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**EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES
CHALLENGES AND REFORMS**

NEELIMA GUPTA
Vice Chancellor
Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University
Kanpur



**ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES
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EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES CHALLENGES AND REFORMS

NEELIMA GUPTA

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest systems in the world. There is a growing challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to ever-growing number of students, correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reviving institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge. India Skill Report (2020) provides a preview of talent landscape in the country stating 47 per cent current employability, which is affected by changes in the demand for skills and changing nature of jobs. The problem of unemployability is related to the poor skills that our students possess even after pursuing higher education. Many students joined those courses just because others were opting for them. The 21st century Indian workers also needs transferable skills. Above all, India needs to create an agile workforce that can anticipate and adapt to changes in technology, automation and digitisation. A partnership between all the stakeholders of universities– Students, teachers, parents, alumni, employer, regulatory agencies and the government – is the need of the hour for innovation in higher education.

PRELUDE

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest systems in the world. There are new challenges and regulations from the management being faced by these institutions –both in the public sector and also in the private sector–which are now growing at a fast pace. As a result, the old structures of management are now required to undergo drastic changes to satisfy the expectations of their students and the market. There is absolutely no substitute to quality of higher education and the country should prepare itself to export the Indian brand of education to foreign countries.

Higher education in India is passing through a phase of unprecedented expansion, marked by an explosion in the volume of students, a substantial expansion in the number of institutions, and a quantum jump in the level of public funding. There is a growing challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to ever-growing number of students, correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reviving institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge (Saini, 2015).

The emergence of a global economy has forced nations to adapt their systems of higher education to the changed global realities. Rather than continuing with their inward-looking policies, several countries are reshaping their systems of higher education for making them globally competitive. Pragmatism rather than ideology is driving this change. The United States of America has major plans for investment in higher education. The United Kingdom has injected new dynamism in the higher education sector through competition and incentives. China has undertaken a package of comprehensive reforms in higher education for over the past two decades. The government in China has declared education, science and technology to be the strategic driving forces of sustainable economic growth. Education, being one of the basic human rights, is gaining attention around the world, obviously for valid reasons (The Global Talent Competitiveness Index 2019).

The institutional framework of universities in India consists of universities established by an Act of Parliament (Central universities) or of a State Legislature (State universities); Deemed Universities (institutions which have been accorded the status of a university with authority to award their own degrees through central government notification); Institutes of National Importance (prestigious institutions awarded the said status by the parliament); institutions established by State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated to the University (both government-aided and unaided). India's higher education system is under pressure from the State to achieve multiple objectives, such as growth, quality and equitable access. As per a study published by Ernst & Young (2018), India is reported to have 140 million young college goers before 2030. And thus the country should pursue massive structural and systemic changes to produce better results in the field of higher education and distance learning, specifically (Brookings India, 2018). Apart from having the best-in-class post-secondary education system, by 2030, India will have the largest population in the world, resulting in increased bracket of students eligible for higher learning and educational courses. To reach these targets, national and state policymakers are actively engaged in providing adequate resources, enabling private provision of higher education, and so forth. Government has set a target of increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from the present level of about 23 per cent to 30 per cent (AISHE 2018-19). Various new initiatives are being taken by the government to increase the GER. To manage the future of higher education, there is a need for effective governance of higher education internally and externally.

BROAD CHALLENGES IN THE INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Poor Quality of Teaching-learning Methodology

The system has many problems like a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and low employability of students.

Poor Research Capacity

India has a very low level of PhD enrolment, poor quality research, lack of opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration, and low levels of industry partnership.

Uneven Access to Higher Education

Due to social divisions and multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population and geographies, access to higher education is uneven in India.

Outflow of Indian Students

A steady increase in disposable income of the Indian middle class is leading to growth in the education market in other countries. USA is the most popular study destination among Indians. Australia has become the second most popular study destination for Indian students who want to pursue higher education, since it has gained from its liberalised visa norms and post-study visa options. UK, Canada, France, Singapore and Germany are other popular destinations for higher studies.

