

RUSA and Academic Reforms in Higher Education System of India

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Abstract: Higher Education plays an important role in the development of nation. It helps the members of the society to get lives, to develop well and to improve the strength of the nation. There is pursuit of truth and excellence in man and only the higher education can direct the right path of it. The objectives of higher education are to promote welfare of individuals as to strengthen the nation. It is to inculcate the high standards of conduct and behaviour and integrity of personality in the individual members. The topic of my article revolves around the role of RUSA in academic reforms of Indian Higher Education System. With the development of technology and changing social demands our higher education system need to be contemplated and perpetually evolved to meet the new challenges, our daily life present. *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan* (RUSA), or National Higher Education Mission, is the key implementing initiative of the Indian government's 12th Five Year Plan for higher education Its action plans are centered on two objectives: equity-based growth and improvements in teaching-learning and research which are the key challenges of the Indian higher education system. It is all these components I would like to touch in my article which may be useful.

Keywords: Equity, Challenges, Higher Education System

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. Synchronisation and harmony among the global universities across the globe can create sync throughout, wherein the nurturing of the young minds may be accustomed to the changes desired. Another aspect which is very important today is the concept of blended learning. It is just the next step to the previous idea of creating a harmonization of higher education across the globe. Students from all over the world will be benefitted from the expertise of the renowned academicians. The harmony may create a balance in learning and research thereafter.

For India however, the problem is deep-rooted and a higher education reform is the need of the hour. The demand for higher education and the magnitude of planned reforms over the next ten years in India will provide the largest opportunity in the world for international higher education institutions and education businesses.

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 paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education now a days, from 'national education' to 'global education', from 'one time education for a few' to 'life long education for all', from 'teacher- centric education' to 'learner centric education'. These changes make new demands and pose fresh challenges to the established education systems and practices in the country.

It is worth noting that while India has the second largest system of higher education, next only to USA, the total number of students hardly represent 6 percent of the relevant age group, i.e., 18 - 23, which is much below the average of developed countries, which is about 47%. India's higher education gross enrolment ratio (GER) at 18% is currently well below the global average of 27%. This difference is even more stark when compared to China and Brazil at 26% and 36% respectively (2010 figures) 19. The government plans to increase GER in higher education to 30% by 2020. This will require a transformational change at a pace and scale never seen before. Thus, access, equity, accountability and quality should form the four guiding principles, while planning for higher education development in India in the twenty-first century.

The Rashtriya Uchchatar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a new strategic intervention for the improvement of access, equity and quality in Indian higher education, that focuses on state universities and state institutions through a special centrally sponsored scheme in a mission mode. RUSA document proposes a new centrally sponsored scheme for higher education which will spread over two plan periods (XIIth and XIIIth) and will focus on state higher educational institutions. There are 316 states public universities and 13,024 colleges that can be covered under RUSA. The funding will be provided in the (Center : State) ratio of 90:10 for North-Eastern States & J&K, 75:25 for Other Special Category States (Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and 65:35 for Other States and UTs. Funding will be available to private government-aided institutions also, subject to their meeting certain pre-conditions, for permitted activities based on laid down norms and parameters.

SALIENT FEATURES OF RUSA

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (National Higher Education Mission) or RUSA is a holistic centrally sponsored scheme for the development of higher education at the state level and enhancement of allocations for the State Universities & Colleges steered by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development.

Built on the success story of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All Movement) and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (National Mission for Secondary Education), RUSA will be spread over two plan periods, for improving access, equity and quality in the state higher education system

RUSA can prove to be a boon for the poor states which are unable to implement the updated modern infrastructure and other essential items for up-gradation of higher education systems due to shortage of fund. It is based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivizing well performing institutions and decision making through clearly defined norms, which will establish and rely upon a management information system to gather the essential information from institutions.

RUSA will aim to provide greater autonomy to universities as well as colleges and have a sharper focus on equity-based development and improvement in teaching-learning quality and research.

Higher education needs to be viewed as a long-term social investment for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. The globalization era has necessitated inculcation of competitive spirit at all levels. This can be achieved only by bringing quality of higher standards to every sphere of work. Therefore, the quality of higher education has become a major concern today.

RUSA and Academic Reforms

For academic reforms RUSA's action plans are centered on two objectives: equity-based growth and improvements in teaching-learning and research.

1. Equity-based growth: As per the RUSA document, greater emphasis will be laid on to correct regional imbalances in access to higher education through high quality institutions in rural and semi urban areas as well as creating opportunities for students from rural areas to get access to better quality institutions. It includes setting up of higher education institutions in un-served and underserved areas. It laid emphasis on improving equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities to socially deprived communities; promote inclusion of women, minorities, SC/ST and OBCs as well as differently-abled persons.

Under RUSA, socio-demographic variables like rural/urban distribution; proportion of SC/ST and vulnerable groups; districts with adverse education indicators; difficult, most difficult and inaccessible areas, left wing affected districts etc. would be considered while allocating resources to the districts. Thus the key aspects of RUSA are to provide opportunities for higher education to all who deserve and desire higher education (access), fair access to the poor and the socially disadvantaged groups to higher education (equity), and providing knowledge of the highest standards available in education to help the students to enhance their skills and other human resource capabilities (quality). To ensure quality and excellence in higher education, adequate number of good faculty in institutions is required. Filling faculty positions is also a challenging task for RUSA. As RUSA will work in the states through the State Higher Education Councils (SHEC). It proposes SHEC to ensure that faculty positions are filled in a phased manner and must include proactive steps for faculty recruitment and development. One of the key **governance provisions** which RUSA seeks to address with regard to the current Indian higher education system to set up Model Colleges in each district and integration of various equity schemes currently in place and Infrastructure up gradation of existing institutions with focus on quality and equity.

2.Improvements in teaching-learning and research: RUSA proposes improving teaching-learning and research by creating several world-class universities and academic clusters (groups of autonomous institutions that collaborate to expand student access across institutions), enabling mergers, expanding cross-disciplinary offerings within institutions, and establishing research universities..RUSA proposes providing academic freedom, modest teaching loads for faculty, adequate state funding and academic inclusion in institutional governance. The first aspect is the process of converting an existing university into a research university. Such a university would be chosen by virtue of its “well-functioning number of departments, and enrolment of research scholars and research output.” According to RUSA, “The University should have demonstrated an aptitude for research and innovation in more than one department. Such work should have been acknowledged globally.

A second challenging aspect of the proposal concerns RUSA's interest in developing a faculty that is committed to disinterested research or creating knowledge for its own sake. Commitments on research, innovation and creation of new knowledge are the major areas that needs to be addressed immediately by RUSA in the higher education system of India.

RUSA seeks to address provision of research and innovation grants/funds and support for state endeavors to create Research Universities.

Conclusion

Higher education in India reveal a system undergoing considerable transformation. There is a sense of urgency in policy makers, institution leaders and faculty to expand the system at a fast enough pace to meet the surge in demand, while increasing quality and ensuring equitable access .RUSA has recommended stepping up capacity and improvement of infrastructure which can attract and facilitate the retention of students from rural and backward areas as well as differently-abled and marginalised social groups to enhance equity and inclusion in higher education. It also recommends to develop a quality system for conscious, consistent and catalytic programmed action to improve the academic and administrative performance of the HEIs.

“You Must Be the Change, You Wish To See In the World.” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. ~ Swami Vivekananda