International Journal of Advanced Research and Development
ISSN: 2455-4030, Impact Factor: RJIF 5.24
www.advancedjournal.com
Volume 1; Issue 9; September 2016; Page No. 52-57

State higher education councils in India under purview of RUSA: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

As India is a nation of full of diversions socially, economically and educationally where education keeps importance to remove such diversions ethically and morally. In view, this paper is made an attempt to explore the contributions of central government for imparting the education among whole parts of all states, and an attempt to put an end to the urban and rural divide through RUSA. Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a centrally sponsored scheme proposed by the ministry of human resources development. Which will be functioning under UGC to ensure holistic planning at the state level and enhancement of allocation for the state institutions, which will focus on state higher educational institutions**?**

There are 16 RUSA objectives listed. The foremost important is 'Facilitate the creation of State Higher Education Councils (SHECs)'. The intent of RUSA is that SHECs are to play a

Central role in the delivery of the RUSA vision to attain higher levels of access, equity and excellence in the state higher education system with greater efficiency, transparency, accountability and responsiveness.

The task of developing State Higher Education Plans demands expertise in assessing national and regional needs, setting targets, in assessing existing progress, in resource allocation and in challenging assumptions about the adequacy of implementation arrangements. To have the confidence of state governmental officials and agencies, state councils must have the staff expertise and competence to carry out funding responsibilities. Ensuring objectivity and validity in funding methodologies is a critical responsibility of most state councils. None of the SHECs fully meets good international practice regarding an "arms-length" relationship with state political leadership and state government administrative entities.

This paper will focus on the Approach, Planning and Appraisal. Moreover, this will attempt to find out challenges and short out problems through making comparative studies from other nation's higher education status and policies.

Keywords: state higher education, RUSA

Introduction

The higher education system in India at present is at a transition stage. A stage where changes have taken place for good and more transformations in thoughts and processes are desired. Higher education system in any nation today seeks a relook. The world is being slowly but steadily turned into a global village.

One of the pre-requisites of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) Scheme requires that states form a State Higher Education Council (SHEC). This represents a fundamental change in Indian higher education policy, especially in recognition of the role of the states as the unit of planning, and the intent that multiple funding streams to states (Central and State) be aligned with the SHEC planning.

For India however, the problem is deep-rooted and a higher education reform is the need of the hour. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) Report, (2009) has been very apt and the Government has to lend a keen ear to the problems in hand. Fortunately the Indian Government has taken up many of the Commission's proposals. For example, India's Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) for higher education had been crafted within the framework of NKC's policy recommendations. "The Eleventh Plan saw nine fold increases in the public spending on higher education which fuelled significant inclusive expansion in the public higher education sector. However, there has been no significant improvement in terms of quality of higher education delivery. The issues of skill gaps, skill shortages, and unemployable graduates still persist" (FICCI-E&Y, 2012).

Recognizing the central role that SHECs are to play under RUSA, this paper reviewed the challenges facing India's existing State Higher Education Councils in meeting the role and functions foreseen under RUSA. The review analyzed the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the existing councils (legal status, powers, membership, record of performance, etc.)?
- To what extent do the existing state councils conform to the RUSA requirements?
- What lessons can be drawn from the experience of the existing SHECs in making the transition from the existing state councils to councils that meet the RUSA requirements, or from the establishment of new state councils that meet these requirements?

Data and methodology

The proposed study mainly is descriptive in nature. It humourlessly based on secondary data and information which is collected from the concerned sources as per need of the research. The relevant books, documents of various ministries/departments and national and international organizations, articles, papers and web-sites are used in this study.