Limited Focus on Entrepreneurship

There are few institutes that offer programs in entrepreneurship and have active incubation/entrepreneurship cells on campus to reflect the importance of self-employment and entrepreneurship in an economy. There is a need for building a culture of research, innovation, and entrepreneurship that can build high economic growth in the country.

Lack of Gender Parity in Education

Cultural and social beliefs create multiple disparities that debar girls from their right to education. India has witnessed many gender focused initiatives to remove gender inequality in education with considerable success, although a lots till needs to be done.

Signs of Stress in Higher Education

The premier institutes across India have been plagued by a number of problems, which are adding to the stress level of students. Some students are not exactly able to cope with the pressure. Institutes must take wiser measures to deal with this issue.

India's Skilling Challenge: A Snapshot

- Nearly 1.25 million new workers aged 15-29 are projected to join the workforce every month through 2022.
- By 2022, India will have about 47 million more people between the working ages of 19 to 59 than younger or older people. This demographic dividend will peak in about 2040.

- The roughly 70 million workers entering the workforce between 2018 and 2022 will need to be skilled for a 21st century economy if India is to keep pace with technological change.
- Many of the roughly 468 million now in the workforce could be upskilled and reskilled—not easy because 92 per cent are in the informal sector.
- Slightly more than half of India’s workers have school attainment below secondary school with no vocational training.
- The unemployment rate for graduates aged 20-24 was 29 per cent, for those 25-29, 12 per cent, and for those 30-34, four per cent.
- Three hundred million Indians are currently in educational institutions or acquiring vocational skills and will be eventually looking for work (NCAER, 2018).
- Poor Opportunities for Vocational Training and Skill Development

DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

India Skill Report (2020) provides a preview of talent landscape in the country stating 47 per cent current employability, which is affected by changes in the demand for skills and changing nature of jobs. The digital transformation of industrial organisations has created demand for tech-savvy professionals having first-hand knowledge of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Various stakeholders of higher education have made a beginning in implementing new initiatives for creating future ready workforce and positive outcomes will be observed in the near future. The report also shows a slight improvement in employability of engineering students and a downfall in employability of management graduates.

The understanding of how structural and technological changes in this 21st century are radically altering today’s workplace and the nature of work, is imperative. While India must deal with its large and persistent backlog of unskilled informal workers, it must also provide for its future to sustain rapid progress. Firms of different sizes are already placing different skill requirements on individuals—large firms need formal business and accounting skills and high technological skills, and smaller firms need multitasking and adaptability to business practices. The 21st century Indian worker also needs transferable skills. Above all, India needs to create an agile workforce that can anticipate and adapt to changes in technology, automation and digitisation (Deloitte Insights, 2019).

The new Annual Employability Survey 2019 report by Aspiring Minds reveals that 80 per cent of Indian engineers are not fit for any job in the knowledge economy and only 2.5 per cent of them possess tech skills in Artificial Intelligence (AI) that the industry requires. The report highlights that ad-hoc changes in the Indian higher education system would not help address the problem, it rather needs a systematic and fundamental change to deal with high unemployment rate.

Problem of Unemployability

The problem of unemployability is related to the poor skills that our students possess even after pursuing higher education. This problem is connected to mismatch between personality and the job requirement. Students need counselling to understand the kinds of jobs that are available; the job profiles, whether the job profiles match their interests and skills, the skill gaps that may disqualify them, and how to address those skill gaps. Many students pursuing higher education do not have the aptitude for those courses; they have joined those courses just because others were opting for them. Personality tests during secondary education could help them identify their aptitudes. Experts have mentioned various reasons attributing to poor employability ranging from selection procedure in our graduate colleges, curriculum and quality of teaching, student interest and lack of corporate involvement (India Skills Report 2020).

