Indian Higher Education System in The Recent Times

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Abstract

Casting off the shackles of geographical boundaries of the highly inward oriented higher education system since Independence, the New Education Policy has set the stage to take India to the global stage, it long deserved. This has been the first time in the education history of India, that the UGC and the government has taken a bold initiative to integrate Indian higher education system with the international education and making meticulous efforts by evolving implementation strategies and regulations to make it world class. Higher education in India remained highly inward oriented despite several post-independence reforms in education sector. In terms of number of educational institutions, India has the world's largest higher education system with about 1,000 universities and 40,000 colleges whereas it ranks third in terms of size and diversity, but its presence in the international education system has been abysmally below its true potential that remains unexplored. These include higher education in the fields of technical, medical, law, forestry, etc. The present situation of higher education system in India is complex and challenging.

Key Words: Indian Higher Education System; Academic Institutions; Graduates Enrolment; Employability Skills; Education System

1. Introduction

Casting off the shackles of geographical boundaries of the highly inward oriented higher education system since Independence, the New Education Policy has set the stage to take India to the global stage, it long deserved. This has been the first time in the education history of India, that the UGC and the government has taken a bold initiative to integrate Indian higher education system with the international education and making meticulous efforts by evolving implementation strategies and regulations to make it world class. Higher education in India remained highly inward oriented despite several post-independence reforms in education sector. In terms of number of educational institutions, India has the world's largest higher education system with about 1,000 universities and 40,000 colleges whereas it ranks third in terms of size and diversity, but its presence in the international education system has been abysmally below its true potential that remains unexplored. These include higher education in the fields of technical, medical, law, forestry, etc. The present situation of higher education system in India is complex and challenging. With the increase in population, there has been surge in the number of students seeking admission in these universities and colleges for higher education. In the field of higher education in India, there was the time when population of the country was much lesser and higher education was accessible to all and everyone. Reviving Higher Education in India Hindi India has seen a dramatic increase in the capacity of its higher education sector in the last two decades. Enrolment in higher education has increased four-fold since 2001. With a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 26.3% (AISHE 2018-19), we are close to achieving the target of 32% GER by 2020. However, many important questions such as the quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employment of graduates merit further examination. Figure 1 explains the growth of higher education in India.

Table 1: Higher Education Expansion in India

Year	Number of Universities	Number of Colleges	Enrolment (millions)	GER (%)
1950-51	27	578	0.2	-
1960-61	49	1,819	0.6	1.5
1970-71	102	3,277	2.0	4.2
1980-81	132	4,577	2.8	4.7
1990-91	185	6,627	4.4	5.9
2001-02	260	11,146	8.8	8.1
2011-12	621	34,908	28.5	19.4
2016-17	864	40,026	35.7	25.2
2017-18	903	39,050	36.6	25.8
2018-19	993	39,931	37.4	26.3

Source: Reviving Higher Education in India (2019).

The admission of the private sector in the 1980s indicated a policy shift. After independence, the growth in higher education was mostly through public institutions. The focal point of the government was on instituting high excellence institutions, rather than rising access to higher education. For instance, the Radhakrishnan led University Education Commission (1949) required to boundary the figure of students in universities to 3000 and colleges to 1500.4 Similarly, the Education Commission (1964-65) suggested a planned expansion of higher education while imposing stricter norms for entry.

2. Higher Education Position In India

Despite the increasing number of professional colleges, three-year degrees in arts, commerce and sciences remain the most popular programmes as evidenced by high enrolment rates. India has seen a rapid expansion in the higher education sector since 2001. There has been a dramatic rise in the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and enrolment has increased four-fold. Despite the increased access to higher education in India, challenges remain. Low employability of graduates, poor quality of teaching, weak governance, insufficient funding, and complex regulatory norms continue to plague the sector. India's gross enrolment ratio (GER) in 2018-19 was 26.3% but still far from meeting the Ministry of Human Resource Development's target of achieving 32% GER by 2022. Table 2 explains the some of the popular courses taken by the students in India

Table 2: Top 10 Popular Programmes Offered In India and Students Enrolment Details for the Academic Year 2018-19

Programme	Number of Students Enrolled	Percentage of Total Enrolment (%)
B.A.-Bachelor of Arts	93,49,287	25.90%
B.Sc.-Bachelor of Science	46,80,159	12.96%
B.Com.-Bachelor of Commerce	40,30,325	11.16%
B.Tech.-Bachelor of Technology	21,25,043	5.89%
B.E.-Bachelor of Engineering	16,45,906	4.56%
B.A.(Hons)-Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	16,39,796	4.54%
M.A.-Master of Arts	15,12,814	4.19%

B.Ed.-Bachelor of Education	12,23,858	3.39%
M.Sc.-Master of Science	6,97,217	1.93%
M.B.A.- Master of Business Administration	5,88,833	1.63%

Source: Reviving Higher Education in India (2019).

