intake of 76,240 students. In 2001-02 AICTE. approved technical management institutions has risen to 4,791 with annual intake of 6.7 million students (10th plan Vol. II).

Higher Education Policies at National Level

The Indian higher education system is one of the highly reviewed subjects by various committees and commissions from time to time. The major ones were – University Education Commission of 1948-49, Education Commission of 1964-66 (also known as Kothari Commission) and New Education Policy 1986. In addition to these Commissions, many committees and groups reviewed higher education and suggested measures for improvement of various aspects. Many of the measures have been implemented and many more recommendations are yet to be implemented. Particularly, the recommendations related to access, standards and quality of higher education. Relevance and job orientation of the higher education courses are yet to be implemented on a large scale with intensity. Though these issues are crucial to the development of higher education, efforts to bring reforms in these areas are not significant. Some of the recommendations of these commissions, though not implemented due to various reasons, are still valid and appropriate to the present context. This indicates the vision shown by these commissions for the development of higher education. At the same time reforms brought so far by these national policies in the following areas are worth mentioning:

- introduction of semester system;
- implementation of national eligibility test (NET) as a pre-requisite for appointment of university and college teachers;
- examination reforms;
- introduction of autonomous colleges concept;
- administrative staff colleges for continuous professional development;
- establishment of centres of advanced studies for quality research;
- use of modern technology for improvement of quality of teaching;
- development of open and distance education system etc.

The above reform and policy direction of various commissions/committees in the National Policy for Education, 1986 and Programme of Action 1992 are reiterated by 9th and 10th five years plans for the improveement of higher education system in India.

In addition to the above mentioned efforts at the national level, many state governments also set up committees to look into various aspects of higher education such as examination reforms, management of universities and colleges, financial management etc. All these efforts indicate that Indian higher education has been subjected to rigorous review to empower it for self-renewal and to cope with ever changing socio-economic conditions in the society.

Reflection and Action 20.1

What are the reforms mosted by the national polices on education to for an efficient higher education structure in India

Expansion of higher education

The expansion of higher education system is closely associated with the huge expansion that had taken place at other levels of education during the last five decades. The thrust shown by the Union Government was evident with the allocation of 7.86% of the total plan outlay on education in the First Five Year Plan (1951 - 1956). However, the level of allocation for education declined gradually in subsequent plan periods. The proportion of allocation for higher education to the total outlay for education increased from 9% in the First Five Year Plan (1951-1956) to 25% in the Fourth Plan period (1969-1974) and then fell to 8% in the Eighth Plan (1991-1996). This fluctuation in the allocation to the education sector is because the priorities of the government shifted to other sectors. The same is the case with in the education sector – priority for primary education over higher education.

In spite of all the hurdles and challenges, the Indian education system's tremendous growth can be seen in Table 2 (Panda 2005) below:

Table 20.2: Growth of Education in India (Panda, 2005)

	Institutions (thousands)		Students (millions)		Teachers (thousands)	
Levels	**1950-51**	**2003-04**	**1950-51**	**2003-04**	**1950-51**	**2003-04**
Primary	210	638	0.19	114	538	>1,900
Upper primary	13.6	206	0.31	42.8	86	>1,500
Secondary and Senior Secondary	7.4	126	0.15	27.6	127	>1,800
Higher education	27U[a] 590C[a]	304U[a] 13,500C[a]	-	10.5 (C + U)	-	350 (C + U)

[a] Actual figures (not in 000s); U = university, C = college.

Source: Powar (2003); Chaudhary (2003)

In addition to the above network, India has premier institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) which produce high quality human resources, who are competing with the best in the world. Agriculture Universities and Institutions are contributing to the growth of this sector through research and extension activities. The last two decades have seen the growth of quality institutions established largely by private initiatives in the area of information and technology in the country, producing high quality human resources, who are in demand in many developed countries along with other countries.

Reflection and Action 20.2

How do you interpret the growth of Indian higher education so far?

20.3 Major Issues

Indian higher education is confronted with many problems such as – lack of adequate infrastructure, relevance of the curriculum, quality of education provided, access and equity, resources etc. We shall briefly discuss these issues in this section.

