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Higher Education in India: Emerging Issues

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has an important role in rebuilding a nation through its significant contribution in overall development of the human resources. However, Indian scenario is not at all encouraging in terms of gross enrolment ratio, research output or employability of university graduates. Some of the recent reforms in higher education sector ignites a little hope about enhancing the effectiveness of higher education institutions in the country. In this article, the authors have tried to look at the emerging issues plaguing the quality of higher education and provide a fresh perspective on reducing the lag.

Keywords*:* Higher Education, Globalization, Privatization, Educational Quality, Access to Education, National Education Policy 2020, India

INTRODUCTION

In his bestseller "The World is Flat", Thomas Friedman describes a world of shrinking trade impediments and expeditious technological advances which have led to revolutionary

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globalization of industry. Domestic companies in India and other parts of the world are now able to compete on a level playing field with companies the world over. The world has been flattened. In today's world where there is neck-to-neck competition, education must be such that our graduates have a reasonable opportunity to achieve success. Education is important for the sustained growth of the nation. It is the foundation on which the development of every citizen and the nation is contingent.

The direct correlation between higher education and human resource development is an area of abundant research. Capacity building in the national context presupposes numerous resources of which human resource is the most important one. Developmental activities require a workforce that is proficient across a range of skills. With the emergence of LPG era, the value of education has multiplied leaps and bounds.

GLOBALIZATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION: THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Globalization has changed the dynamics of economies and the politics of world nations. And policy formulation across the board is increasingly influenced by the factors of globalization as the domestic markets protected so far opened up to completion from across the world. The Indian higher education institutions have been undergoing transformation for the last 20 years under the influence of globalization. Many new universities have been conceptualized and established to increase the reach of higher education throughout the country. The universities with stronger relationships with industry and the economy have adapted to changes arising due to globalization and the ecosystem. Globalization leads to many opportunities and challenges in higher education in India.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Shortcomings in Intuitional Capacity Expansion

The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education is only 27.1% in India as per the report of All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20 conducted by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. This ratio is quite low when compared to that of developed as well as developing countries.

Making higher education inclusive and equitable

The composition of students in higher education is not representative of the various sections of society. Merit should not be the exclusive domain of only the rich, wealthy, and elite which has increased after globalization. Measures must be taken to ensure that the people untouched by the advances of technology and globalization are also brought into the fold of higher education.

Ensuring quality and promoting excellence in Higher Education

After globalization, the higher education institutions are in competition not just with domestic institutions but with global institutions. Excellence in higher education has to be pursued to make the institutions globally competent and they have a lot to learn and implement from best practices across the world. Though the Government is consistently focusing on quality education still the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark their place among the top universities of the world. Expansion, excellence, and equity are interrelated any policy should address these 3E's.

Investment percentage of GDP

One of the reasons for lower quality not being able to attain a global level of excellence and also not being fully equitable is because of underinvestment in Higher Education. In 1968 the Kothari commission has suggested 6% of GDP should be on HE. As per the Economic Survey 2019-20, the expenditure on education by the Center and the States as a proportion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 2014-15 to 2018-19 has been around 3%. National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) reaffirms the recommendation of an increase in public investment on education to 6% of GDP, but this target has not been achieved till now.

Employability

Many a time, there is a long gestation period after graduation and before landing a good job. Sometimes people remain unemployed even after completing higher education because of lack of skills that are required for employment. The focus of education must shift to skilling the students to make them industry ready and not just to impart knowledge.

Poor Infrastructure, Facilities, and Faculty shortages

Infrastructure particularly of public sector institutions suffers from poor facilities, faculty insufficiency, and the incapacity of the educational system to attract, retain and preserve well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years. There are plenty of vacancies in Higher Education Institutions but still large numbers of NET/Ph.D. candidates remain unemployed.

Inadequate Research

Not much attention has been catered to research in higher education institutes. The quality of the research is getting compromised as the scholars are working either without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time. Moreover, Indian Higher education institutions are poorly tied with research centres and industries.

Poor Governance Structure:

Excess-centralization in decision-making, bureaucratic structures, and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism are some of the challenges faced by the Indian education system.

CORPORATE EXPECTATIONS FROM UNIVERSITIES

The authors have interacted with HR and Line Managers (both from the technical and non-technical side) of different companies viz. Amazon, Google, Yash Technology Solutions, Sell Craft Global Solutions. They have responded to the questionnaire on varied aspects such as curriculum by the University, students' performance at campus placements, time for providing training, percentage of the quality of students they are getting versus the quality of students they want, etc. On interacting with them it has been found that there is an immense gap between the skills required by them and skills possessed by the students. They got to spend most of their productive time training the unskilled freshers.

