

**Quality in Higher Education-An Analysis of Under Graduate Education System in India:
A Macro Study**

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Higher Education not only means to generate larger personal and social wealth; it is also a means to intellectual, cultural and aesthetic development. The raw materials of higher educational institutions are its teachers, researchers and its curriculum. The service the institution provides is total pastoral care to its students through learning facilities such as libraries and computer facilities. The products of educational institutions are its students and the competencies that they acquire should be either employment destinations or the knowledge generated by research. Institutes of higher education through their curriculum are expected to provide knowledge, know-how, wisdom and character to the students through Quality Education.

1.2.The overall scenario of higher education in India does not seem to match with global quality standards. Educational institutions often understand that quality enhancement is determined by their internal sources which includes qualified faculties, number of books and journals in the library, an ultra-modern campus, and size of the endowments etc. or by its definable and assessable output i.e. efficient use of resources, highly satisfied and employable graduates. This view of determining quality in higher education, popularly termed as the ‘Value Addition Approach’, does not measure the competencies students develop through the course offered. The competencies are recall, understanding and problem solving.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- Traditional education and modern education in India with special reference to under graduate students.
- Aspects of present day undergraduate education.
- What is the need of the hour?
- Comparison of Indian education system with western education system.

3. Research Methodology:

The present study is a descriptive macro level study based on secondary data collected Economic and Political Weekly, and Economic Times and other newspapers.

4. Traditional education and modern education in India with special reference to under graduate students: Knowledge can be imparted to the students by various methods. These methods are just tools and the effectiveness of these tools depends on the teacher. How well and smoothly the teacher seeks attention, creates interest and involves students in the teaching and learning process, determines the quality of imparting knowledge.

4.1 Traditional Teaching Methods: In the pre technology education context, the teacher is the sender or the source, the educational material is the information and the student is the receiver of the information. In terms of delivery medium, the educator can deliver the message via the 'chalk –and-talk' method and overhead project transparencies. Chalk and talk method is till date a popular technique and it has been used for decades as an educational strategy in all institutions of learning. Basically the teacher controls the instructional process, the content is delivered to the entire class and the teacher tends to emphasize factual knowledge. In other words, the teacher delivers the lecture content and the students listen to the lecture. Thus the learning mode tends to be passive and the learners play little part in their learning process. In such a lecture students assume purely passive role and their concentration fades off after 15-20 minutes.

4.2 Modern Teaching Methods: Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has helped to expand access to education, strengthening the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, thereby raising educational quality, making teaching & learning into an engaging, active process connected with real life. Nevertheless, the 21st century has already welcomed such ICT tools that may cover up the maximum of the time, space and activities in the classroom.

4.2.1 Besides, ICT can also improve learning outcomes. By incorporating ICT in education changes can be introduced in both teaching-learning methods and in content. Students can enjoy learning actively, such as by bringing the outside world into the classrooms, or by interacting with peers, experts and others. Furthermore, the student will have the opportunity to learn different skills. Information and Communication technology can motivate and engage students in ways not previously possible in new dimensions in: exploring and experimenting, thinking and working creatively, reflecting and planning, and creating new learning possibilities, and ultimately achieving excellence. Use of ICT can transform learning. ICT can not only make teaching and learning more effective and efficient but can also create new learning environment and extend the depth and nature of learning.

4.2.2 ICT aids in active learning. Active use of it in various activities helps learners learn as they do and, whenever appropriate, work on real life situations, making learning less abstract and more relevant. In this way, in contrast to memorization-based learning, ICT-enhanced learning promotes increased learner engagement. ICT also aids in collaborative learning. ICT-supported learning encourages interaction and co-operation among students, teachers, and experts regardless of where they are. Apart from modeling real-world interactions, ICT-supported learning provides learners the opportunity to work with people from different cultures, thereby helping to enhance learners' teaming and communicative skills as well as their global awareness.

Hence a paradigm shift from 'Chalk and Talk' method to Information and Communication technology should be the prime concern of all the educational institutions to enhance the quality of teaching learning process in order to compete with the world.

5. Aspects of Present day Undergraduate Education: Higher Education not only means to generate larger personal and social wealth; it is also a means to intellectual, cultural and aesthetic development. Students now days enter the higher education institutions with the mindset that they have to get back the money which they have invested in higher education. As a result the economic principle of demand and supply works in higher education system too. The system of higher education itself is more expensive and public consensus is growing that 'higher education' is a private goods primarily benefiting the individuals. The various aspects covered by the authors are issues at system level, financing higher education and challenges relating to teaching methodology, research methodology and the other important aspects related to imparting education.