Infrastructure

When we talk of infrastructure in educational institutions we talk of land, buildings, equipment, laboratories, libraries, personnel – both academic and administrative, their accommodation and hostel facilities etc. Looking at the number of institutions, teachers and students involved in higher education system facilities required are huge in terms of quantity and quality. The higher education institutions are mainly dependent on either central or state government funding. Recently privatlly funded institutions are emerging very fast. The older institutions need modernization of its infrastructural facilities, whereas the new ones have to start from scratch, both requiring a lot of resources. Government funding to these institutions is increasingly becoming difficult. Moreover in the wake of economic liberalization, most of the educational institutions are urged for self-generation of resources. Institutions located in rural and remote places are hard hit due to lack of government funding and at the same time not in a position to generate resources on their own, which adversely affects the infrastructure and overall quality of education imparted by these institutions.

There are many government-funded institutions with reasonable physical infrastructure, but when it comes to qualified teachers, either they are not available (particularly in rural and remote areas) or vacancies are not filled for long period due to various reasons. Teachers recruited long back do need exposure and continuous development to update their knowledge and skills. Those who have the facilities of books and other technologies are at an advantage; those without these facilities do remain with the disadvantage. To overcome this weakness, Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) were established by UGC. These colege are responsible for organising seminars, workshops, orientation and refresher programmes for colleges, and university teachers. To sum up all the universities and colleges are not at one plane as far as infrastructural facilities are concerned this situation seriously affects the quality of education provided and students produced by these institutions.

Relevance and Quality

The above analysis indicates that we have a large and diverse nature of institutions along with a few institutions of excellence in the IITs, IIMs, the Indian Institute of Science etc., which compete and collaborate with the best in the world, and upgrade/update and modify the curriculum to suit the ever changing societal needs. But a large number of higher education institutions, both colleges and universities follow a curriculum developed long also without appropriate changes to suit the ever changing societal needs. In the process these institutions produce a large number of graduates in general education courses – who are neither professionals nor skilled to get a job in the market. Hence a large number of them remain unemployed.

The picture is dismal particularly at the first degree level, whose enrolment accounts for 88% of the total enrolment for higher education. Out of this 80% represent general education programmes of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Commerce and Sciences - products of diverse institutions marked by

indifferent quality, irrelevant curriculum and lack of relevance to societal needs. Professional programmes at the first degree level represent 20% of the enrolment, whose relevance and quality is relatively better.

In this context, it is very important to mention that quality is a collective societal concern and it ought to be adhered to by all the providers of higher education. Against the backdrop of economic liberalization and GATS on the one hand and of the increasing demand for higher education on the other, several institutions, both national and international, have come up as providers of higher education. Unfortunately many of these institutions do not ensure the required quality of higher education. Though many of these institutions and their educational programmes are being derecognised by the UGC, DEC and AICTE, a vast number of them still exploit the innocence of the students.

The contribution of Indian Universities is mainly to post-graduate education and research, with acceptable levels of quality and standards, but this segment represents only 12% of higher education enrolment the remaining 88% belongs to under-graduate education with varying degrees of quality (Mukhopadhyay, 2001). Even the post-graduates in some social science subjects and a few science disciplines remain unemployed due to lack of opportunities. The picture can be attributed to lack of relevance of the curriculum in these subjects, even at this level, to societal needs.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) had undertaken certain measures in the late eighties and nineties to restructure the curriculum and diversify the courses, particularly at the under-graduate level. There was some progress on this front – some institutions have changed the combination of the courses and restructured courses offered at the first degree level. But there is a long way to go, with the majority of institutions yet to start the journey in this direction. The UGC has embarked on a plan to promote quality and relevance of higher education by initiating complementary skill-oriented courses.

As we discussed in the initial sections of this unit higher education in India has been subjected to thorough and comprehensive reviews by several commissions and committees. The result of these reviews were good ideas and intentions to address crucial issues, but implementation has been lax due to lack of will and commitment at various levels. Thus qualitative reforms have not penetrated Indian higher education. Such reforms are really the need of the hour to overcome the crisis situation.

Access and Equity

Access and equity are major issues in Indian society which represents the most diverse socioal economic and cultural settings in the world. Particularly in a democratic society, all groups and segments of the population should have access to higher education to provide them with equal opportunity. Let us examine the situation with the help of facts.

