



HIGHER EDUCATION: CURRENT STATUS, EMERGING STRATEGIES OF NATIONAL POLICY OF EDUCATION AND MEASURES IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction:

Our higher education system is one of the largest systems in the world, with 864 Universities, 40,026 Colleges and 35.7 million enrolments across the country. But the facilities in terms of infrastructure in the universities and colleges are poor when compared to the international standards. The spread and development of these institutions have been uneven. The courses offered by the universities are generally of traditional nature and few are related to the job oriented and skill development. Research is another area which is generally acknowledged to be cost effective; it does not get adequate proportion of funds available. The credibility of evaluation system is being faded.

According to "Ramamurti committee" (a review committee on National Policy of Education) 1986, higher education as envisaged in NPE 1986 lays emphasis on reflection rather than action (para 5.24). Higher education has a valuable role to play in regard to action on the part of those receiving it particularly on the issues such as regional development, school education and universalisation of elementary education etc. As a matter of fact curriculum and the entire education process in the colleges and universities should be dynamically and integrally linked to such issues. Since the higher education system is largely funded from the public exchequer, the system should work suitably as balance between the regional expectations of the people and their global activities in education and research. The university system should move to the centre stage by utilising its autonomy for innovations in teaching and pursuing high quality research. The emphasis on autonomy of universities and departments, provision of means to interact globally with institutions and funding agencies, better infrastructure, more rationalised funding of research, integration of teaching, research and evaluation, all these reflect the major concern. In the context of delinking degrees from jobs, the National Policy of Education has envisaged the National Testing Service (NTS) as a centralised instrument for conduct of tests. Ramamurti Committee viewed that the tests could be organised by the user agencies on a decentralised basis. The NTS need only to provide resource support. The UGC had been playing major role and paying attention to quality improvement through special programmes for promotion of excellence in teaching and research. There has been a conscious effort in improving the status of teachers. The Educational technology and media have come to play an important role too.

The Present Status:

We can see that the present scenario reflects very serious weaknesses. The proliferation of universities and colleges has been rather unplanned. The infrastructural facilities are seriously inadequate. There is a notable mismatch between education and employment. Wastage in the system in terms of failures and low percentage of passes is very high. Examination reforms have been very slow. There has been a serious complaint from all corners about lack of accountability and responsiveness in the system. The academic activities are at a low profile and the academic calendar itself gets seriously disrupted almost every year due to various reasons.

The most shameful thing to our country is that we fail to get Noble Prizes proportionate to our population compared to other (small) countries, and our universities and other higher academic institutions do not find suitable place in the list of institutions declared having international standards worldwide. We do not have many higher education institutions today in our country which can pride themselves imparting highest quality education comparable to some of the well-known institutions in the world.

The Policy Programme and Strategies:

According to the NPE the higher education should become dynamic as never before. The main features of the programme and strategies to impart the necessary dynamism to the higher education system consist of the following:

- ✓ Consolidation and expansion of institutions
- ✓ Development of Autonomous colleges and departments
- ✓ Redesigning of courses
- ✓ Training of Teachers

- ✓ Strengthening Research
- ✓ Improvement in efficiency
- ✓ Creation of structures for co-operation at State and National levels
- ✓ Mobility
- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Review and Monitoring

Developments:

The major developments in the field of higher education in pursuance of National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (POA) include:

- ✓ Revision of pay scales of university and college teachers with financial assistance from central Government; Provision for career advancement linked to performance appraisal and training; and formulation of a Code of Professional Ethics for teachers.
- ✓ Introduction of National Eligibility Test (NET) for recruitment of university and college teachers and selection of junior research fellows.
- ✓ Establishment of academic staff colleges (48) by the UGC in different universities in the seventh five year plan for organising orientation programmes for newly appointed teachers; and identification of (200) university departments for conducting refresher programmes for in service teachers.
- ✓ Conferment of autonomous status to 86 colleges in 7 states.
- ✓ Preparation and examination of a comprehensive report by the Gnanam committee appointed by the UGC to review the management structure of universities.
- ✓ Setting up of inter university centres for providing common facilities for research in Nuclear Science, Astronomy and Astro-physics, Atomic energy, etc.
- ✓ Circulation of model curricula developed by UGC's curriculum development centres in 27 subjects in science social science and humanities;
- ✓ Formulation of UGC guidelines on setting of State Councils of Higher Education (SCHE) and establishment of a SCHE in Andhra Pradesh.
- ✓ Expansion of distance learning and Open University systems.

The proposals for establishing an Accreditation and Assessment Council are in an advanced stage. The proposal for setting up of a National Apex Body for higher education has not made much headway. The implementation of the NPE 1986 and POA was constrained, development of autonomous colleges, establishing SCHE by lack of consensus on some important measures such as non proliferation of institutions of higher learning, establishing of SCHEs, redesigning of courses, promotion of student and teacher mobility, resource insufficiencies and absence of effective monitoring and review mechanisms were also constraints.