As the government evaluates proposals to reform the University Grants Commission and implement the recently proposed Draft New Education Policy 2019, this Brookings India report takes a wider view of reforms necessary to respond to challenges facing higher education in India today. It examines the capacity of HEIs with respect to students as well as teachers; governance and accountability; funding and affordability; research and innovation; and, regulatory regime, to create a globally relevant and competitive ecosystem that can produce employable graduates and sophisticated knowledge workers. The exponential growth of the sector has been due to the increased demand for higher education. The higher education sector has grown across all levels and disciplines. However, broad trends and patterns in enrolment, graduation and placement suggest that access to higher education continues to remain a challenge, especially at the postgraduate level. According to the AISHE 2018-19, 264 diverse programmes are accessible by HEIs in India across all stages. However, 10 programmes account for more than76% of all enrolments (Table 2). Of these, just three programmes- Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) and Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) make up50% of all enrolments. These 'traditional' programmes are three-year-long courses, usually run by affiliated colleges. There is limited scope for innovation in terms of curriculum in traditional degrees as the syllabus is prescribed by the affiliating university. The university also conducts a common exam for all its affiliated colleges. Figure 1 explains the level wise enrolment percentage.

Figure 3: Level-wise enrolment as percentage of total enrolment
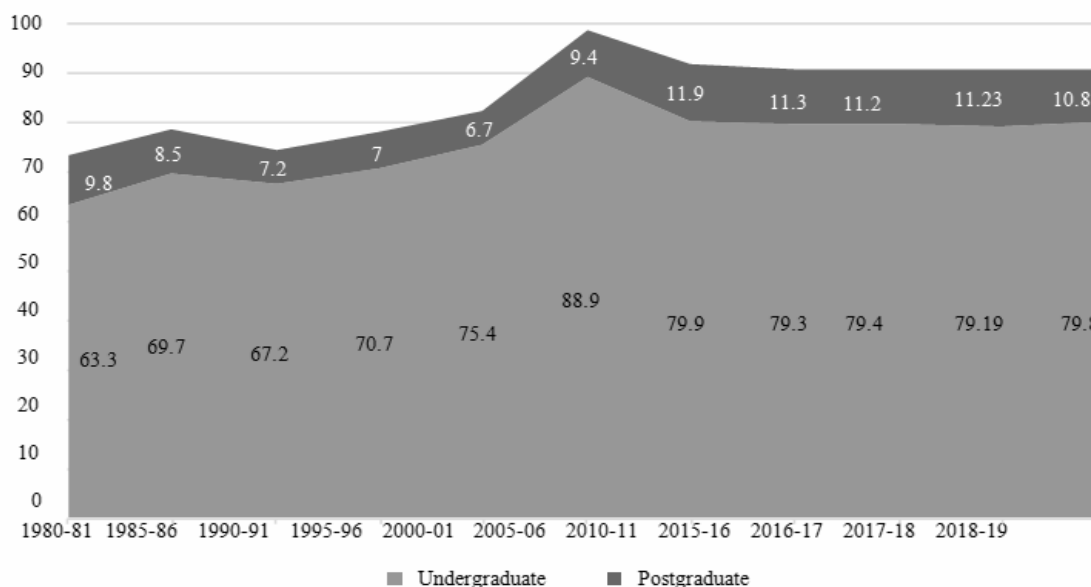
Source: Reviving Higher Education in India (2019).