India has the second largest system of higher education with more than 300 universities and 14,500 colleges catering to over 10.5 million students and 3.5 million teachers. This large network is catering to about 6% of the population in the relevant age group of 17-23 years. The main objective is to raise this from 6% to 10% by the end of Tenth Plan i.e. 2007. This rate of participation in higher education is much less in comparison to developed countries (about 40%) and even to some of the developing nations (about 19%). What about the rest of the population in the relevant age group? How to provide access to this large population to democratize higher education?

In terms of gender about 35% of the students are women, and about 12% belong to disadvantaged communities (Panda 1999; Powar 2000). Economic power and merit equally determine access to higher education. Almost 80% of

the seats in higher education go to the top 30% of the income brackets (Mukhopadhyay 2001).

The Government has taken measures to reduce disparities and provide access to various social groups to participate in higher education through reservations, scholarships and establishing exclusive institutions for women, minorities and other weaker sections. There is another point of view among the educationists to this focus on access and equity in higher education – that quality and standards are compromised. Balancing both by the governmental mechanisms/ measures is the only way; otherwise with increasing globalization and competition disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged communities are bound to grow.

Reflection and Action 20.2

How will improving access and equity in the field of higher education will help the mainstreaming of marginalised in Indian society? In your opinion what are the possible strategies that can be adopted?

Resources in Higher Education

The major issues and challenges faced by higher education, which are explained above are on one side, and the issue of resources in higher education alone on the other side with equal importance or more. Let us examine the facts. At present about 4% of GDP is devoted to education. Assurances of 6% of GDP allocation for education promised by various central governments in the past were never kept. Korea (21%), Thailand (17%), Malaysia (23%), Nepal (14%), and the US (8%) spend more on education than India in terms of GDP (TOI 2006). When it comes to budget allocation for higher education was a steep fall from 25% of the total education allocation in the Fourth year plan (1971-76) to about 8% in the Ninth Plan. With increasing governmental priority for basic and primary education, financial allocation to higher education is decreasing rather rapidly. Universities are under pressure to mobilize resources and adopt measures of financial stringency and efficiency. This trend is evident even in the budget, for the fiscal year 2006-07. Of the Rs. 24,115 crores allotted for education, elementary education alone would get Rs. 16,892.50 crores. The emaining amount has to be shared by adult, secondary, higher and technical education (TOI 2006). With increasing pressures from world bodies, the impact of the General Agreement in Trade Services (GATS) and liberalization within the country, the government is seriously taking measures to reduce the subsidy to higher education. Another argument from critics of subsidy is that higher education largely benefits the upper-middle class and upper segments of the society, hence, it has to go.

There have been several suggestions by education planners. One extreme view has been that the users should pay. There has been the suggestions for a fee hike, and increasing the income of institution through linkages with industry and offering of consultancy services, etc. But whenever there is an increase in fees, one can watch the militancy among students with full support of all political parties without any exception. Thus, we still charge Rs. 18 as monthly fee as fixed about 45 years ago in some of the colleges. It a remotely located college or university has to collaborate with industry, to mobilize resources, which industry we are talking about? Thus we are putting higher education institutions under a lot of pressure; and at the same time we expect them to perform and excel in the field. In some regions of the country, we hear that teachers get their salaries not every month, but once in a few months or whenever institutions get/receive funds from the government. Facing this crisis boldly, we are still producing through our higher education institutions, human resources which are essential to the socio-economic development of our society and also exporting to other countries to shine flourish there.

Another dimension to the resources in higher education institutions are under utilization and misutilisation of funds. Underutilization largely occurs due to the inefficiency of the personnel at various levels, whereas misutilisation is the result of wrong priorities of the leaders/heads who run the institutions. Measures to remedy these situations may be difficult to suggest or to take, but teachers have to be utilized fully as stipulated by the UGC i.e. 40 hours of stay and work per week for teaching, preparation, and research. How can higher education institutions face these grave crises with piecemeal approaches to major issues? Concerted and concrete efforts are needed to face this crises situation.

The crisis situation analysed above is likely to continue and affect the future of higher education as well. In the following section an attempt is made to bring out those issues.

Reflection and Action 20.3

List some more issues (other than those listed above) that Indian higher education is facing.

20.4 Emerging Challenges and Search for Alternatives

The major issues and emerging challenges in higher education along with the search for alternatives are presented in this section.