Soft skills of high importance for employers: Oxford Economics Survey

Apart from the domain knowledge, there are other skills that are of high importance to employers for hiring a candidate as per the Oxford Economics Survey, refer Fig. 1 to 4. They

included Communication Skills, Computer Skills, Numerical and logical ability, and behavioral traits like learning agility, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. From the figures, we can see that these skills which are so important for companies are necessary irrespective of the individual's field of study or course. However, most universities do not lay emphasis on these skills and there is an urgent need to redesign the curriculum, method of instruction, and evaluation to ensure that these skills are developed in students as part of regular instruction and create extra-curricular opportunities for the inculcation of these skills.

Fig. 1: Skills in high demand over the next 5 to 10 years.

Digital Skills

Digital business skills	**Ability to work virtually**	**Understanding of corporate IT software and systems**	**Digital Design Skills**	**Ability to use social media**
50.6%	44.9%	40.1%	35.2%	29.3%

Source: Oxford Economics

Fig. 2: Agile thinking skills

Ability to consider and prepare for multiple scenarios	**Innovation**	**Dealing with complexity and ambiguity**	**Managing paradoxes and balancing opposing views**	**Ability to see the big picture**
54.8%	46.0%	42.9%	40.9%	15.3%

Source: Oxford Economics

Fig. 3: Interpersonal and communication skills

Co-creativity and brainstorming	**Relationship building with customers**	**Teaming**	**Collaboration**	**Oral and written communication**
48.3%	**47.4%**	**44.9%**	**30.4%**	**29 %**