Postgraduate enrolments have added doubled since 2009-10. However, apprentice programmes make up a clear majority of enrolments in India. According to the AISHE (2018-19), undergraduate enrolments account for close to 80% of all enrolments in India. With around four million students enrolled, postgraduate programmes are a distant second at 11%. as shown below, the proportion of postgraduate enrolments has seen a slight increase in the last decade. As the trend in undergraduate programmes, the Master of Arts (4.1%), Master of Sciences (1.9%) and Master of

Business Administration (MBA) (1.6%) are among the most popular programmes at the postgraduate level. Interestingly, the MBA is the third most popular postgraduate programme, even above Commerce (1.1%). The popularity of MBA programmes can be attributed to the higher rate of employment of MBA graduates. According to placement data from the AICTE, placement rates for MBAs (40%) are among the highest. It is comparable to or higher than many popular engineering disciplines. At the postgraduate level, general programmes and those with high chances of employment are the most popular. Research degrees account for a very small proportion of enrolments. This is borne out by the fact that the proportion of PhD enrolments to total enrolment has fallen in the last decade. Though the number of PhD enrolments has doubled in the last five years, its share in total enrolment has actually fallen.

Table.3 PhD Enrolment Detail between 1980- 2019

Year	Total Number of PhDs Enrolled	Percentage of Total Enrolment
1980-81	26,820	0.9
1985-86	27,020	0.7
1990-91	34,230	0.7
1995-96	38,520	0.6
2000-01	48,050	0.5
2005-06	70,579*	0.64*
2010-11	77,798	0.28
2015-16	1,26,451	0.37
2016-17	1,41,037	0.4
2017-18	1,58,363	0.4
2018-19	1,69,170	0.45

Source:
Reviving Higher Education in India (2019).

The disparity in undergraduate and postgraduate enrolment is due to a lack of capacity in Indian HEIs. According to the AISHE (2018-19), only 34.9% of all HEIs run postgraduate programmes and just 2.5% of HEIs run PhD programmes. Further, 34.8% of all colleges in India run a single programme, and close to 83% of these are privately managed. In addition to this, the poor quality of postgraduate education in India is illustrated by the increasing number of Indian students pursuing postgraduate programmes abroad.

According to 2016 estimates, 2,78,383 Indian students were pursuing tertiary education in other countries, almost double the number from 2005-06.35 This meant that Indian students studying abroad accounted for 1% of India's total enrolment. However, a clear majority of Indian students abroad are studying at the postgraduate level. Overseas Indian students accounted for almost 7% of postgraduate enrolment in India. This is despite the fact that higher education in many of the top destination countries is far more expensive than in India. The low rate of postgraduate enrolment points to a serious need to improve both the quality and capacity of postgraduate programmes in India

Given the low proportion of students that go on to pursue postgraduate and doctoral education, a shortage of qualified teachers is a further problem that is plaguing even the best universities in India. High entry barriers, poor incentive structures, stringent tenure rules and rigid promotion practices lead to a limited supply of faculty. Faculty shortage, low inputs available for research and inadequate industry linkages amplify the existing limited uptake of good quality independent research in HEIs across all disciplines. We find that while countries like the United States, China and South Korea have invested in research to build a skilled, productive and flexible labour force, HEIs in India, in contrast, lack the culture of independent academic research. The higher education sector in India is crippled due to the lack of financial, academic and administrative autonomy granted to institutions. Overall, this has resulted in the poor quality of institutions as well as education. Under the affiliating university model, the supervisory authority for most colleges is the university or a government authority; both lack the capacity to effectively regulate their constituent colleges and hold them accountable. In contrast, autonomous HEIs are at an advantage since they have the power to constitute their own academic councils and make decisions on academic matters. In the last three decades, the government has taken a step back from its role as the primary funder of higher education. Union funding for government and government-aided HEIs is skewed in favour of central universities, and state governments spend a lot more than the central government on higher education. While, there is little to no data on how the higher education sector is funded, we do know that household expenditure on higher education is now the biggest source of funding. Private HEIs are funded almost entirely by student fees. Research suggests that the average tuition fee for an engineering degree from a private institution is almost twice as that of a public institution, while private HEIs account for three-fourths of all enrolments. Limited assessment and accreditation capacity of the NAAC and NBA has been a significant barrier in linking the performance of an institution to autonomy and funding decisions. Thus far, NAAC has retained the exclusive power to accredit HEIs, allowing corruption and profiteering to creep into the sector. Several proposals, committees and draft policies in the last decade have suggested the need to revamp the University Grants Commission in order to resolve the numerous roadblocks in an over-regulated regime in the Indian higher education sector. The distribution of functions, roles and responsibilities among several agencies and providers has inhibited innovation and creativity, and led to issues with accreditation of HEIs, their autonomy and inadequate funding. Some recent measures for instance, granting Institution of Eminence status to select HEIs, enactment of IIM Bill 2017, many proposals made under the DNEP-19 demonstrates that these issues have been acknowledged and reforming the regulatory regime is non-negotiable.