Blended Learning for Improve Comprehension

The blended education and ‘made for me’ models improve comprehension of knowledge by students. Flipped classrooms are becoming more popular as a means to support student learning in HE by requiring students to prepare before lectures and actively engaging during lectures. These models are based on self-paced learning. Students receive notifications about how they are performing in a course as they progress through it. Traditional lecture hall teaching is serving to be less effective than personalised learning models. Oral and rote learning is now outdated (India Today, 2018). The need of the hour is for students to remain relevant despite the increasing number of pass-outs and it is crucial for HEIs to match the students’ learning with what the industry demands.

Ensuring Sustainable Education through Information and Communication Technology

There is a need to establish sustainable education systems using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for rapid capacity building and to develop e-resources/libraries as repositories of knowledge by the country. The integration of technology in teaching-learning and the digital revolution is bringing in sweeping changes in the higher education landscape. Every institute is taking various initiatives in promoting digital education. MHRD has taken up novel initiatives like SWAYAM (India’s own MOOCs), Swayam Prabha, National Digital Library (containing 6.5 million books), and National Academic Depository. The technology of online education and all the digital initiatives have the possibility to revolutionise higher education scenario in the near future and address the twin concerns of enhancing access and quality. Digitisation in education is also helping in saving resources.

Need for Interdisciplinary Learning

There is a need for interdisciplinary learning. This can help students to widen their knowledge beyond a single domain. For instance, Dr Homi Bhabha State University (HBSU) has created the state’s first cluster university that will provide students access

to subjects across disciplines and campuses. In 2015, University Grants Commission (UGC) approved the implementation of CBCS by all central and state universities to allow interdisciplinary learning. UGC had developed detailed syllabi in consultation with various stakeholders in as many as 109 undergraduate courses as a template. All the universities were requested to adopt the CBCS and also revise the curriculum. CBCS makes learning system more student-centric as it will allow them to choose inter-disciplinary, intra-disciplinary courses, even from other disciplines according to their learning needs, interests, and aptitude. Credits earned at one institution can be transferred to another institution as well.

Vocational Training/Skill-Based Courses for Preparing Workforce

Vocational training/skill-based courses can give a new direction to the education system. The education policies in India focuses on academic progress rather than vocational training. Vocational education is not built-in into the education system. Countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands emphasise on vocational education in their curriculum. Germany's dual-track vocational training program, known as the VET, is the route that around half a million apprentices in Germany take to a skilled profession every year. Under this system there are two components: classroom study in specialised trade schools; and supervised, on-the-job work experience. In their classes, students learn job-specific as well as general education subjects. Germany's vocational schools partner with around 430,000 companies, and more than 80 per cent of large companies hire apprentices (Clean Energy Wire, 2018). The Swiss Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is strongly employer and market-driven and yields good labour market outcomes. The government of Mexico has strengthened its Vocational Education and Training (VET) through greater involvement of the private sector and increasing apprenticeship training programmes. There is a growing realisation of the important role of TVE Training (TVET) in the development of individuals and preparation of the workforce in the 21st century.

Vocational education is less valued in comparison to academic education in India. There is a growing need for skilled labour and well-designed labour training programmes. India will have the youngest workforce in the coming years and therefore holds a huge opportunity for economic growth. There is a need for expanding opportunities for skill development and revitalising the higher education system in India. A component of industrial training must be inbuilt in the curriculum at secondary education level to promote understanding of work environment and awareness on important skills to be learnt. The new National Skill Qualification Framework seeks to promote vocational education and training by facilitating seamless mobility between general and vocational streams. New B.Voc (Bachelors of Vocational Studies) courses are being designed and delivered under the NSQF and National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) schemes.

Striking Balance Between Learning, Skilling and Job Opportunities

Universities need to strike a balance between learning and availability of job opportunities. Focus on generating key employment skills like problem solving,

critical thinking, communication and entrepreneurial abilities must find place in the curriculum across all disciplines (NCAER, 2018). The employment generation can be enhanced keeping in mind the demand of skills. Teaching models need to shift to learning by doing. According to the World Economic Forum, there is an urgent need for developing social and emotional skills in addition to Technological skills to add value to individuals. These kinds of skills can be said to be broader employability skills required to succeed across all jobs. Developing Emotional Intelligence from preschool to higher education has to be given importance as it leads to better psychological development as adults and the capacity to cope with stress.