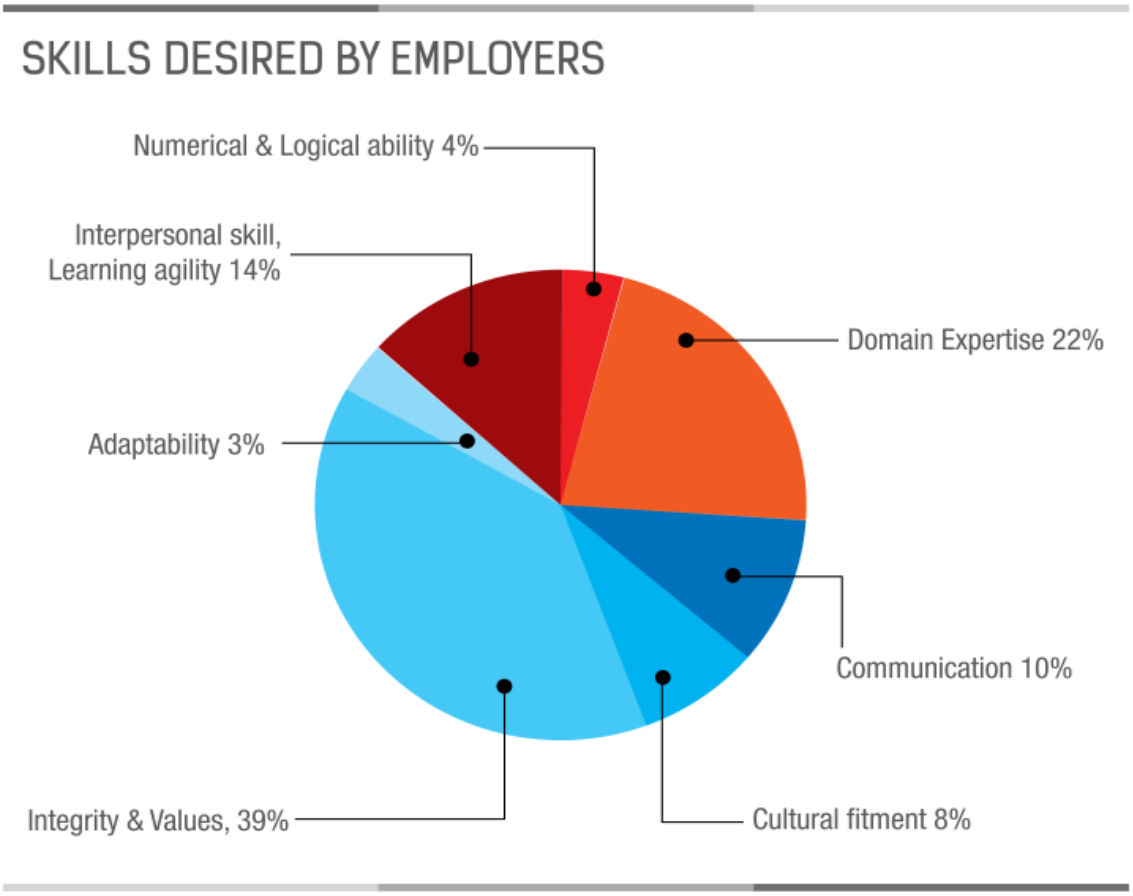
Source: Oxford Economics

Fig.4: Global operating skills

Ability to manage diverse employees	**Understanding international markets**	**Ability to work in multiple overseas locations**	**Foreign language skills**	**Cultural Skills**
49.1%	**45.7%**	**37.5%**	**36.1 %**	**31.5%**

Source: Oxford Economics

Fig.5: Employability Skills



Source: Job-market-India-2015-an-essential-report

From the graph above in Fig. 5, huge importance is given by industry to soft skills such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, etc. which are given minimal importance in the current higher education institutes. Thrust must be given to these areas in higher education by making the courses more hands-on.

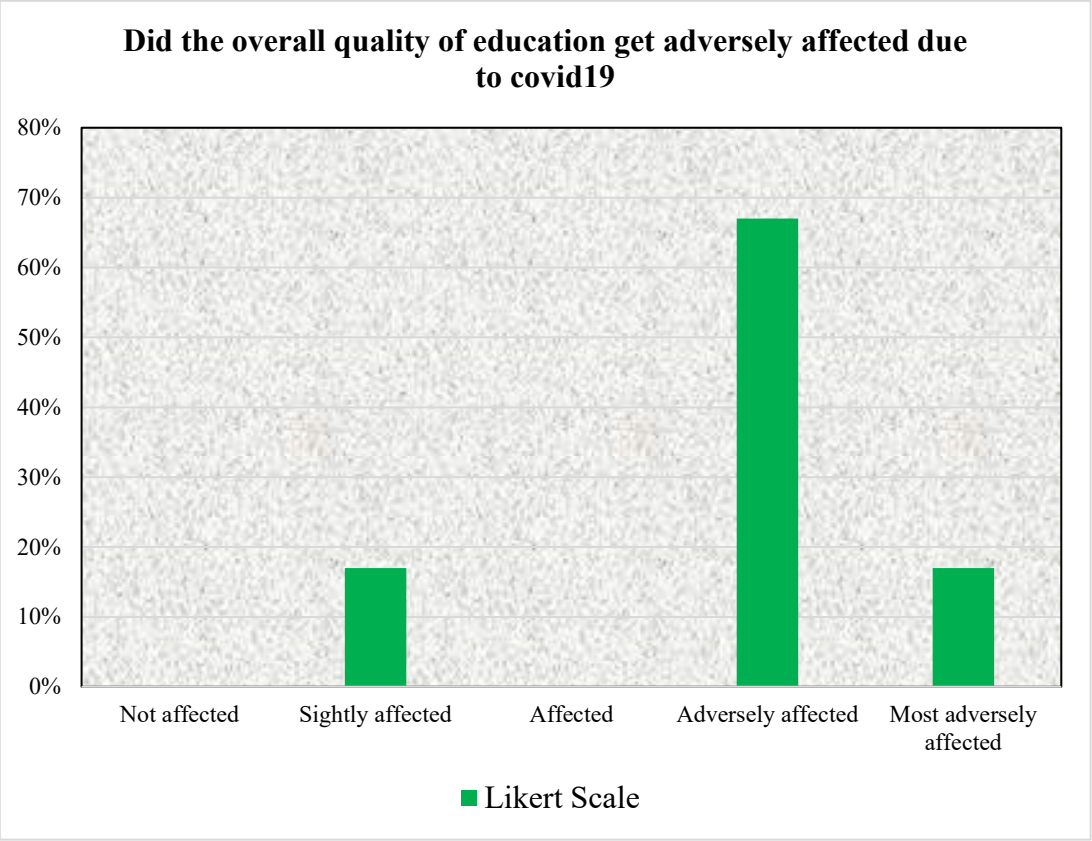
STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON CHALLENGES FACED DURING AND AFTER COVID

To understand the impact of covid on the overall effectiveness of delivery of lectures, assignments, and activities in the effective delivery of education during and after covid crisis, we have conducted a survey on students across different disciplines in Osmania university. We have delivered a short questionnaire to students, and we have received a total of 184 valid responses The questionnaire was sent through multiple methods such as SMS, WhatsApp, and paper based. The results of the questionnaire are discussed in detail below.

