

India on the Long Road to World-Class Higher Education System

¹Bashir Ahmad Joo

²Younis Ahmed Ghulam

³Sadaf Riyaz Wani

Abstract

The Covid -19 pandemic has created challenges that have further degraded India's quality of higher education. Analyzing historical trends and current data together, the authors warn that there is an urgent need for attention to higher education quality, poor infrastructure, lack of skilled human resources, methods or procedures of financial regulations, and specific regulations. The government needs to take urgent steps to boost educational spending and halt brain drain as lack of qualitative higher education cause brain drain and non-returning Indians.

Keywords: Quality Higher Education, Brain Drain, Covid-19, India

Higher Education worldwide has plenty of challenges with COVID-19 and the extended campus closures. Despite being the third-largest in the world, behind the United States and China, India does not have a world-class higher education system. According to the Education Department of MHRD, Higher Education can be defined in two ways; Education, which is gained after 12 years of formal education and followed for at least nine months. Education is pursued for at least three years after finishing ten years of schooling. It helps people ponder the fundamental economic, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues humanity is confronted with. It aids the country's development by disseminating specialized knowledge and skills. As a result, it is acknowledged as an essential survival component, and therefore it is at the top of the educational pyramid.

The genesis of the Indian higher education system may be linked to the British period. The Charter Act of 1813 was the very first step toward education being made an aim of the government and developing scientific knowledge in British India. The inaugural higher education institution

¹Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir, email: bjazra2000@yahoo.co.in

²Senior Research Fellow Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir
Email: younisahmed885@gmail.com (Author for correspondence)

³Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir
Email: sadaf3292@gmail.com

was established in Calcutta during 1817, which eventually became a presidency college in 1855 and a presidential university in 2010. The earliest university, formed in 1818 and granted university status in 1829, which is still in operation, is the Senate of Serampore College. The Wood dispatch in 1854 was the first governmental move addressing higher Education, and Lord Curzon was the first person to form a commission on university education in 1902. In 1913, there was an agreement on education policy, and the Sandler Commission (Calcutta University Commission) supported the separation of intermediate Education from colleges in 1917. It was an antecedent to the 10+2+3 system, which began in India in 1975 with the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE). The Abbot Wood Report (1937) suggested English as a medium of education at the tertiary level. The Sargent Report (1944), also known as the Post War Educational Development Scheme in India, advised setting up the University Grant Commission. The level of literacy was abysmally low during British control. After India's freedom, education was viewed as a vital aspect of the new environment's socio-cultural, technological, political, and economic advances.

The Indian government took various steps to strengthen and promote higher education post-independence. Over the course of seven decades after Independence, the education system of India has evolved gradually yet phenomenally. It can be seen from Table 1 that there was a literacy rate of 18% in 1951 and 77.7% in 2021. According to the report published by the National Survey of India, the Literacy Rate of India in 2011 was 69.30%, and in 2021 is 77.7 percent. There has been an increase of just 8.4% in the last decade compared to the previous census data.

Table 1. Literacy rates in India.

Year	Literacy rate
1951	18
1981	40.76359
1991	48.22207
2001	61.01456
2006	62.75447
2011	69.30256
2018	74.37299
2021	77.7

Source: data.worldbank.org.

Thus, the higher education system in post-independence India has evolved tremendously, with a national commitment to creating multiple universities, technical institutes, research institutions, and professional and non-professional colleges around the country to disseminate knowledge. Over the last 70 years, higher education in India has grown tremendously, with the Indian higher education system currently ranked third among the world's largest. Unfortunately, the Indian experience has shown that the expansion in the quantity of higher education has outpaced the increase in higher education quality. There has recently been a storm of criticism from many well-meaning sources criticizing the declining quality of higher education. India's over-regulated and under-funded higher education industry cannot provide the globally relevant and world-class higher education that the country so urgently requires.

India could not make the top 25 in the QS Higher Education System Strength Ranking still 2018. The USA topped the list with a score of 100 followed by the UK with 98.6. India ranked 26 with a score of 58.1. The QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings highlight the nations with the world's strongest higher education systems. Comparing national performance in four areas, the ranking is based on system strength, access, flagship institution performance, and economic context.

These four categories are outlined below.

System strength: How strong the higher education system is compared to the rest of the world. Each country is awarded a score based on the number of its institutions that are ranked 700 or above in the QS World University Rankings, divided by the average position of those institutions. The aim is to give an overall indication of each country's standing in the global ranking tables. India scored 62.7 in this category.

Access: Scores in this category are calculated based on the number of places available at universities ranked within the global top 500, divided by an indicator of population size. The specific figures used in this calculation are the total number of full-time equivalent students at universities in the top 500 of the QS World University Rankings, divided by the square root of the population. The aim is to give an indication of the chances of gaining a place at a world-class university for residents of the country in question. India scored 2.7 in this.

