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Compiled By:

Dr. Jayaprakash

Librarian

Dnyanprassarak Mandal's College and Research Centre,
Assagao, Bardez, Goa - 403 507

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RINGING IN 2020: UPCOMING REFORMS IN INDIAN EDUCATION SECTOR

Stakeholders hope 2020 will see crucial steps to strengthen Indian education, including skill development, innovative funding

The Indian education sector has a lot of hope, with elements of concern too, on the changes it will see in 2020. Academicians and industry leaders expect reform measures to be announced in early 2020 which will help strengthen the education system. The initiatives could range from skill development and innovative financing to encouraging research output.

Prime concerns in the sector, at an international level, include China taking a lead in research output. But, there's hope that India will show improvement in the area. The past five years have seen some leading institutions lay greater emphasis on research.

Domestic issues include shortage of top faculty and remuneration. In fact, board members of some of the leading management institutions have called for greater incentives - both financial and career growth - to faculty members.

The higher education system in India is one of the largest in the world with 51,649 institutions. The enrolments have also seen a significant four-fold increase. Despite the increased access, challenges remain. Insufficient funding, overarching regulations, low employability of graduates and poor quality of teachers plague the sector.

In a panel discussion by the US-based think tank The Brookings Institution on reviving higher education in India, experts weigh in on the disruption required in the sector. Prof V. Ramgopal Rao, Director at IIT Delhi says one needs a financial model in place to take IITs to the next level. "One cannot run these institutions like another department in the government, which is currently the case. My biggest challenge today is we have created IITs but there is no financial model to run them."

He explains that the investment for these premier institutes depends on the budget decided by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which is not linked to either the number of students in the campus, the research requirements or the numbers of papers

published. "I do not know how much money I will receive next year."The premier institutes in the US get one-third of their revenues from fees, another one-third from the endowment fund and another one-third from research fund. Among IITs in India, all three revenue means are absent. "We need Rs 700 crore every year to run IIT Delhi and fees constitute only five per cent of the total budget," says Rao. IIT Delhi recently launched its global alumni endowment fund but the concern is all funds received by the institute become 'government money'. Another key challenge is overarching regulations and lack of autonomy with the institutes to take decisions. The higher education sector needs to be regulated to ensure quality education and equity and social justice, as well as to prevent unfair practices. But, the sector has been over-regulated since independence, leading to several inefficiencies. Brookings' report "Reviving Higher Education in India" finds that there are 14 regulatory bodies in the higher education sector in India across general education, technical education and professional education.

The major chunk of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India fall under the affiliating university model where the supervisory authority for most colleges is the university or a government authority. They often lack the capacity to effectively regulate their colleges and hold them accountable.

Having autonomous institutes is an option but they constitute a very small per cent (only 2.1%) of the total number of HEIs in the country. Earlier instances, says the Brookings report, have found that autonomous HEIs are at an advantage since they have the power to constitute their own academic councils and make decisions on academic matters.

Prof Pankaj Chandra, Vice Chancellor of Ahmedabad University, says, "An institution is about people, its processes, it's about the aspiration of that institution and not the aspiration of the regulatory body." He suggests for a robust accreditation process. "The way we do accreditation currently is by giving grades and numbers, which is not an enabling mechanism. One needs to look at one institution at the time, get a mentor to work with this institution, identify its weaknesses, build the capabilities that are needed and then enable it to move up the ladder," he says.

Several of these issues have been there for the last 20 years but not much has changed. Today, we have reached a flash-point where one needs urgent reforms. Pramath Raj

Sinha, Founder and Managing Director of online professional education platform Harappa Education calls for disruption in the sector. He says, "Increasing institutes capacity, improving student faculty ration are all incremental measures. We need to come up with an alternative model for education to teach at scale the 25 billion Indians and meet their aspirations." There are no answers yet, and that is where the opportunity is.

Source: <https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/enrolments-jump-4-times-yet-higher-education-needs-a-disruption/story/391361.html>

INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IS IN PIGEONHOLES; IT NEEDS TO MOVE AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL STEM FORMAT

*Chandrika Tandon is a multifaceted Indian-origin success story in the US. A former partner at McKinsey & Company, she chairs Tandon Capital Associates. Tandon, whose musical skills led to a Grammy nomination, is also involved in higher education in the US. She talks to **Rajesh Chandramouli** about the changes India's higher education needs:*

How would you assess the Indian students coming to the US universities?

I see a lot of Indian students come into the top universities in the US. I am the vice chairman of the board in multiple schools where Indian students come in and do a Masters programme. I look at the assessment in two/three levels. When the students come in, they come in incredibly bright. They are off the charts in terms of broad intelligence. They are very confident. We must give them worldly polish, better communication skills, better soft skills, areas which the schools here (in India) don't do a very good job. We define academic success in a fairly narrow way. We should add several courses on life skills and soft skills.