Higher Education Challenges and Opportunities: Literature Review

The expectation of society is different nowadays. The authorities who decide upon the policies should take a note of the situation. To be competent and to be at par with global competitors, the H.E. institutions should provide interdisciplinary programs to the students to meet the 21st century's higher education demands (Rae, 2007) [10]. H.E. institutions require reorganizing courses, programs, and structures to suit the aspirations and needs of the students (Hanna, 2003) [7]. So H.E. Institutions require to redesign or align their curriculum to support today's' students to fit globally (Hirsch and Weber, 1999) [8]. Bridges (2000) [1]. Also state the importance of curriculum design in today's higher education.

Student Employability

Employability is a very important aspect of H.E. System. Students seek educational opportunities to enter the world of jobs (West, 1999) [14]. According to Bridges (2000) [1]. The real requirement today is to take into serious consideration the student placement, and in this process inculcate the requisite skills and habits viz. original analytical thinking, communication skills, superior presentation skills, working in teams, and information technology. This will help in aligning the students with the industry. Therefore, H.E. Institutions should make their curriculum more practical and industry oriented instead of traditional methods being followed. Singh and Sharma (2008) [11]. have emphasized the emerging role the industry could play in the Indian context, in ushering collaboration with the education sector; they recommend that industry could play a vital role in increasing the growth prospects of educational institutions.

Quality of Research

The dismal need for today's H.E. Institutions is to strengthen their research capacity. In order to achieve this challenge H.E. Institutions require to initiate multiple disciplines (centres) under one roof. This would help integrating varied areas of expertise and building relationships among different teams along with industry experts to establish their research capacity. It has also been acknowledged that pruning and nurturing of high quality research is one of the most important tasks carved and for the H.E. institutions (Hirsch and Weber, 1999 [8]. Hanna, 2003) [7].

Higher education institutions in India: a brief overview

The context for change The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade. This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population.

Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with four broad challenges:

- **The supply-demand gap:** India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.
- **The low quality of teaching and learning:** The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.
- **Constraints on research capacity and innovation:** With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.
- **Uneven growth and access to opportunity:** Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies.

A brief overview of the Indian higher education system provides an essential backdrop for the following research findings and comments.

There are three main types of tertiary institution in India:

1) Universities and university-level institutions,
2) Colleges and
3) Diploma-awarding institutions.

These are categorised by funding source: central government, state government and private.

Table 1: Higher education institutions in India

Type And Number of Institution	Central	State	Private	Total
University and university-level institutions	152	316	191	659
Colleges	669	13024	19930	33023
Diploma-awarding institutions	0	3207	9541	12748
Percentage enrolment in 2012	2.6%	38.6%	58.9%	100%

***Source*:** 'Higher education in India: twelfth five year plan and beyond', Ernst and Young (2012)

If there is one overall structure which defines Indian higher education, it is the affiliated college system. The vast bulk of students study at public and private colleges which are affiliated to state universities. These colleges do not have their own degree awarding powers; they deliver the courses, curricula and examinations specified and regulated by their parent state university. The affiliated college sector is huge, enrolling over 90% of undergraduates, 70% of postgraduates and 17% of doctoral students. Some universities have as many as 1000 colleges affiliated to them. There are considerable challenges in regulation and quality control; and while there are notable exceptions, many are perceived to be sub-standard. Last year, accreditation through the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and the National Body for Accreditation of all universities and colleges was made mandatory. A huge exercise is underway to accredit the two-

thirds of universities and four-fifths of colleges that do not have accredited status.

Challenges

These falls into four broad categories: the low quality of teaching and learning; the supply-demand gap; uneven growth and access to opportunity; and constraints on research capacity and innovation.

The low quality of teaching and learning arguably, the greatest challenge facing higher education in India is the chronic shortage of faculty. Various reports estimate that 30-40% of faculty positions are unfilled. Most faculties have had no training in teaching. Other issues in teaching and learning which compound the problems include:

- Outdated, rigid curricula and the absence of employer engagement in course content and skills development. Very few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.
- Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.
- High student: teacher ratio, due to the lack of teaching staff and pressure to enrol more students.
- Separation of research and teaching; lack of early stage research experience.
- An ineffective quality assurance system and a complete lack of accountability by institutions to the state and central government, students and other stakeholders.