1. **Impact of Covid-19 on the overall quality of Higher Education**

We used a Likert scale of 5 with 5 being most negatively affected and 1 least affected. Of the 184 students, 17% chose 5 which is most negatively affected while 67% selected 4 which is negatively affected. A total of 154 i.e., 84% of the students feel that the quality of education has been adversely affected due to covid19. Nobody felt that covid19 has not affected education during Covid-19.

Fig. 6: Impact of Covid-19 on the Overall quality of Higher Education

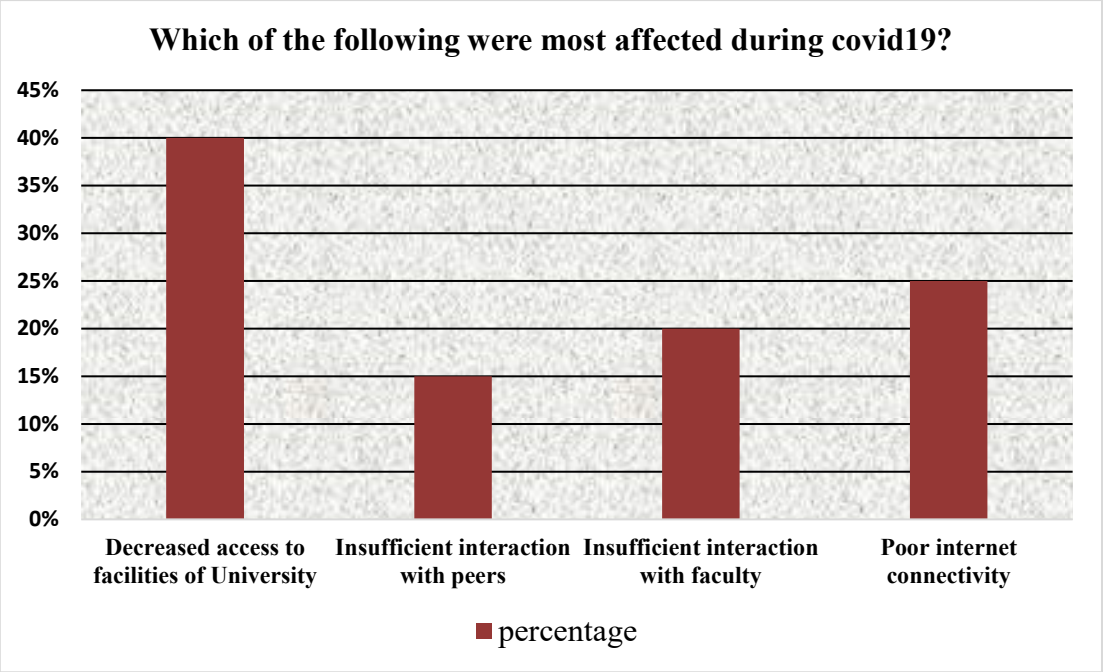


Source: Author

2. **Factors affected the most in Higher Education sector during Covid-19**

For these 74 students, i.e., 40% of the students said that decreased access to university facilities was the most important factor that was affected followed by poor internet connectivity at 25% and insufficient interaction with faculty at 20%.