Universities and Research:

During the Seventh plan, the commission provided Rs.133 crores which is 23% of its total plan expenditure for research and development. Co-operative research facilities have been established by UGC in high priority areas through the inter university centres and steps are under way to establish two more centres. But active participation of universities in industrial research has not been materialised on a large scale. However some universities have established effective linkages with industry. UGC is supporting 111 departments during this period under the scheme of "Strengthening of Infrastructure in Science & Technology." One of the preconditions for support the scheme is that the grantee departments should change over to a method of teaching more conducive to students, learning and creativity and adopt new procedures for experimental work, project and field work. This is expected to sensitise the post graduate students to research methodology and training. Since 1984 the commission has been conducting tests for selection of junior research fellows. For science subjects such tests are organised in collaboration with CSIR. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between UGC and CSIR in 1991, provides scientists in universities access to the research facilities in CSIR and vice-versa. The following recommendations are made for promotion of research in universities.

- ✓ University-Industry linkages should be established on a priority basis in metropolitan areas, cities and regions with a concentration of industry.
- ✓ UGC should initiate a scheme of providing initiatives to universities which are successful in establishing effective linkages with industry.
- ✓ Efforts should be made to increase the flow of research funds to the university sector.
- ✓ Inter institutional links between universities in India and "state of the art" research institutions abroad should be established to facilitate basic research in priority areas.
- ✓ Sophisticated and expensive equipment, which is used by different departments within the same university should be put to optional use rather than duplicating such facilities in each department.
- ✓ Journals are essential for good quality research. Due to the steep depreciation of in the value of the rupee many universities are unable to continue subscription to the essential journals. There is an urgent need to augment resources to ensure continuation of subscription to journals, particularly in science

technology and emerging areas, and to work out modalities to exchange journals between universities situated in close proximity.

- ✓ Full advantage should be taken by the universities of the facilities available at the National Centre for the Science Information at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and the Information Centre in Humanities and Social Sciences at M.S. University, Baroda and SNDT Women's University, Bombay.
- ✓ A high power committee should be constituted by UGC with representatives of DST, CSIR, ICSSR, ICHR, etc., to assess the quality of research in our universities.
- ✓ The commission has nurtured about 200 science and technology departments under SAP and COSIST. These schemes should be merged during the 8th plan and departments which have been assisting under these schemes should serve as focal points for coordinating research in frontier areas and training scientists in other universities/ colleges in research methodology etc.
- ✓ New inter university centres for research should be established in humanities and social sciences.

Promotion of Science Education in Universities:

Some of the important steps taken by the UGC up to the end of 7th five year plan for promotion of science education and research include:

- ✓ Of the general development grants (Rs.103 crore) provided to universities Rs.42 crore was for development of science infrastructure.
- ✓ Under the scheme of COSIST, 111 university departments have been provided Rs.37.40 crore for strengthening of teaching and research.
- ✓ Up to the end of 7th plan, 200 university departments in science and technology have been provided Rs.26.80 crore under the Special Assistance Programme (SAP).
- ✓ Inter university centres in Nuclear Science, Astronomy, Astro physics, MSD radar and crystal growth have been established at cost of Rs.26 crore.

In addition to the above, the commission has provided support for introducing courses in emerging areas like Bio-Technology, Ocean Development, Electronics and Computers etc., as well as research in super-conductivity, up-keep of University Services. Instrumentation centres and fellowships/salary to research fellows research associates and scientists. While UGC would continue to provide support on the above lines to science education and research, the following recommendations are made for promotion of science education: -

- ✓ In the long-term a special sub-plan should be prepared by UGC in consultation with department of Science & Technology and State Governments for equipping deficient laboratories in the universities and colleges in a phased manner by 2000AD. Steps should also be taken for removal of obsolescence and replacement of fragile equipment.
- ✓ In the short term UGC should consider equipping at least one science college in every district of the country with a modern laboratory during the 8th plan
- ✓ There is an urgent need to provide special training to science teachers to keep them abreast with latest developments in their area of specialisation UGC should work out a strategy in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology for meeting the training needs of science teachers on a priority basis.

Information Technology:

UGC has been providing assistance to universities for setting up of computer facilities and establishing computer centres up to 1990-91, 105 universities have been provided with computer systems and 948 colleges with personal computers. The commission has also been assisting universities under the UGC-DOE joint programme running several man power development courses in the field of computer science. The UGC has decided to setup Information and Library Network with providing and establishing communication facilities so as to improve capability of information transfer and access, for linking library and information centres in universities and institutions of national importance etc.,)

Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education:

One of the major problems in the maintenance of standards of higher education is that there has been a proliferation of colleges and universities established by the State Governments without prior consultation with the UGC. The commission is in no position to control this situation. The only instrument available with the commission is non sanctioning of grants to such universities established without prior consultations. This is totally inadequate. This issue has been gone into the notice of the Estimates committee 1988-89 and they had recommended that the UGC and Ministry should give serious thought to the problem in consultation with the State Governments and develop a mechanism to ensure that new universities are established only if there is actual need and if in-depth spade work has been done. In regard to this matter, the position of government would seem to be that the State Councils of Higher Education proposed under NPE 1986 would bring about some discipline by their role in the areas of coordination and consolidation; and that ultimately unplanned proliferation of colleges and universities could be checked only if there is political will for this.