This has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across south Asia, and an insufficient basis for movement to higher levels of study and research. These problems are endemic across higher education institutions in India, including many of the 'top tier' institutions, but particularly so in affiliated colleges and state universities.

The supply-demand gap despite an average growth rate of over 7% in the last decade, India's GER (girls' enrolment ratio) in higher education is very low. By some estimates, even if India succeeds in its target of 30% GER by 2020, 100 million qualified students will still not have places at university. India needs to drastically increase the number of places at universities and enrolment through distance learning programmes. Over the last decade, the diversity of courses offered by universities and colleges has narrowed, resulting in saturated markets for engineers, technology graduates and MBAs.

Uneven growth and access to opportunity despite efforts to spread the location of higher education institutions more evenly across the country, there is wide variation, particularly between urban and rural areas, but also between states.

Yashpal Committee Report

The Full text of the 94 page report of The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education is up on the education ministry's site. Some important recommendations are mentioned here

1) All universities must be teaching cum research universities. All research bodies must connect with universities in their vicinity and create teaching opportunities for their researchers.
2) We must prevent isolation of study of engineering or management. We should look forward to the day when IITs and IIMs also produce scholars in areas like literature, linguistics and politics. Institutions must be given the freedom to expand and diversify as they see fit rather than thrusting an uniform diktat on all institutions.
3) All syllabi should require teachers and students to apply what they have learnt in their courses, on studying a local situation, issue or problem. There should be sufficient room for the use of local data and resources to make the knowledge covered in the syllabus come alive as experience.
4) Need to expose students at the undergraduate level to various disciplines like humanities, social sciences, aesthetics, irrespective of the discipline they would like to specialise in subsequently.
5) Teacher training for all levels of school education (from primary to higher secondary) must be carried out by institutions of higher educations. The absence of university-level interest in teacher training has resulted in poor academic quality.
6) State funding, though increasing, will not be enough to expand supply and progress towards excellence. Complementary sources of funding will have to be found even for state funded universities. Philanthropy from society and alumni as a source of funding needs to be encouraged, with appropriate changes in regulation. Universities must be able to hire professional fundraisers and professional investors to attract funding from non-government sources.
7) The NCHER may initially consist of five divisions:
   i) **Future Directions**: Developing global benchmarks on student performance; university performance; salaries, potential programmers; new research directions; and articulation of needs of the government in terms of manpower etc.
   ii) **Accreditation Management**: Creating norms for accreditation and certifying multiple accreditation agencies which would be independent of the government. Institutions and universities may like to get accreditation from one or more than one agencies depending on their reputation. They would be also providing annual feedback to universities, and organizing workshops etc.
   iii) **Funding & Development**: Developing funding needs of universities, developing mechanisms for funding institutions, helping universities with development of corpus and good endowment management, managing the guaranteed student loan/scholarship programme, and funding the requirements of universities etc.
   iv) **New Institutions & Incubation**: Including training workshops for first-time VCs as well as on themes like accounting, investing the corpus, communication within & outside the university, negotiations & managing vendors, good office practices, human resource management etc.
   v) **Information & Governance**: This division will focus on managing the data needs of the commission, display of information on universities, develop performance parameters on the governance of universities, support other divisions with information as well as provide students with information on each university. This division will also inform the

Accreditation and Funding & Development divisions of the performance or lack thereof, for each university, each year

National Knowledge Commission Report (2009)