3.Graduation and Employment

The increasing enrolment in higher education means that a greater number of students are graduating from HEIs in India, which in turn implies that an increasing number of graduates are entering the workforce. However, given that most students pursue three-year programmes, it is not easy for them to enter the job market. We discuss some of the challenges associated with the current pattern of graduation and employment below.

3.1Graduation

Across all programmes, the average pass percentage for a student appearing in exams in India is 74.3%. Pass percentages for the top 10 programmes by the number of graduating students are listed below. As in the case of enrolments, the top 10 graduating programmes account for 78% of all graduates. In general, science and technology programmes have a higher pass percentage as compared to other disciplines. In accordance with their enrolment rates, almost 50% of the graduates are from three-year programmes. The total pool of graduating students across all disciplines and levels in 2018-19 was 9.09 million. However, the organised sector of the economy is estimated to be around 50 million. As we see in the next section, many of the graduates for three-year programmes end up working in the unorganised sector of the economy.

3.2 Employment

Though India has one of the largest education systems in the world, its contribution to the workforce is only marginal. According to one estimate, only 10% of India's workforce is educated up to the tertiary level.43 The organised sector, which most graduates expect to enter, makes up only 15% of the market.44 In this section, we explore two issues in relation to the employment of graduates. First is the employment of these graduates in the organised sector. Second is the question of employability of the graduates produces by Indian HEIs.

Table 4 Pass Percentages of Top 10 programmes (2017-18)

Programme	Number Appeared	Number Passed	Pass Percentage
B.A.-Bachelor of Arts	26,48,205	18,63,049	70.35
B.Sc.-Bachelor of Science	12,85,737	9,53,586	74.16
B.Com.-Bachelor of Commerce	12,53,419	8,91,942	71.16
M.A.-Master of Arts	7,69,849	5,80,637	75.42
Diploma	7,51,729	5,07,626	67.52
B.E.-Bachelor of Engineering	5,04,931	4,25,156	84.2
B.Ed.-Bachelor of Education	5,16,576	4,17,965	80.91
B.Tech.-Bachelor of Technology	5,06,012	3,93,046	77.67
B.A.(Hons)-Bachelor of Arts (Honors)	3,88,660	3,10,277	79.83
M.Sc.-Master of Science	3,29,139	2,49,853	75.91

Source: Reviving Higher Education in India (2019).

3.3 Employment Rate of Graduates

Three-year programmes account for half of all Indian graduates. However, the training in these courses is very general. Traditionally, graduates from these programmes applied for government jobs.45 However, since the growth in enrolment has far outpaced the increase in government jobs46, they turn to the private sector for employment. Unlike technical colleges, only a few elite three-year colleges have placement cells that foster closer linkages between the institution and industry, leaving graduates with no obvious pathways to enter the job market. It is difficult to assess the level of unemployment for graduates of three-year degree programmes as these colleges do not record placement data. However, statistics from employment exchanges are a useful indicator.47 In 2013, there were 9 million graduates who had signed up on employment exchanges around the country. Of these, close to 8 million were graduates of four programmes viz., Arts (3.7 million), Science (1.7 million), Commerce (1.3 million) and Education (1.38 million). In total, graduates from the four programmes accounted for 89% of all registrations in employment exchanges in India. Certainly, job exchanges are one of the many platforms available to job seekers. But the fact that only 3,49,000 job seekers were placed in 2014 suggests that the unemployment rate among three-year graduates is quite high. As a result, many of the graduates from three-year programmes end up working in the unorganised sector for lesser pay in non- permanent jobs. Technical programmes, on the other hand, are popular based on the perception that graduates of these programmes find employment more easily. Colleges often advertise their placement rates to attract prospective students. Students also pay a premium to attend such colleges. However, data from the AICTE suggests that the placement rates in

these institutions are not very high. Of the 1.84 million enrolled students, only 33% (6,15,539) students were placed in 2016-17. It must be noted that placement data only captures those students who find employment through the college placement cell. It does not account for students who find jobs through other means and those who pursue further education. The latter is an increasingly popular choice but is only a small fraction of the total number of graduates. The placement-to-enrolment percentage is also not an accurate measure as it does not account for dropouts. Another estimate places the total unemployment rate of educated engineers at 48%. In both general and technical courses, the unemployment rate is quite high. The Employment-Unemployment survey notes that the unemployment rate increases with the level of education in India. The survey also finds that this is because graduates cannot find work commensurate to their education and salary expectations.52 Graduates may also have the economic wherewithal to remain unemployed in search of a suitable job as opposed to those with lesser education.