Fig. 7: Factors affected the most in Higher Education sector during Covid-19

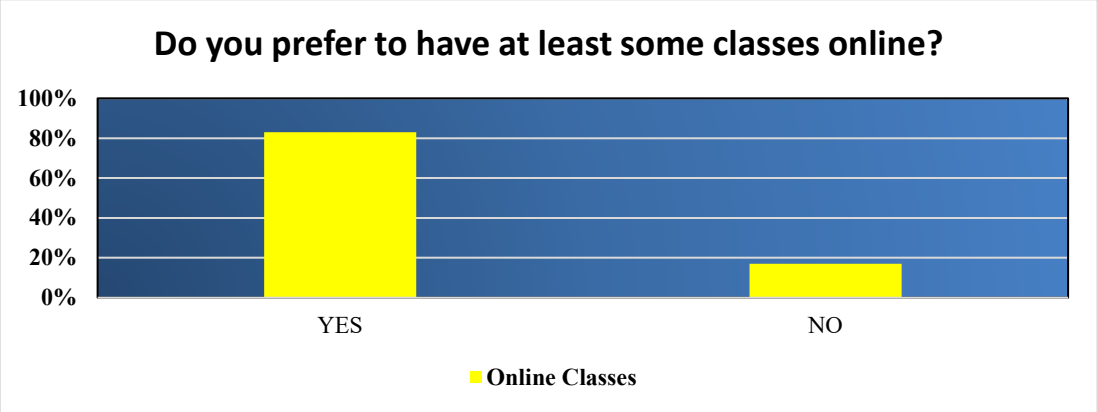


Source: Author

3. Continuing Higher Education in Online Mode during Covid-19

Majority of students, i.e., a whopping 83%, 153 said yes when asked whether their education continued through online mode during Covid-19.

Fig. 8: Continuation of Higher Education through online Mode during Covid-19

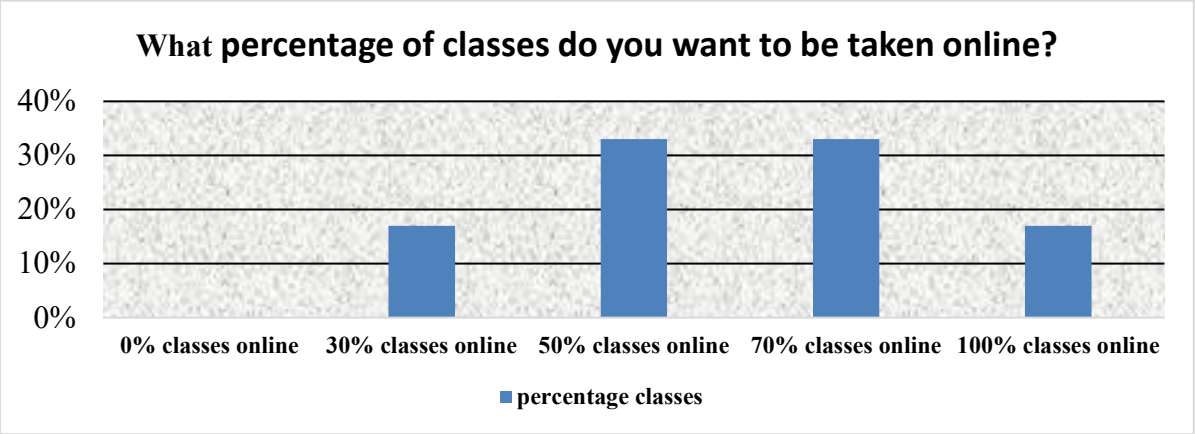


Source: Author

4. **Preferences regarding Online/Offline classes**

17% of the students preferred to have 100% classes online while 33% preferred to have 70% classes online. So, a total of 50% i.e., 92 students preferred to have 70% or more classes online. Another 33% of the students preferred 50% classes online. Nobody wanted to have 100% in-classroom teaching.

Fig. 9: Preferences regarding Online/Offline Classes



Source: Author

MAJOR OBSERVATIONS FROM THE STUDENT SURVEY

1. Students feel that overall education during covid is adversely affected. They flagged lack of university facilities and poor internet connectivity as the main reasons.
2. From the above two questions students on the one hand have overwhelmingly said that the education during covid is adversely affected but on the other hand a vast majority still preferred the online mode of delivery of classes. This seems contradictory but the most reasonable explanation would be the flexibility of location and freedom to work while studying that online classes offer to be the reason for students preferring online classes while they do feel the shortcoming of lack of access to resources in the university such as the library, direct interaction with faculty, etc.

NEED FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

FDI in higher education will solve the problem of enrolment rate as we are in a situation of less supply high demand. Indian money and talent going abroad would be arrested to some extent. Infrastructure will improve in higher education will improve as the foreign universities will build their campuses as per international standards tried and tested in their countries.

The ensuing competition would induce the homegrown Indian universities to become more competent by improving their infrastructure, method of imparting education, up-gradation of curriculum to keep abreast with the changing requirements of the industry. Moreover, FDI in education would generate immense employment opportunities.

INTEGRATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND INDUSTRIES

Keeping in view the intensified global knowledge economy, there is a need for strategic partnerships between the universities and industry that go beyond the customary funding of discrete research projects. Their partnership will work well when the research-driven university work in coordination with the innovation-driven environment of the company.