Globalisation

With the opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s a large number of universities from developed countries opened centres in India and started offering programmes and courses to Indian students. The response to these programmes particularly from the middle and upper classes of society, who can afford high fees charged by these institutions, is gradually increasing. In the process have emerged the large number of fake universities announcing their programmes with addresses/collaborations with foreign universities, in different parts of the country, to exploit the growing demand for higher professional education. WWe have witnessed in the recent past in of Chhatisgarh and some other parts of the country the overnight mushrooming of universities, without any sort of infrastructure and credibility. Some of the institutions were setup in a one room garages in commercial places which are meant for fancy, and grocery shops. With intervention of the central government and courts of law, some of these "educational shops" had to close down. There must be proper mechanisms to address and promote the entry of foreign institutions in the era of globalization and GATS agreement. What we are witnessing in the name of globalization is total commercialization of higher education leading to further widening the disparities between the education haves' and haven'ts.

To check this trend, the government constituted the 'Committee on Promotion of Indian Education Abroad (COPIEA) in April 2002, with the mandate to monitor the promotion of Indian education abroad and regulate the operation of foreign institutions in India (10^{th} plan, vol. II). To arrive at and to fully address the correct position on this is important issue, consultations among providers of higher education has been intensified during the Tenth Plan.

Privatization

Private initiative is not new to the Indian higher education system. Private colleges both general and professional (medical and engineering) were established during the last few decades by educational trusts/societies with the noble objective of spreading education and to cope with the increasing demand for higher and professional education. In the capitation fee, medical

and engineering colleges only the rich can afford to enrol, the meritorious poor cannot. Though courts pointed this out and took objection to such blatant commercialization, the process is continues in one form or the other. The quality offered by some of these institutions with limited expertise and inadequate infrastructure and the products produced by such institutions, are always under the scanner of employers. Some of these institutions are being accorded the status of 'deemed to be' universities by the University Grants Commission. Many of the big corporate houses, media corporations and others are awaiting for the clearance of the 'Private University Bill' which is pending in the parliament. One of the reasons, probably, for delay in clearing the bill by the parliament, is the complexity of the issue - allowing private institutions in higher education may further increase commercialization in the absence of proper controlling mechanisms (who would do it and how to do it etc?). Experts observe that the "Private players are inevitable in higher education. However, the Government should propose schemes and regulations which would not only regulate their functioning but also give them space to flourish" (Mungekar 2006).

State-run bodies like AICTE, MCI, and DEC should also be empowered to assess private institutions and accredit them from time to time on the lines of state funded higher education universities and institutions, or the government should appoint a separate regulatory authority for private universities. As education is a Concurrent subject, the Union and States Governments should collaborate in inspection of universities and in implementing the regulatory mechanism.

Reflection and Action 20.4

Can you think of some more challenges due to globalization and privatization of Indian higher education?

Emergence of Open and Distance Education

As elaborated above higher education in India has faced numerous challenges, This has led to the development of open and distance learning (ODL) all over the world This has emerged as an effective alternative response to these challenges. Let us examine a few of the issues that have led to the emergence of the ODL system.

- In spite of tremendous expansion of higher education, demand is increasing; and the existing network of higher education is not in a position to accommodate the growing demand. This led to search for alternatives in the form of distance learning by the Central and State Governments and private institutions. Accordingly the Government set the target of 40% of higher education students to be accommodated is distance-learning institutions in the 10th Plan.
- The participation rate in higher education of the eligible age group is about 6% only; to raise it to 20% as planned by the Government and to provide access to various groups and communities, existing institutions alone will not suffice, Hence one of the major alternatives is distance and open learning.
- The continuous decline in funding of higher education by the state, left the institutions to mobilize their resources by research and consultancy and offering programmes through distance learning etc.
- Relevance and quality are two important issues faced by higher education institutions particularly at the undergraduate level. Many of these institutions could not diversify their programmes and improve the quality on accepted levels. At such a juncture ODL institutions with flexibility and innovativeness started offering job-oriented programmes with best quality reaching for flung areas where, conventional institutions could not reach.