Entrepreneurship Courses and Self Employment Training

Universities can offer several entrepreneurship courses at the undergraduate level, such as Financing of Business, Managing Family Business, and Setting Up a Business in Growing Economies. Entrepreneurial training should be mandatory across all disciplines and students in higher education must be provided with incubation opportunities to develop business ideas. In India, where over 300 million people are living below the poverty line, it is simply impossible for any government to provide means of livelihood to everyone (National Knowledge Commission). Such situations surely demand for a continuous effort from the society, where the people are encouraged to come up with their entrepreneurial initiative.

Working towards entrepreneurship, every year, the National University of Singapore sends 200 of its most entrepreneurial students to spend six months or a year abroad. These students work at startup firms across the Silicon Valley, New York, Stockholm, Beijing, Shanghai, or Israel and attend classes in technology entrepreneurship in the evening. Upon their return to the NUS, the students are accommodated in an entrepreneurial-themed campus residence where they share their experiences and create their own businesses and products. These NUS students are said to have founded 350 companies since 2001.

India has also moved on the path of self-employment rather than merely expecting the large number of students to be absorbed by the industry. This is also reflected in the Budget 2020 which is a budget for entrepreneurs and MSMEs. When it comes to budgetary allocation for the MSME Ministry, the allocation this year stands at an all-time high of Rs 7572 crore – an increase of eight per cent from the FY 2019-20.

We should be aware of the fact that, as per the ‘MSME at a Glance’ Report of the Ministry of MSMEs, the sector consists of 36 million units and provides employment to over 80 million persons in India. Overall, SMEs are seen as the backbone of any economy as they constitute more than 90 per cent of the formal economy worldwide (World Bank). Hon’ble Finance Minister Sitharaman in her second budget speech hailed the entrepreneurship mindset of Indians, saying, “Entrepreneurship has always been the strength of India,” and pushed the total allocation for ‘Entrepreneurship and Skill Development’ from Rs 479.91 crore to Rs 556.47 crore. Thus, the focus is on MSMEs and entrepreneurship which by itself is the best means for creating

employment. It is now upto secondary schools and universities to generate awareness among students even if it means introducing compulsory entrepreneurial education.

CONCLUSION

Quality is a challenge in higher education in India. Few Indian institutions feature in the top 200 in world rankings. The Indian Government is striving to put Indian higher education on the global map in research, innovation and teaching. There are a growing number of innovative reforms being designed at the central and state level to enable Indian institutions to get into the list of world class institutions. The reforms in higher education are helping states to receive more autonomy, provide fresh opportunities for international collaboration with new partners, and to prepare students for becoming self-employed in the next decade as outlined in the SDG 4 that calls for providing all learners the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

A partnership between all the stakeholders of universities– Students, teachers, parents, alumni, employer, regulatory agencies and the government – is the need of the hour for innovation in higher education. Universities need to work with each other, with open learning platforms and with industry partners for strategic and collaborative curriculum development. Allowing quality foreign universities to open branch campuses in India would bring in global best practices to the country and enhance its existing knowledge base. Also, instead of a uniform regulatory structure for all higher education institutions, a differentiated structure based on the quality of institutions can be helpful.

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The Biography of the Author

Neelima Gupta

Neelima Gupta is the Vice Chancellor, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur. Earlier, she was Professor, Department of Animal Science, and Dean, Students Welfare at MJP Rohilkhand University, Bareilly. She is Member, National Research Centre, Cairo, Egypt. She is Chairman and Member of committees at University Grants Commission (UGC), National Assessment and Accreditation Council, (NAAC), Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Council of (CSIR)& Member Public Service Commission, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. She is recipient of 68 awards including Ek Janaki Ammal National Award, Saraswati Samman, Vigyan Ratna) awards. She has published 200 research papers, authored/edited 8 books and has participated in 220 (International - 41; National -179) conferences.