

Research Papers



## Role of Government in Higher Education:

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### Abstract

India has a fairly large and diversified education system. Its billion-plus population consists of a higher proportion of children and young individuals, especially in the age group of 6-24 years, which is the most prospective age group in terms of academic inclinations. This age group accounts for more than one-third of the India's population. According to the National Knowledge Commission, for the first time in this decade, the total number of illiterates decreased from 329 million to 304 million. The literacy rate also increased from 18.3 per cent in 1951 to 67.3 per cent in 2004, as per HRD statistics.

The National Literacy Mission aims at achieving 85 per cent literacy at the end of the Eleventh 5-year plan (2007-2012). In order to achieve higher literacy rates, the government has been initiating programmes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which aims at achieving universal elementary education of satisfactory quality by 2010. Furthermore, the development of an Educational Development Index (EDI) for elementary education is perceived as a significant step towards imparting quality education. The country's present education system comprises elementary, secondary and higher education, which consists of undergraduate, post graduate and professional degree and diploma courses. Following Table shows the growth of Indian education institutes during 1950-2006.

Table No. 01:

**Growth of Indian education institutes 1950-2006 (In thousands)**

| Years    | Primary | Upper primary | Sec./Senior sec./Inter/Pre. jr. colleges | Colleges for general education | Colleges for professional education (Engg. Tech., Arch., medical & education colleges) | Univ./ Deemed univ./ Inst. of national importance |
|----------|---------|---------------|--|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 1950-51  | 209.7   | 13.6          | 7.4                                      | 0.4                            | 0.2  | 0.03  |
| 1960-61  | 330.4   | 49.7          | 17.3                                     | 1                              | 0.9  | 0.05  |
| 1970-71  | 408.4   | 90.6          | 37.1                                     | 2.3                            | 1  | 0.08  |
| 1980-81  | 494.5   | 118.6         | 51.6                                     | 3.4                            | **3.5  | 0.11  |
| 1990-91  | 560.9   | 151.5         | 79.8                                     | 4.9                            | 0.9  | 0.18  |
| 2000-01* | 638.7   | 206.3         | 126                                      | 7.9                            | 2.2  | 0.25  |
| 2001-02* | 664     | 219.6         | 133.5                                    | 8.7                            | 2.4  | 0.27  |
| 2002-03* | 651.4   | 245.3         | 137.2                                    | 9.2                            | 2.6  | 0.3   |
| 2003-04* | 712.2   | 262.3         | 146                                      | 9.4                            | 2.8  | 0.3   |
| 2004-05* | 767.5   | 274.7         | 152                                      | 10.4                           | 3.2  | 0.41  |
| 2005-06* | 771.1   | 288.2         | 154                                      | 11.5                           | 5  | 0.35  |

\*Provisional; \*\*includes institutions for post-matric courses  
Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)

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**Growth in student's enrolment:**

Higher education in India has scaled up gradually from 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence to 416 universities and 20,677 colleges currently. These comprise of 251 state universities, 24 central universities, 103 deemed universities, 5 institutions established under state legislations and 33 institutes of national importance established by central legislation. At the start of the academic year 2007-08, the total number of students enrolled for higher education stood at 11.6 million; of which 12.94 per cent were enrolled in university departments and 87.06 per cent in affiliated colleges. More than 80 per cent of the students are enrolled in three faculties of arts, science and commerce/management whereas the rest are enrolled in professional courses with the highest percentage in engineering and technology followed by medical sciences. It is interesting to note that in India, where agriculture and allied constituents play a critical role in economic development, student enrolment in agricultural courses accounts for around only 0.5 per cent. Enrolment of female students grew phenomenally from less than 10 per cent of total enrolment during independence to around 40 per cent in 2005-06. Likewise, the number of women colleges also increased in the last decade from 1,146 to 1,902 in 2005-06. The faculty of arts accounted for more than 50 per cent of the total female student enrolments. Kerala, Goa and Punjab were the three top states in terms of female student enrolment and their respective female student enrolments in the total enrolments were 61 per cent, 59.2 per cent, and 51.7 per cent.

