



GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *Knowledge is power and therefore has remained one of the most important driving forces of sustaining human existence. For any economy to achieve exponential economic growth, it is essential to gear up skill based activities through a potential, vibrant and dynamic higher education system. The system is huge and complex, and there is a consensus that reforms are imperative. Over the years, trade, investment, mobility of people and the economy have grown significantly and so the need of revamping the higher education system replacing the age old and non-relevant practices. Looking at the deficiencies in most of the key areas of higher education system of India like accessibility, quality, financing and governance, a strategic paradigm shift in the policy framework and overall functioning is needed to meet growing expectations and societal needs.*

Key words: *Indian Higher education system, Governance, Need for governance, Issues, challenges*

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OUTLOOK OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Higher Education System in India compare to developing / developed countries needs substantial improvement. The percentage of students taking higher education is hardly about 13 % whereas the same is varying between 28 to 90 %, across the world. The lowest % being 28 % and the same is as high as 90 % in developed countries. (Chandhoke & Priyadarshi, 2009)

At one end we claim that India would rank 3rd among all countries by 2020 in education. If we observe overall ranking of relevant institutions it's seen that in the year 2000, out of 500 there were 2 Indian Universities / Institutes were featured in the list, and 1 institution from China.

However, the scenario is changing gradually. India, over the past couple of years, has extraordinarily redesigned its higher education system. It has generated an extensive access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all disciplines.

With well-organized development and a student-centric approach of education, India has far lot improved its registration figures and has historically upgraded its results.

India has also embarked on wide-ranging restructurings to improve faculty-student proportion by making academics a desirable career option, increasing ability for doctoral students at research institutes and disconnecting academic qualifications from teaching skills.(Higher education in India: Vision 2030)

WHAT IS GOOD GOVERNANCE?

Before delving further into governance in education, it's useful to have better sense of what is meant by "good governance"? A widely-accepted definition was proposed by Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2003) who define it as "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised" for the common good of all. Since 1996, they have been measuring governance with the following aggregate indicators: voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption. However, such indicators are not sufficient to properly evaluate governance in education. Rather, education governance entails an assessment of performance; of the interactions and incentives of policymakers and service providers, as well as their relationships with the beneficiaries and other stakeholders; and of fiscal performance – that is, how resources are allocated, managed, and actually used. For



gauging education governance, Lewis and Pettersson (Lewis & Pettersson, 2009) suggest a framework that encompasses performance indicators based on four pillars: standards, incentives, information and accountability. According to the authors, each of these pillars, outlined below, is necessary to improve performance in the education sector:

- “Standards - transparent and publically recognized criteria or benchmarks which inform education policy, provision and performance
- Incentives – financial or non-financial factors that motivate a specific type of behavior or action, and can be positive or negative, i.e., encourage a certain behaviour or deter it
- Information – in the form of clear definitions of outputs and outcomes combined with accurate data on performance and results collected at regular intervals, enables sanctions to be imposed when specified standards are not met
- Accountability – refers to the act of holding public officials/service providers answerable for processes and outcomes, and imposing sanctions if specified outputs and outcomes are not delivered.”

NEED FOR GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The *Learning Forum* reflected on the current global crisis and examples of failed and ineffective governance. This led to discussion of *why good governance is important*, and how fundamental principles are needed in an autonomous higher education system as with all autonomous institutions that serve public interests.

Much has been written about good governance, both in higher education and in the corporate sector by international contributors. Clearly, in the corporate and banking sectors over recent years many bitter lessons have been learned. This includes examples like Enron in the United States and Satyam in India, where boards of governors failed in their essential duties. Higher education can gain from these experiences, but the different circumstances of learning institutions should not become limited in seeking to follow any current corporate model. In regard to good governance the public and not for profit sectors have much also to contribute:



- Good governance underpins and supports the mission and purpose of the institution. Without such shared intent in purpose and delivery a board of governors (BOG) will be weak.
- Good governance creates a sound, ethical and sustainable strategy, acceptable to the institution as a whole and other key stakeholders.
- Good governance oversees the implementation of such strategy through well considered processes and procedures in an open, transparent and honest manner.
- Good governance is essential to the grant or assertion of autonomy. Boards of governors, by embracing good governance approaches, accept unequivocally their own collective and individual responsibilities.

GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Higher Education sector ensures quality of the educational process with the help of accreditation agencies established for the purpose. The main agency which accredits University and Colleges in general education is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) established by the UGC in 1994, whereas similar function is done for Technical Education by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) set up by AICTE in 1994, and for Agricultural education by Accreditation Board (AB) set up by ICAR in 1996. Some of the other professional regulatory bodies are attempting to set up their own accreditation agencies, for instance both the Distance Education Council (DEC) and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) are currently discussing with NAAC the procedures for developing their own accreditation mechanisms. Because of their very late arrival on the scene, the progress of accreditation so far has been very slow. As on May 21, 2006, NAAC has accredited only 128 universities and 2879 colleges and reaccredited 4 Universities and 43 Colleges (NAAC Website), whereas NBA by June 2005 has accredited merely 1232 programs from 325 institutions (NBA Website) as against a total of 14000 programs in 3589 approved UG and PG and 1608 diploma institutions. Initially the progress of accreditation was very slow but has picked up speed in the last few years, and both NAAC and NBA have plans to complete the backlog of accreditation of eligible institutions during the next few years. In addition to National accreditation, local quality inspections of affiliated colleges are carried out by the affiliating University to ensure provision of adequate academic



infrastructure and satisfactory teaching learning processes. Analysis of examination performance of students is also used by Universities to assess the quality of educational offerings of individual colleges (Joshi, 2011).

GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

Higher education in India should be recognized for governance and regulation. The current system of authority and jurisdiction in the working of universities is ineffectual and does not imply any liability. These institutions are constantly subjected to governmental pressures and intrusion of political processes. Decisions are often made on the basis of non-academic considerations. This intervention starts right at the top with the appointment of the vice chancellor. University Courts are oversized with 500 members, with the result that they are decorative with no functional use. The same is true of academic councils-large size prevents dynamism in decision making.(Altbach, 2006).

The other cause of poor governance is the system of affiliating colleges to the university which yields revenue for the university through fees. There are a total of about 17,700 undergraduate colleges, out of which a mere 1.1 percent are autonomous. The rest are affiliated to universities. Many universities have more than 100 affiliated colleges and there are some with more than 400 affiliated colleges each. With so many affiliated colleges the universities become bulky structures. The need for joint examinations of affiliated colleges prompts standardization and dilution of curricula and examinations with inadequate emphasis on flexibility in response to changing and varying needs of students. There is also no opportunity therefore to nurture centers of excellence within the university systems.

A regulator in higher education usually has five functions:

- license to grant degrees;
- accreditation or quality benchmarking;
- disbursement of public funds;
- regulation of access through stipulation of fees or affirmative action; and
- Provision of licenses to practice profession. Apart from the first function the UGC is responsible for all the others. However, it has not fulfilled its function in many cases and the courts have had to step in to fill the vacuum with contradictory judgments being made on several issues.



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN GOVERNANCE

Knowledge, experience and key issues related to developing good governance in technical and engineering education.

1. Conceptualize legal foundation for a new model of an autonomous institution to

- Serve a public purpose. The model should be the same for institutions funded in part by the government as well as those receiving no government subsidy. Transition all current government-funded, government-aided and private non-aided institutions to this model.

2. Common legal framework for governance, consistent with the new model of an Autonomous institution, which provides:

- Clear statements of responsibilities and relationships for the BOG, including
- Composition of boards of governors, selection/nomination of members, powers, functions, and an inculcation and assessment of accountability (using national guidelines)
- Professional qualifications, experience, responsibilities and appointment of the (a) Vice Chancellor/Director, and (b) the senior institutional officials, including terms and conditions of service (with minimum standards set by the state and implemented by higher education institutions) internal governing structure of the institution, including the principal academic and administrative bodies within the institution.

3. Strategic planning at institutional and state levels to ensure:

Alignment with national and state priorities for India's global competitiveness in the knowledge economy:

- Size, shape, and relationship
- Access and equity
- Affordability (this will need support from central government)
- Quality Research competitiveness
- Inclusiveness (gender, ethnicity, and so forth)
- Responsiveness to the need of industry and India's future economy

4. Common quality assurance policies and standards (such as those internationally

- Benchmarked using accepted parameters to meet the needs of industry) including:



- Common framework for qualifications, specifying the knowledge and skills
- Required for employment to establish credible national standards
- Curriculum frameworks/subject benchmarks to guide curriculum development. (state / central government to specify minimum credits)
- Student assessment and continuous quality improvement within institutions
- Assessment and certification of skills and competencies obtained through industry based training and experience for partial credit toward degrees.
- Quality assurance and accountability based on outcomes (at various levels: institution, state, central government)
- Policies and mechanisms for student mobility (including credit transfer) within and between institutions and states, and outside India
- Framework for faculty appraisal/faculty development scheme including training needs analysis and funding.