1) Establishing numerous universities and colleges to cater to the ever rising Indian population.
2) To reform the regulatory system of H.E. System in India. There is a proposal to establish an Independent Regulatory Authority for Higher Education (IRAHE). To redefine the role of the University Grants Commission (UGC), and to limit the role of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Bar Council of India (BCI) into their respective professional associations. The entry and the regulatory functions being performed by these aforementioned shall be undertaken by the IRAHE.
3) To expand the public spending on education and to diversify the funding required for sourcing the H.E.
4) To establish 50 National universities.
5) Bring reformation in the existing universities and colleges functioning, which would include the revision of the curricula at least once in three years. Transition to credit system instead of marks system and scheme of internal assessment throughout the year instead of annual examinations being prominent among the reforms suggested.
6) Promoting the enhanced quality of H.E. learning is also emphasised. This includes refurbishing of the infrastructure currently available, stringent information disclosure practice for the colleges to disclose the exact financial position and the value of assets and liabilities, faculty positions, level of accreditation and so on.
7) Ensuring quality education for everyone who deserves it, so that financial constraint doesn't hamper the talented students. Need based admission policy have been emphasised. The introduction of all extensive and well-funded scholarship schemes should be introduced to cater to the requirements of the needy and deserving students.

Key reforms in India planned in 12th five year plan (2013-17)

The central government operates a five-year planning cycle. The twelfth five-year plan for higher education addresses three overarching challenges: excellence, equity and expansion.

- **Excellence:** Priority issues include improvements in teaching and learning, and a focus on learning outcomes; faculty development to improve teaching; increased integration between research and teaching; more international partnerships in teaching as well as research; better links between industry and research to stimulate innovation; and connecting institutions through networks, alliances and consortia.
- **Equity:** Further initiatives targeted at underprivileged and underserved populations in society and geography, addressing urban/rural, gender, people with disabilities and community divisions and inequities.
- **Expansion:** Scaling up capacity in existing institutions, rather than creating many new government-funded institutions; enabling discipline diversity, counteracting the skewed growth towards engineering and other technical subjects; enabling flexible and skills-based learning; ensuring a more even spread across the country; alignment to the needs of the economy; and encouraging private investment.

These three interrelated areas are not new: all have been addressed in various forms in previous five-year plans dating back to 1980. The main difference in the 12th plan is its holistic nature, with a clear focus on quality, or 'excellence', as an overarching guiding principle for expansion and equity.

The state governments have been empowered to improve their systems through RUSA

Rashtriya Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a scheme launched in October 2013, devolves more power to the states but makes them more accountable for their funding to state-funded universities and colleges. While internationalisation of higher education institutions is not one of RUSA's explicit goals, state governments can allocate funds for such initiatives under different budgetary heads. Given the increasingly important role state governments will play in the Indian higher education sector, we have explored international collaboration opportunities in five states: Punjab, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Orissa. These states have relatively mature enrolment ratios and relatively high intent to improve the quality of education.

Based on a prioritisation framework that looked at the scale, maturity, quality of the higher education system, political climate and openness to collaborate, five states have been identified to understand potential international partnership opportunities:

Table 2

State	HE Priorities for the next 5-10 years	International collaboration opportunities
Gujarat	• Increase GER from the current 18% to 32% by 2022 • Marked improvement in the proportion of 'A' accredited institutions in the state • 75% graduates employable by the end of the decade	• Providing access and improving excellence and physical infrastructure are top of the agenda for Gujarat government where it would welcome international support • Faculty development and exchange and curriculum development are key areas for international collaboration to improve the quality of teaching. The Government will fund foreign faculty who wish to come and teach in Gujarat • Employability of graduates by providing training in transversal skills (such as interpersonal, communication, English Language, etc.) and ICT skills
Tamilnadu	• Increase GER from current 42% to over 50% and make the state an innovation centre and education hub by 2023 • Good progress has been made on access and equity in HE; a strong focus on access for women and	• Expansion of higher education and enhancing research capability • Curriculum development partnerships to improve quality and relevance to industry • Providing graduate skills courses, including language training • Partnerships which support widening access and participation