4. Problems Existing In Indian Higher Education System

The growth rate of India in the last two decades can directly attribute to the higher education system. If India wants to greater growth, it must transform its universities and other higher technical education institution to world class institutions, and then its higher education system must be reformed. Since, the country must safeguard the interests of young researchers, besides providing a strong platform for research and ensure permanent appointments for faculty members. Thus the following are some of the problems still existing in the Indian higher education system.

4.1 Lesser Enrolment Ratio

There is a huge gap between those who move out from school and who enroll in higher education system, which is really needed to be bridged. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is around 19 percent which 6 per cent lower than the world average and it is 50 per cent lesser than countries such as Australia and the US. India has the largest population of young people (100 million) between 17 to 19. When around 19 % students enroll into higher education institutes which translates to 20 million, which very low.

4.2 One Ordinary Stage

In India, apart from UGC (University Grants Commission) there are several regulatory bodies like AICTE, MCI, BCI, NCTE and those under state governments. These individual bodies move in different paths, creating various hurdles like exams, teaching methods for students. So we need to bring all important regulatory bodies on a common platform and develop a common understanding and strategy for managing the change.

4.3 Lack of Research Centric Approach

Most of the Indian higher education system lacks strong teaching-learning process and research. That is the reason why no higher education institution of India figures in the global top 200 higher education institutes around the world. Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore, which was in the 201-250 band in 2016, has slipped into the 251-300 band. According to World University Rankings–which ranks the top 1,000 universities from 77 countries – performance of Indian centres of learning has deeply deteriorated. Apart from IISc, The Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur and Indian Institute of Technology Madras have also dropped by at least one band.

4.4 Lack of Good Faculty

Shortage of quality faculty is proving to be a great stumbling block in the transformation of higher education in India. According to a government report, there is a massive need for expansion in

higher education; but there is also a lack of deserving Ph.D. candidates for faculty positions in the higher education. This has created a shortage of almost 54 percent in the faculty talent pool in higher education; such a deficiency will greatly prove to be a stumbling block, which mainly due to the bad decisions taken by policymakers, bureaucrats, and university administrators.

4.5 Lack of New Teaching Methods

The Indian higher education system has been following lecture drive method for several years. This has turned ineffective and not sufficient in many areas. Besides, there is a lack of teacher's learning and development areas need which is should be in the form educating them. There are no approaches like mentoring, spot visits, practical educational tours and involvement in research projects with peers. Finally, one need to change the teacher's training curriculum along with content, subject and methodology. Teachers must be encouraged take short duration professional training courses, which could help to strengthen the teacher's learning and development areas. Finally, there is no syllabus for integrating development concepts like emotional competencies, life skills and info-savvy skills. etc. Education institutions often lack the emphasis for pointing out on the learning outcomes than content teaching. Many institutions never take the initiative to collaborate or participate with international institutes in order to get the exposure of digital learning methods or technologies.

4.6 Increases in Profit Making Institutions

Though private player in the higher education contributes significantly to the growth of the sector, the profit intent of these institutions has threatened the very basic foundation of social development goal. Many private players who are politicians, realtors, businessmen/women mint huge money by creating educational institutions, which had made us to say that no secret that the education industry has long lost its noble cause and is more of a business. This greatly harmed the higher education system.

4.7 Government Initiatives for the Issues

The government has taken a number of initiatives to tackle the reduce the demand supply gap in school education. It has been proposed to set up another 6,000 schools at the block level as model schools to benchmark excellence. Of these, 2000 will be set up under Public Private Partnership. Besides, a new proposal by the Human Resource Development Ministry has been put forward to replace the University Grants Commission, which is the governing body for all the colleges and universities. The new Higher Education Commission of India will also govern the functioning of the universities and colleges but it would give a special power of acting as 'self-governing' bodies.

5. Steps Required To Take To Promote Quality Higher Education

The present situation of higher education system in India is complex and challenging. With the increase in population, there has been surge in the number of students seeking admission in these universities and colleges for higher education. In the field of higher education in India, there was the time when population of the country was much lesser and higher education was accessible to all and everyone.