**Growth of Higher Education Institutions:**

India has the largest number of academic institutions in the world in terms of higher education and is the third in the world in terms of enrolment, after China and the US. However, only 7 per cent in the age group of 18-24 enroll for higher education in India and this is only one-half of Asia's average. On a brighter note, however, enrolments have been increasing steadily in higher education in the past 2 decades from 3.4 million in 1984-85 to 11.03 million in 2005-06. In addition to a medium of livelihood, higher education is also now regarded as an instrument of infrastructure for social and economic change. Fundamental policy changes at the grassroots level in issues pertaining to curriculum, infrastructure, governance, and funding are taking place to make India's higher education a socially and economically viable option in a competitive world. Factors such as e-learning, distance education, public private partnerships coupled with international collaborations and exchange programmes are changing the face of higher education in India. The higher education system in India has changed its unidirectional approach and is slowly transitioning into producing professionals with better quality education. Traditional programmes are adopting innovative measures to encourage enrolment and institutes are promoting research based practices. Efforts are being made to move from the theoretical base to a more 'real-world' and career-oriented approach. On the flip side, India's education system continues to grapple with deficiencies such as a rigid system, lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, demand supply gaps, urban-rural divide, and scarcity of skilled manpower.

**Role of Government in Higher Education:**

Higher education system in India is fairly large and complex. Within the system, the Central government is primarily involved in policy decisions and state governments are engaged in funding activities. The central government's role involves establishment, grants and oversight of institutes of higher education and it discharges its activities through UGC and other professional councils. State governments, which play a major role in funding of institutes through operating as well as capital grants, carry out most functions through the concerned government department or directorate of the respective states. The role of the Central government in funding institutes of higher education is quiet limited and uneven. With a handful of central institutions catering to around 2 per cent of the students getting nearly 85 per cent of central allocation for higher education, state governments end up being responsible for providing bulk of public funding. According to the report of the CABE Committee on financing of higher and technical education, state governments account for more than three-fourths of the total government expenditure on higher education. However, in case of technical education, the Union and state governments share the financial responsibility almost equally.

In the late eighties, state governments grappled with issues related to unprecedented demand for quality higher education for a growing population. Over the years, different states tried various methods

for fulfilling this requirement; for instance, they allowed entry of private players and tried out different models of financing based on fees and merit. Some states also drew flak from some quarters in the public who felt the administration was diluting the quality of education by bringing in the commercial aspect in an otherwise social sector. In response to these adverse public reactions, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra enacted laws regulating admission and prohibiting capitation fee in private unaided professional institutions in 1983, 1984, and 1987, respectively, and thus, opened doors for judicial intervention. Presently, state governments are struggling with the ever-increasing financial burden on the one hand and the need to maintain quality of education on the other.

Central Government is responsible for major policy relating to higher education in the country. It provides grants to the UGC and establishes central universities in the country. The Central Government is also responsible for declaration of Educational Institutions as 'Deemed to be University' on the recommendation of the UGC. Presently there are sixteen (18) Central Universities in the country. In pursuance of the Mizoram Accord, another Central University in the State of Mizoram is planned. There are 99 Institutions which have been declared as Deemed to be Universities by the Govt. of India as per Section of the UGC Act, 1956.

State Governments are responsible for establishment of State Universities and colleges, and provide plan grants for their development and non-plan grants for their maintenance. The coordination and cooperation between the Union and the States is brought about in the field of education through the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE). Special Constitutional responsibility of the Central Government: Education is on the 'Concurrent list' subject to Entry 66 in the Union List of the Constitution. This gives exclusive Legislative Power to the Central Govt. for co-ordination and determination of standards in Institutions of higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions.

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