Improving Efficiency:

The POA 1986 made several recommendations in regard to improvement in the functioning of higher education institutions and outlines the responsibilities of Government, institutions, teachers and students in this regard. In pursuance of the recommendations contained in the NPE 1986 and POA, the UGC has circulated the following guidelines to the State Governments and Universities with a view to bringing about improvements in the functioning of higher education system.

- ✓ Guidelines on terms and conditions of Affiliation of colleges by the university (1987)
- ✓ Guidelines on minimum number of actual teaching days.
- ✓ Progress of examination reform and workload for teachers in Universities and Colleges (1988)
- ✓ Report of the Task Force on Performance Appraisal of Teachers (1988)
- ✓ Report of Task Force on Code of Professional Ethics for University and College Teachers (1989)
- ✓ Report of the committee on academic calendar in universities and colleges (1989)

Though the UGC has made serious efforts to improve the functioning of the universities and colleges through the above guidelines the implementation part has not been satisfactory due to various factors which are responsible for the low process are as follows:

- ✓ Absence of appropriate mechanisms at the central and state level to oversee the implementation of UGC's guidelines and recommendations.
- ✓ Reluctance of educational institutions and the academic community to change.
- ✓ Excessive politicisation of universities and indiscipline on campus.

The UGC has reorganised its internal functioning on the basis of the recommendations made by the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad. The commission has undertaken a comprehensive review its schemes with a view to consolidating, reducing of overlap and duplication and strengthening of priority schemes. In order to improve the internal efficiency of the institutions of higher education, it is necessary to provide opportunities for professional development of university and college administrators. Recognising this fact the Department of Education constituted a committee in January 1991 to suggest measures for the augmentation of training facilities for the universities and college administrators. The committee has completed its work.

Review and Monitoring:

The need for establishing efficient mechanisms for a continuous review and monitoring of the Programme of Action (POA) was recognised and the following recommendations are made:

- ✓ The commission should initiate the practice of reviewing the major schemes in every meeting and make recommendations for bringing improvements.
- ✓ The recommendations of the commission should be made available to the CABE for review.
- ✓ At the state level the SCHEs and SABEs would play roles corresponding to UGC and CABE
- ✓ At the institutional level affiliating universities should be entrusted with this task.

The Measures to Improve Efficiency of Universities Should Focus on:

- ✓ Implementation of the report of the committee for segmenting of training facilities for university and college administrators.
- ✓ Establishment of autonomous departments and units to decentralise administrative, academic and financial powers in universities.
- ✓ Setting up of effective grievances redressal machinery and
- ✓ Creation of machineries for coordinated development.

Action to Prevent Brain Drain:

- ✓ Make the scientists pool in the CSIR more attractive by offering more remuneration according to merit and placement in the right institutions
- ✓ Utilise all international collaboration programmes to enable Indian Scientists and Technologists to undertake useful collaborative projects with well established institutions abroad.
- ✓ Take concrete steps to enhance the mobility of scientists and technologists paying due attention to matters such as accommodation, financial compensation, children's education etc.
- ✓ Check migration of engineering graduates, computer specialists to other countries and even in India to other professions through career guidance activities.
- ✓ Make available opportunities of employment, including on part time basis, for well trained women scientists /engineers.
- ✓ To consider bringing in legislation to ensure that highly engineers and technologists put in at least three years of service in the country before they can abroad as in countries like USA, Australia and other.

Finances:

At present many of the universities are suffering for want of funds. Higher education has a crucial role in training manpower for national development. It is therefore necessary to provide adequate financial support

to maintain its infrastructure and establishment at an acceptable level to keep abreast with latest developments and to meet future challenges.

In view of the above, it has become necessary for the institutions of higher education to consider measures to raise internal resources and improving their cost efficiency. While there is a case for raising tuition fee and other fees, which are more or less static for the last several years. An elaborate and effective system should be established for providing free ships, scholarships, and loans to students belonging to the weaker sections of society. Efforts should also be made to evolve rational norms for providing grants to universities which should take into account per capita cost, teacher-student ratio, proportion of teaching and non-teaching staff, types of courses offered, costing of services and extent of their subsidisation, ratio of graduate and postgraduate / research students etc., There has been a need for a balanced distribution of resources between universities and research institutions.

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