	disadvantaged groups and skills for employability and language training for university students remains a key focus	• Design and use of technology-enabled learning
Punjab	• Provide access to higher education to 100% by 2022 focusing on rural and tribal areas • Increasing quality and employability of graduates	• Given the state's increasing focus on vocationalisation of higher education, international collaborations that aid employability will be promoted • Further collaborations for research, students/faculty exchange, curricula development, infrastructure development and sports will be welcomed
Karnataka	• Achieve GER of 30% by 2020 from current 25.5% • Create new research departments and universities • Reform of undergraduate curricula	• Although the state government does not have any specific plans for internationalisation, there is a key focus on increasing the quality of research collaborations in STEM, ICT, and medical science. • Interest in student and faculty exchange; supporting early stage research experience, faculty development through workshops on international best practices, effective use of technology in teaching and learning and creating a state accreditation system, institutional QA and a state HE ranking agency
Orissa	• Achieve GER of 32% by end 2022 • Achieve 25% higher enrolment of rural students, SC and ST students and girls by 2022 • Promotion of ICT and R&D	• The key focus of the state is on access and equity, skills development and compulsory vocational courses for UG students. International collaboration in employability, skills and curriculum development for additional courses would be of interest • There is a demand for expert foreign faculty to come and train local faculty members and send local teachers abroad for training.

The new central government has initiated several measures to tackle the challenges

The new central government, which came into power in May 2014, is putting in place various measures to improve the employability of Indian graduates and to position India prominently on the global higher education landscape through initiatives in skills development, digitisation and research. While the government is preparing a new policy for education, which should be completed in the coming year, several new flagship initiatives specifically related to potential international collaboration have recently been launched:

- SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-learning for Young Aspiring Minds): A new national Indian MOOC platform, offering online courses in Management, Social Sciences, Basic Sciences, Engineering and Energy, on which international universities have been invited to offer postgraduate courses.
- NSQF: The new National Skill Qualification Framework seeks to promote vocational education and training by facilitating seamless mobility between general and vocational
- Streams.
- B.Voc: Bachelor of Vocation: New B.Voc courses are being designed and delivered under the NSQF and National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) schemes.
- GIAN: Global Initiative for Academic Networks: The Government will support Indian universities to invite eminent scholars and researchers both inside and outside the country as guest speakers/scholars
- Connect to India Programme: Aims to attract undergraduate students from other countries to spend time in India on short courses or summer schools under a shared funding model. A pilot scheme was launched in July 2014 initially with a limited number of Indian universities, but will soon be expanded to others. In addition to these central initiatives, some state governments are also setting up various programmes, particularly in faculty and student mobility.

Conclusion

There is a total change of scenario in every aspect and H.E. System is not, therefore, a peculiarity. The thought thereby comes into mind that this change should be positive and of worth**.** India today requires industry smart students. How can that be facilitated? The answer again points towards faculty development. There can be three recommendations for the same which are being followed by some H.E. Institutes in India. The need of the hour is to make this a comprehensive policy for all H.E. System in India.

- To bring industry professionals to deliver lectures to the students or more appropriately provide students with the guidance and mentoring of industry people who are well versed in the system prevailing in the corporate echelons.
- To provide training to the faculty members so that they become able to train the potential students in return.
- To make industry training mandatory for the students' right from graduation so that they may easily fit on to the tedious requirements of the industry, right from the onset.

The review of almost all the recommendations given by the NKC Report (2009), UGC Annual Report (2009-10), Yashpal Committee (2009) suggest that the challenges being faced by the Indian H.E. system is well documented and good remedies have been also suggested. However, the researcher feels that there is a dire need to implement all the valid recommendations after due deliberations at the earliest. Further, it has to be ensured that the requisite step is being taken and that it does not succumb in the pipeline. The researcher also recommends that an audit agency/committee/department be formed in order to look into the works which are done by the H.E. regulatory bodies' viz. UGC, AICTE, MCI, BCI in consonance with the IRAHE. This will ensure a watchdog to look into the irregularities faced by the H.E. institutions in India.

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