Fig 10: Enrollment of Indian Students by fields of study

Field	Number ('000)	Total %
Arts	7,539	37%
Science	3,790	19%
Commerce & Management	3,571	18%
Engineering & Technology	3,262	16%
Education	733	4%
Medicine	716	4%
Law	373	2%
Others	218	1%
Agriculture	97	0%
Veterinary Science	28	0%
	20,327	100%

Source: International Journal of Academic Research ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.3, Issue-2(2), February 2016

ATTRACTING FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES TO ESTABLISH INSTITUTES IN INDIA

One of the recommendations of UGC is that foreign universities should be encouraged to offer their programs in India. On behalf of GOI, there are several schemes which are offered by various regulatory bodies concerned with higher education. These schemes support the

bilateral exchange of academic staff from India to foreign countries. Moreover, international institutions such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP are also offering similar programs. All these are aimed at bilateral transactions and aimed at Quality enhancement.

GLOBAL INITIATIVES FOR ACADEMIC NETWORK (GAIN): APPROVED BY UNION CABINET IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Union Cabinet has approved a program titled Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN) in Higher Education aimed at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs internationally to encourage their collaboration with the institutes of Higher Education in India. GIAN will initially include the participation of foreign faculty in Institutes as Distinguished / Adjunct / Visiting faculty / Professors of Practice, etc., to participate in delivering Short or Semester-long Courses.

The Government of India has come up with NEP 2020 with the aim to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035 and increase public sector investment in the education sector to 6% of GDP.

WAY FORWARD/ SUGGESTION

1. The States must come up with a new vision and programs specifically addressing the needs of the State, its industry, economy, social setup.
2. Collaboration between higher institutes in India and abroad must be given more emphasis to enable the exchange of students, best practices, and knowledge sharing.
3. To enable diffusion of knowledge among research various research institutes in India, collaboration and inter-institutional research have to be encouraged to avoid reinventing the wheel, save resources, and achieve higher productivity and progress.
4. Government must promote an alliance between Indian higher education institutes and top international institutes and generate liaisons between national research laboratories and research centres of top institutions for standard and synergic research.
5. There should be a multidisciplinary approach in higher education so that students develop rounded knowledge and personality.
6. Pedagogy must be improved through the following ways:

a. Increase the teacher training days and the frequency of training.
b. Establish teacher training institutes to cater to the existing and new faculty for training.
c. Collaborate with premier institutes in India such as the IITs and IIMs for teacher training.

7. Improving the quality of all Universities irrespective of Public or Private.
   a. Stringent implementation of UGC norms will help improve the quality.
   b. Many private institutes have mushroomed without basic infrastructure and facilities. These must be made to adhere to the norms failing which punitive measures need to be taken.
8. Need to create standard and qualitative education infrastructure to grab futuristic jobs.
9. Ensure that education policy is fully integrated into larger economic growth strategies.
   a. Government should facilitate and enforce concrete integration of higher education with industry by making an internship mandatory. Incentives must be provided by the government to the industry for giving internships to students. This will boost the industry-higher education integration and will be a win-win as the industry can make a full-time offer to the interns and students can get real-life work experience for future job searches.
   b. A percentage of classes conducted for the various higher education courses must be reserved for industry professions. This will not only foster stronger engagement of industry with higher education but also helps knowledge sharing on current issues faced in the industry and the best practices.
10. Move rapidly to develop new forms of digital and automation-enabled training programs.
11. Develop and promote investment policies that encourage foreign direct investment and curtail long-term unemployment.

CONCLUSION

Higher education is the pipeline of manpower resources for all economic activity and the quality of output from the higher education institutions determines the present and future economic

growth and prosperity. True, Higher Education has continuously evolved in tandem with the rapidly changing requirements of the industry in terms of knowledge and skill required. Indian Higher Education sector is fraught with many issues in terms of quality of education imparted, methodology of delivery, and the skills imparted. Apart from catering to industry, Higher Education also must be accessible to all sections of society and to different geographies. Expansion of higher education sectors in terms of quality, as well as volume, is the need of the hour. While the government has made many efforts to expand the capacity of higher education such as attracting premier foreign higher education institutes, expanding Indian institutes, and bringing about changes in UGC norms, etc., a lot more needs to be done to reform the higher education sector in India.

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2. https://www.education.gov.in/en/aishe-report-1
3. https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/doc/vol2chapter/echap10_vol2.pdf http://www.skillsahead.net/job-market-india-2015-an-essential-report/

4. https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics)
5. http://iiti.ac.in/GIAN/
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