5. Policies and formal mechanisms for industry/academic collaboration, including, but not limited to:

- Industry investment in higher education (in kind, and funding); this may need national incentives/ support
- Experts from private industry serving as faculty and researchers at institutions and faculty serving in industry
- Industry providing training for students and awarding of credit for industry based training.

6. Professional development for faculty, institutional leaders and boards of governors to increase their capacity to assume increased responsibilities in autonomous institutions (quality assurance, curriculum development, and so forth)

7. Optimum utilization of resources, including, but not limited to:

- Sharing of faculty and other resources (laboratories, libraries) among institutions
- Use of technology for effective delivery of courses and to support research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Government regulations in the Universities must be lessened, so that the University independence and responsibility are intensified and academic results are taken on merit.



- New approaches and measures of financial control should be developed and direct intervention of the finance department in the financial management of Universities, should be closed.
- As the Colleges are the supporting resources of the Universities, a strong harmonization in their functioning is very essential.
- Absolute transparency should be retained in the functioning of academic organizations and other Governing bodies of the Universities. There is a strong necessity to evaluate the University Acts in different States and modify the same in reference to the new conditions and constraints being confronted by the Universities. New technologies should be employed for obtaining clerical effectiveness.
- Higher Education should be made advanced for community and economic growth of the country.
- Students' participation in University/College management should be encouraged.
- Political influence in the nomination of University teachers and administrators should be prevented.
- Establish deliverable policies for public benefit, which include a clear place for higher education
- While access to qualitative professional higher education needs to be further expanded at the same time equity must be ensured by extending financial and academic support to poor and marginalized sections of the society.
- In order to increase access ICTs aided teaching and learning modules should be developed.
- Sufficient training programmes for faculty members should be conducted to adopt new skills and expertise to develop learning systems relevant and contemporary to the requirements of the 21st century.
- Quality assurance is key to sustainability of any system. As such, higher education system involving all its stakeholders with appropriate regulatory mechanism should create conditions congenial enough for promotion of research, innovative and creative thoughts aiming to ensure high quality.



- International university networks and partnerships should be developed to promote high quality research and develop internationally competitive curricula and teaching practices and dissemination of innovative ideas.
- In view of dearth of public funds in a rapidly growing economy, higher education must be based on public-private partnerships model.
- Academic freedom both for teachers and students should be provided to realize academic excellence.
- Concerted efforts both at govt. and private level must be made to attract the best of the talents with a sound compensation package along with perks and amenities.

ROAD AHEAD

Considering both the multitude and the magnitude of the difficulties that Indian higher education faces, it would be easy to be overwhelmed by the problems and to despair of finding solutions. At the same time, given the tremendous potential of India's booming industry and technology and the considerable progress made in higher education and research in recent decades, it would also be easy to reach a state of exuberance and expect that, somehow, India will surmount these difficulties. Neither of these two reactions appears warranted on the basis of a sober assessment of the situation. The problems India faces in higher education and research are, as this paper and other analyses show, very real and very serious; they will not go away by themselves, nor are they amenable to easy and routine solutions. For them to be overcome seems to require not only massive rearrangements in both the provision and the utilization of public as well as private resources, but also profound and durable changes in institutional cultures inside and outside higher education.

At the same time, the gains to be derived from overcoming these problems and from moving boldly in the direction of an internationally competitive system of higher education and research are tremendous. Dr. Mashelkar's vision on India becoming "the world's number one knowledge production centre" is extraordinarily ambitious, but by no means beyond reach; for this vision to be achieved will require an unprecedented effort on the part of everybody concerned, especially if it is to be reached by as early as 2020.



All of the present problems notwithstanding, India has a number of assets that appear to bode well for living up to that challenge. Having built up a modern system of higher education and research virtually from scratch since independence has been a major achievement and should be a solid predictor of future growth. Furthermore, and especially for an outside observer, one of the most impressive aspects of the current situation in Indian higher education is the emergence of an extraordinarily lively and critical discourse on the further direction that the Indian system of higher education should take. This critical discourse, some of which has found its way into the present paper, is fully cognizant of the problems the system faces, but is also a very valuable source of ideas and proposals for change. It appears that, in many ways, the work of the National Knowledge Commission is aggregating this discourse into actionable proposals for India's body politic. The decisions that are going to be taken on these and similarly bold proposals are likely to hold the key to India's future as a centre of knowledge production.

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