5.1 Issues at system level

There is still not much of a realization that the development and management of an educational institution needs professional preparation and approach. We have developed a large system of higher education including professional education. Unfortunately, institutions have been established more often on the basis of ad hoc decisions rather than on the basis of systematic plan and design. There is widespread criticism against higher education. Political leaders, administrators, parents, students and even teachers criticize it very strongly. Strangely every one vies with the other in condemning it, while no one seems to own the responsibility. This much maligned higher education system keeps on expanding in India. We have been establishing in the country on an average two new colleges every three days and nearly 5 to 6 new universities every year. This development was not based on any national design or state plan. The expansion is not adequately supported in terms of funds. The UGC has not been consulted in advance. Its concurrence and contribution have always been sought after establishing the institutions. Even the Universities which have to give affiliation to the new colleges are approached only for affiliation but not for any advice on the wisdom of establishing these institutions.

5.2 Role of the Government

We must realize and accept that planning and management of education must be entrusted to a specialists and teachers rather than the generalists administrators, who have neither the skill nor the will to innovate. What we need is the development of a new education system. It's not merely administration and management, but innovation, experimentation and development. The broad and comprehensive education of the emerging future cannot now be the responsibility of the ministers and departments of education and universities. The emergence of a new pattern of education needs a wider participation of many wings of the society. The teachers, students, parents, employers, potential users, must all be involved effectively in the mission of educational development. It is important that the plan for education and its development also address the crucial issues of: Content of education and method of education. An important challenge in the higher education sector is to bring about reforms not only in the institutions of higher learning but also in the regulatory structures of the higher education system.

5.3 Private partnership

With the public funding being no more in a position to take-up the challenging task of expansion and diversification of higher education system in the country to meet the continuously growing demand at present, there is little option other than bringing in private initiatives in a massive way to meet the various challenges. The deregulation mechanism of controls started with granting of 'Autonomous status' to identified colleges in the 1970s. Some of these colleges received 'Deemed to be University' status in later years. There has been the strong emergence of for profit educational institutions, principally in the areas of technical and professional education. The private institutions grant degrees/ diplomas by the All India Councils, or by the respective universities to which they are affiliated. Private recognized institutions, which do not seek government funding are expected to adhere to minimum standards but are subject to fewer regulations with respect to fee and admissions etc. Private unaided education has grown rapidly since the 1990s and are mainly governed by commercial motive. .

5.4 Research and higher education

Knowledge has always been a key factor in economic development. Innovations through investment in R&D have the potential to transform the economy in a very significant way. Though all universities are expected to have research focus both on teaching and research, data on doctorates, only few institutions have real research focus. There is a serious and growing concern about the quality of PhDs in the country. The requirement of a Ph.D. for appointment and promotion of teachers had undesirable consequences. The fact that the higher number of Ph. Ds are awarded not by the most reputed universities suggest widely varying standards of quality control for the Ph. D. degree. There is need to improve the quality of doctoral education.

Hence, what the researchers infer is that:

In our country, undergraduate education is so unsatisfactory that unless a student cannot afford to join a college, he feels obliged to do so. In other words, undergraduate education is some kind of compensatory education. In this sense, what is learnt in college is an attempt to learn what should have been learnt in school. This inevitably affects the quality of learning at the undergraduate level. As was noted by the Education Commission, as early as 1966, when a degree holder goes to the developed countries he is not treated at par but considered to have done only part of the degree course (Ref. to the 16 year of education system abroad). Doesn't the same trend continue today? In our view, there are manifold reasons to this.

1) More than 50 % of the colleges in our country are established not always because there is demand but for all kinds of other reasons, mainly political gain. In plain words, given the parameters of today's educational landscape, the real demand at the undergraduate level, especially of arts, science and commerce is degrading.(Ref. to the closure of arts and science streams in many colleges).

2) The initiation of self financed courses like BAF/ BFM/ BMS/ BMM etc. Although these may be started with the aim of providing employment opportunities, do they? Or is it the commercialization of education at a macro level?

3) Although there are undergraduate colleges in every nook and corner of the country, the babysitting function of the colleges has not been changed. The majority of the students joining them are neither well motivated nor academically inclined. They are not qualified enough to take up the jobs nor jobs are easily available for them. In this situation, the dictum 'postpone the evil day' comes into play with respect to entry into the job market and if at all entered to sustain in the competitive global market. This is the grim reality of undergraduate education system in India.

To remodel it, first of all, the different stages of education should be clearly defined :

At the Primary level, the basics should be imparted, at the secondary, the scope of studies should be widened, at the higher secondary, one should prepare for entry into the university or one should acquire the terminal capabilities to prepare for his entry into life and at the undergraduate level, one should acquire a certain depth of knowledge in the chosen field of study. But the problem in our country is that these distinctions are not clearly marked out.

Hence the need of the hour is

1) The choice of course available should be wider enough to cater to the need of Indian population and combination of disciplines should be permitted so that everyone studies according to his inclination.

Unfortunately, in India students are provided with a few packages of courses which does not take into account either the variety of interests the students may have, or the large variations required for different opportunities of employment, entrepreneurship or research.

2) Another very important need is to shift the emphasis from “teaching” to “learning” which means that an individual must be given freedom to learn in his own way instead of inexorably pursuing the exposition of a discipline to a faceless class.

Hence as W.B Yeats rightly says:

“Education is not just the filling of the bucket but it is the lightning of fire”

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