- With increasing competition from within and outside due to globalization, most of the existing higher education institutions are forced to be innovative and change their practices, operations and ultimately nature of academic programmes. In this process most of the institutions are using information and communication technologies, the concept of continuous professional development (CPD) and life long learning, quality benchmarking and development of linkages and partnerships with other agencies and institutions. The listed reforms and innovations are more effectively used and on a large scale by open and distance education institutions than the existing higher education institutions due to the flexible nature of their systems and extensive use of technologies.
- Training of teachers at higher education level was never thought of till Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) came into existence recently. Even these ASCs are not in a position to meet the growing needs of training of university and college teachers. The situation at school level for training of untrained and continuous training of trained teachers is grim and a major challenge to be addressed. Both at school level and tertiary level - planners are looking forward to using distance and open learning methodologies to impart training for continuous professional development.
- To make the higher education programmes and courses more relevant to societal needs and for gainful employment, the Government and the UGC had introduced measures for curriculum updating, diversification and restructuring of programmes and particularly at first degree level. Some effort has been made in this direction by a few institutions, but a lot has to be done by the majority of institutions and universities. Research and extension, which are two significant components of university education, are yet to achieve the rigour required for overall improvement of the tertiary education systems.

Many of the issues and challenges faced by Indian higher education institutions as explained above, and for continuous search for alternatives resulted in the following developments:

- The first Correspondence Course Institute was established at the University of Delhi in 1962 with the intention of catering to those who missed conventional higher education or who could not afford it. Since then many other conventional universities followed suit and established correspondence Course Institutes/Directorates of Distance Education. Now there are about 106 CCIs/DDEs in India catering to the growing higher education demands, and thus contributing to access and equity issue. Another major contribution of the CCIs/DDEs is generation of additional resources to fund conventional education and research of the concerned parent university, which are affected by the severe resource crunch. The CCIs/DDEs have some major limitations such as – lack of autonomy in operations, and inability to utilize the resources generated by them for improvement of quality and for self-development etc.
- To overcome these limitations of CCIs/DDEs and to address mony other challenges faced by conventional higher education, another significant development occurred with the establishment of the first singlemode open university in India i.e. Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) in 1982 at Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Its name is now changed Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University (B.R.A.O.U). Many other state governments followed suit and established state open universities to make use of the full potential of the open and distance system.
- Another major milestone in the historical development of the distance education system in the country was establishment of a national open university, i.e., Indira Gandhi National Open University, in 1985. IGNOU transformed the face of Indian higher education with its innovative instructional system, flexible admission features, offering unconventional

and job oriented academic programmes across various disciplines, catering to over one million students at any point of time, throughout the length and breadth of the country and also in several other countries.

- There are 14 open universities and 106 CCIs/DDEs which offer programes through distance mode to more than 2.8 million higher education students i.e. 25% of the total enrolment in higher education (Panda 2005). The 10th plan target is to increase the per centage of DE students to 40, by the end of the plan.
- The open and distance education network in the country addressing the many issues and challenges of Indian higher education, which we discussed elaborately in the earlier sections of this unit. The contribution of this network can be seen in
- offering unconventional programmes in various disciplines to make it more relevant to societal needs with job orientation;
- reaching rural and remote areas thus contributing to access and equity issue;
- providing best quality of education to diverse clientele groups, geographically widespread including remote areas, with the use of multimedia and latest satellite technologies;
- contributing in the direction of democratization of higher education.

Reflection and Action 20.5

Do you agree with the emergence of ODL system as one of the alternatives to face challenges in higher education? What implications you are visualising in this process, to Indian higher education?

20.5 Conclusion

Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world in terms of number of institutions, students and teachers. Any system with a huge network operating in a diverse social, economic and cultural setting is bound to face numerous issues and challenges, the same is the case with Indian higher education. These issues are related to the relevance of the programmes to changing societal needs and the quality of the programmes offered by diverse nature and types of institutions – which are mix of a few institutions of excellence/premier institutions, many standard ones and large number of average institutions. Infrastructure facilities possessed by these institutions, resources at their disposal etc determine the ultimate efficiency and effectiveness of these institutions. Particularly with declining funding from the state, the higher education institutions are left to generate and mobilize their resources, which is a major challenge and does affect the performance of these institutions.

Globalisation and privatization are other major issues faced by Indian higher education leading to commercialization and exploitation of the students of higher education. To overcome the crisis situation a search for alternatives continued. One of the major alternative that emerged is the growth and development of the open and distance education system.

The above issues, challenges and alternatives in front of the Indian higher education system have been dealt with length in this unit. As a student if you are interested in in-depth reading of these issues, vast literature is available on higher education, particularly policy documents of 1964-66, 1986 and 1992.

20.6 FURTHER READING

Chaudhary, S. 2003. *EduSat for Distance Education*. Indian Space Research Organisation. Ahmedabad