Flagship institution: The 'flagship' category assesses the performance of the country's leading institution within the global rankings. This is a normalized score based on the place each nation's top university occupies in the QS World University Rankings. This indicator is based on the

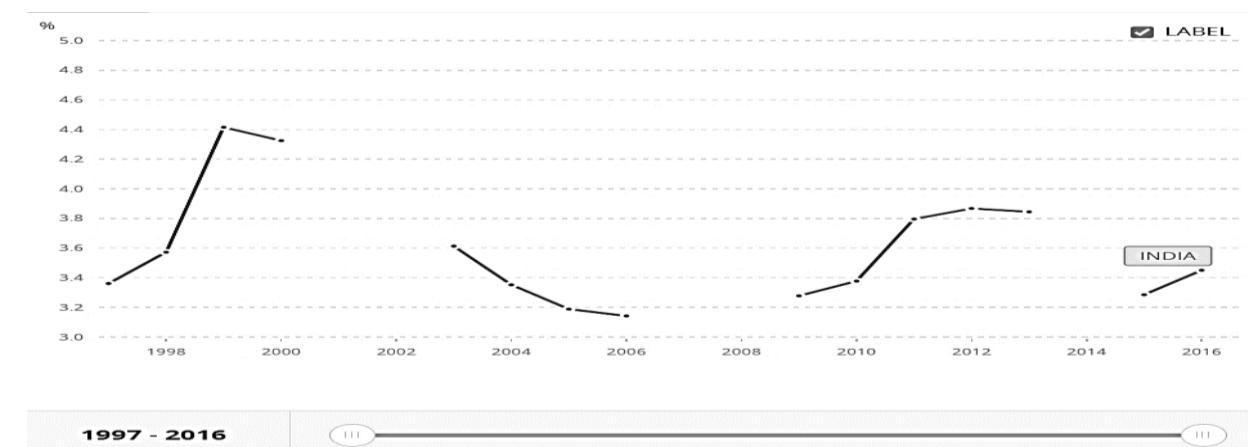
premise that the performance of a country's leading institution is a credit to the overall system, often resulting from national investment in developing a flagship institution to lead the way. In this category, India scored 68.8.

Economic context: The fourth and final indicator aims to assess the impact of national investment in higher Education by comparing each nation's financial situation to its performance in the international rankings. An indexed score is awarded for each university featured in the rankings (7 points for a university in the top 100, 6 points for 101-200, 5 points for 201-300, 4 for 301-400, 3 for 401-500, 2 for 501-600 and 1 for 601-700), and this is then factored against the GDP per capita for the country in question. India scored 98.4 in this.

"Voicing for the need of radical transformation in the Indian education system, Rohit Gajbhiye, Founder, Finance Peer, at World Economic Forum 2020, Davos, said India needs to address issues like quality higher education, poor infrastructure, lack of skilled manpower, and certain regulations."

These issues can be addressed by boosting educational spending and halting brain drain as Lack of qualitative higher education leads to brain drain and non-returning Indians. Even though the National Education Policy 2020 was an important document, it received very little attention in the Budget. The Kothari Commission's "Education and National Development" report (1964–1966) was a very progressive report that the NPEs of 1968 and 1986 followed. These emphasized the need to improve the quality of higher education and suggested allocating 6% of national income to Education. It's ironic, despite the fact that a 6% outlay was proposed nearly 50 years ago, India is still a long way from attaining that target, with current outlays not even touching 4% of GDP.

Figure 1. India's expenditure on Education as a percentage of GDP.



Source: data.worldbank.org

Figure 1 reveals that India's education spending has never touched 6 percent. For the last 70 years, it has averaged 3.5 percent spending on education. To meet the 6% GDP threshold, the education budget for 2022–23 should be double than that of the previous year.

As of 22.11.2021, India has 54 central universities, 442 state universities, 126 Deemed to be Universities, and 397 private universities, with a total of 1019 Universities, but among these, not a single university comes in the top 100 universities list of Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings and QS World University Rankings.

QS World University Rankings – Methodology: The QS World University Rankings continue to enjoy a remarkably consistent methodological framework; compiled using six simple metrics that they believe effectively capture university performance. Thus, universities continue to be evaluated according to the following six metrics:

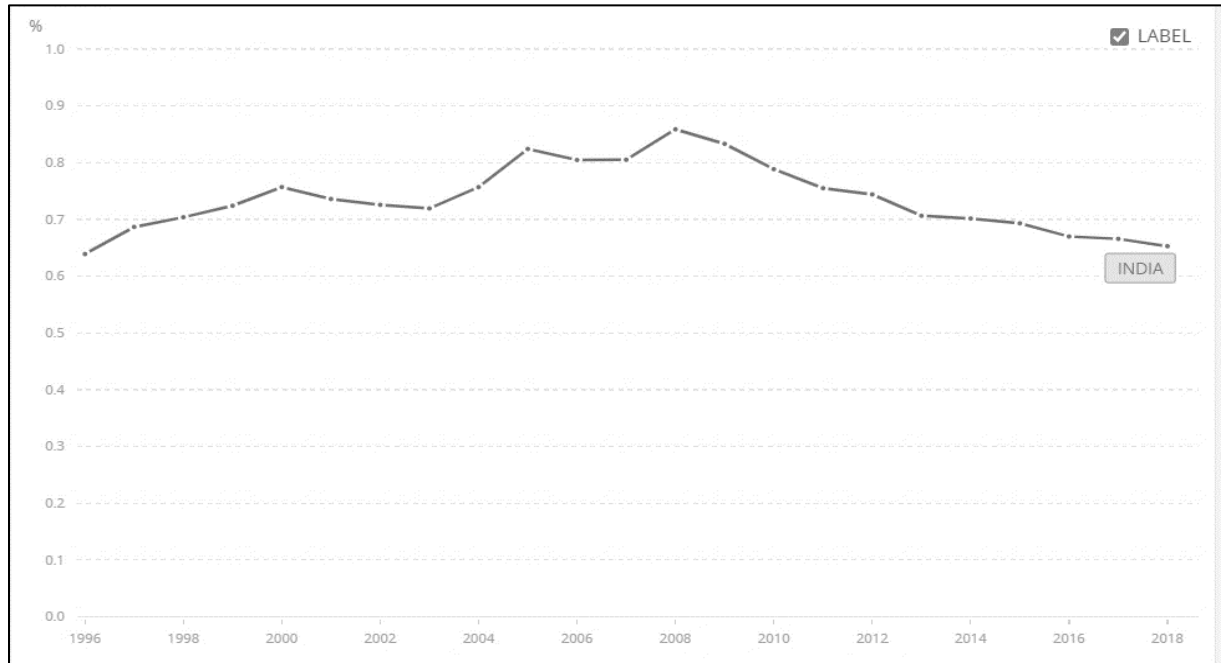
1. Academic Reputation (40%)
2. Employer Reputation (10%)
3. Faculty/Student Ratio (20%)
4. Citations per faculty (20%)
5. International Faculty Ratio (5%)
6. International Student Ratio (5%)

Indian universities lag behind in these metrics and could not even make a place among the top 100 universities for just once.

Thus, India has failed to develop world-class universities in both the private and public sectors. There isn't a single Indian university among the world's top 100 Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings and QS World University Rankings. Aside from prestigious universities, India is home to many institutions established simply for the aim of profit. Quality assurance mechanisms in higher education have failed to prevent malpractice. Higher education enrolment is not sustainable. Aiming for a 50 percent gross enrolment ratio in higher Education is a desirable goal compared to the current rate of 25.8 percent in higher education. The most widely used statistic to quantify country-level R&D investments is gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a proportion of GDP (GDP). India is a low spender compared to the developed countries and emerging economic powers of East Asia. It is also the lowest spender among BRICS nations. It can be seen from figure 2 that Total investment in research & innovation in India declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.6% in 2018. Nearly 0.7 percent of the GDP was spent

every year on research and development, including strengthening science and technology infrastructure and this graph shows a downward trend. A brief assessment of the funding to important R&D entities in the recently proposed budgets show persistent stagnation. This does not speak well for the future. All these issues necessitate a prompt response.

Figure 2. India's R&D expenditure (% of GDP)



Source: *data.worldbank.org*

The authors believe that GOI should focus on improving the quality of higher education by focusing on areas where they scored very low. Also, National spending on public higher education must be increased, and new methods or procedures of financial regulations should be devised. The changes and modifications that NEP 2020 demands certainly require additional resources. In the absence of a credible quality assurance process, institutions must step up and adopt stricter self-regulation criteria. Greater autonomy is required for Indian universities as the university's administrative system which was built prior to Independence, appears to be in place.

Conclusion

Higher education allows people to think about the world's most pressing economic, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues. It aids in the country's development by disseminating specialized knowledge and skills. Literacy was at an all-time low during British rule. Education was seen as a critical component of the new environment's socio-cultural, technological, political, and economic advancements shortly after India's independence. The Indian government took

several steps after independence to strengthen and promote higher education. In the last decade, there has only been an increase of 8.4 percent when compared to previous census data (2011-2021). India's higher education system has grown tremendously over the last 70 years, and it now ranks third among the world's largest. Unfortunately, the expansion of higher education quantity has outpaced the progress in higher education quality in India. India's over-regulated and under-funded higher education industry is incapable of providing the globally relevant and world-class higher education that the country so desperately needs. Quality higher education, poor infrastructure, a lack of skilled manpower, and certain regulations are all issues that India must address. These problems can be addressed by increasing educational spending and halting brain drain and other measures. Brain drain and non-returning Indians are caused by a lack of high-quality higher education. These emphasized the importance of improving higher education quality and the authors suggested allocating 6% of national income to education. Even though a 6 percent outlay was proposed nearly 50 years ago, India is still a long way from meeting that goal, with current outlays barely exceeding 4% of GDP. The education budget for the 2022–23 is expected to double from the previous year to meet the 6% GDP target. It is ironical to not to see any Indian university among the world's top 100 Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings and QS World University Rankings. India is a low spender compared to the developed countries and emerging economic powers of East Asia. It is also the lowest spender among BRICS nations. National spending on public higher education must be increased, and new methods or procedures of financial regulations should be devised.

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