5.1 High Cut-off Rate

Students find a staggeringly high cut-off percentage for admission such as 80%, 85% even 90% in some subjects in prestigious universities and colleges. This again is a grim scenario, causing distress disappointment even leading to deep depression among the admission seekers. Such situation

affects the mental condition of the students. However, it is true that only the deserving should seek admission and granted admission.

5.2 Diversified Streams for Higher Education

The streams for higher education have been diversified in a large way. There are several options for the admission seekers, but qualifications and competitions at every stage are to be presented and faced.

5.3 Loan Schemes

For the brilliant-poor, there should be educational-loans schemes by the banks, which should be available after due scrutiny of qualifications and means, repayable in easy instalments or even after getting duly employed. Many banks have come up with education loan schemes for students.

5.4 Limited Stay

Students at the Universities should be allowed to stay as students only for limited period of study and research period. Beyond it, none should be allowed to stay after post-graduation. Professional students, who just want to stay on as they have nothing better to do, turn into student leaders, indulge in politics, become active members of some political party, contest union elections and ultimately become a law and order problem for the administration. Such disoriented students have no place in a university or a college.

5.5 Role of Teachers

Here again the final onus falls on teachers. They, by their precept as well as by their example of uprightness and devotion to duty should become the real torch bearers for the student community and win regard and reverence from them. That alone can place the University or the college campus above narrow gains.

5.6 Private Coaching

Private coaching has become a wide-spread malady among university teachers. This needs to be curbed and controlled even by law, if required.

5.7 Distance Higher Education

For those who have failed to get admission to a University, or a college, distance-education is the only answer. The Indira Gandhi Open University and similar other Universities all over the country with full recognized courses could be and are the only answer to the aspirant for higher education. There can be multifarious courses offered by these Universities which can even be different from those offered at the regular Universities or their associated or affiliated college and this can be an added attraction to students and can absorb a large number of the crowd waiting at the brinks of the Universities and colleges. While gaining the chance of getting a degree, such seekers can keep working somewhere, if they can along with pursuing a course of study of their choice.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Increase Capacity in Postgraduate Education

There is an urgent need for greater investment in postgraduate education in India. The effort must be led by the government as the private sector has not expanded its capacity sufficiently at the

postgraduate level. Private institutions find it commercially unfeasible to run postgraduate programmes except for a few professional programmes like management and engineering. The Medical Council of India recently mandated that all medical colleges must also have postgraduate departments.40 expanding such requirements to other fields where there is a paucity of postgraduates may help bridge the gap.

6.2 Incentivise Postgraduate Education and Research

It is important to incentivise postgraduate education to make teaching and research a more attractive proposition. The recent move to award fellowships to PhD students in Indian Institutes for Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) is welcome.41 These fellowships are currently limited to the sciences and engineering. The government must look to expand this programme to other institutions as well.

6.3 Diversify course offerings in HEIs

The high rate of enrolment in three-year programmes suggests a need to diversify the programmes in most HEIs. Universities should look to limit the number of three-year programmes and expand capacity in emerging areas and new programmes for their affiliate colleges. Courses in existing three-year programmes should be tweaked to incorporate more vocational skills to prepare students for the job market.

7. Conclusion

Apart from the government initiative more is needed to be done. It includes promising greater autonomy to universities/colleges, developing brand new regulatory environment for upgrading existing institutions into the world class category. Besides, one has to re look at the entire range of regulations that impact higher education which includes teacher qualifications, recruitment system, funding system, credit scoring system, teacher progression (API), quality control of private institutions, procedures for financing central/state universities, methodology or schemes for grant of autonomy. Re-study the old system to find the best regulations, which can help us in a number of ways, like whether the regulations have achieved the objective for which they were conceived; whether, in the current situation and the vision which holds for the future. Moreover, one needs to understand that whether these regulations are necessary in the present form or are they acting as hurdles in the path to reform. With the announcement of the new higher education body, one needs to lay emphasis to change the mode from a 'regulator' to a 'promoter and facilitator'. The new body must shed the role of being a 'licensor'. Finally, there is must be a broad based academic development plan which includes students, professors, researchers and teachers for all kinds of consultations. Since most of the educational institutions are run by either big private players or the government. Many most of the top brass refuses to meet or discuss with them. As great reforms are done for the benefits of students and society, they should be included for implementing any new reforms.

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