We still are focusing on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) skills for engineering streams which is a 20-30 year old way of looking at education. Today, you must learn new things including bio engineering, signal processing, health etc. You can't stop at mechanical engineering, but must know mechatronics. Whole new fields are emerging, yet institutions are still living in pigeonholes and pockets.

How is the landscape changing?

The most exciting work that is getting done is at the confluence or intersection of two fields. Twenty years ago cross-disciplinary was a bad word. Now, the most exciting and groundbreaking work is being done at the intersection. It's not just academic research. Inventions and innovations are happening in this space now.

STEM, the way we know it as taught in IITs, ain't happening anymore. There is a big mismatch between what companies want now and what we are producing. The silos don't let you see what is happening.

Should we marry arts to STEM and make it STEAM?

The elements of critical thinking that arts education brings in to the way we study, STEM doesn't do. What is the goal of STEM? The highest mission of STEM is to really help solve the problems of the world. To harness technology to solve global problems. Today we have students who have no clue about the problems of the world. They just know how to use their protractors without knowing the problems of the world. They don't have a historical context for the problems of the world. If you ask any first year or second year student: What are the great problems of the world? They will say let me think about it. We must provide a social context. History has solved some problems in a great way. That's why you need liberal arts curriculum to be brought in. While we teach our children the very very tough parts of STEM, we have to give them a vision, a bigger vision. Arts lets you do that.

What do you see missing among authorities in higher education?

There was a meeting in London a few days back where representatives from Peking University and the Royal Academy of London participated along with us (US representatives). I asked where is India? We are just not there. China is a major player in the science and technology thought process. We need to be present in these international fora.

India's researchers in many of these areas are brilliant, but aren't good at research accreditation. We in India need a super strong body of research accreditation at the highest international standards, which can then both be branded and publicised. It is an imperative

and India does not have one now. With our research papers, our patents, our licensing, our branded knowledge base, we should be every place at the top of these discussions. Sadly we aren't players in that. Peer reviewed research in top journals is a very specific process and happens in a particular way. Indians still work on individual level collaborations, when we should be owning this space. We have bodies in India which are not in the same league as China. I feel it's an incredible opportunity to put everything under one body and give it the powers to collaborate. The first ten steps are hard and long, but the next ten takes just minutes. The second part is a lot of industries are transforming. For example the music and movie industries. The pace of change here makes most industries archaic.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/the-interviews-blog/indian-higher-education-is-in-pigeonholes-it-needs-to-move-away-from-traditional-stem-format/>

UGC MAY PERMIT ON-DEMAND TESTS

In its latest guidelines on evaluation reforms which were released by Union human resources development (HRD) minister Ramesh PokhriyalNishank on Thursday, the University Grants Commission has held that a new national board should be created to conduct examinations on demand.

University students in the coming years may get to decide the time and place of when they sit for examinations as higher education sector regulator UGC has given a go-ahead to the concept of on-demand testing.

In its latest guidelines on evaluation reforms which were released by Union human resources development (HRD) minister Ramesh PokhriyalNishank on Thursday, the University Grants Commission has held that a new national board should be created to conduct examinations on demand.

The guidelines say that initially the new board will conduct exams for popular degree programs across the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

At the initial stage, the on-demand examinations would be introduced for distance programs to which they are best suited. Popular courses like BA or B Com etc is the distance

mode can be the starting point, said a senior official. “It is natural that the process will take some time to formalize and the setting up of a board from such exams is a key step. Once the board is set up, the infrastructure will be in place other procedural details will be worked out,” the official said. Till then the normal exams will definitely continue, he added. This exam would be open to all with no age limit or minimum requirements for eligibility which would mean that anyone can take these tests, according to the guidelines said.

“The idea is to reduce the stress on the students as well as the pressure on the varsities which have to conduct exams for thousands of students at one go. Under this new system, students will be able to decide when they are best prepared and be able to take the test,” said another UGC official, who asked not to be named.

The official, however, added that the new system would require a lot of work before it starts addressing the needs of millions of students countrywide.

Former UGC member Inder Mohan Kapahy said: “In principle, the idea of Examination on Demand is an excellent idea. However the diversities in the academic and evaluation structures in Indian higher education systems makes it a utopian idea at the present time. It shall require huge restructuring and harmonisation within existing diverse systems.”

Earlier this year, a committee headed by MM Salunkhe, a former vice-chancellor of the Central University of Rajasthan, had suggested the examination-on-demand system as a major evaluation reform.

The committee had suggested the introduction of encrypted barcodes to curb malpractice in examinations. The UGC, on Thursday, also came out with guidelines on inculcation of human values and professional ethics in educational institutions.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ugc-may-permit-on-demand-tests/story-v8FpIFjAkRKqBp36Gs0mCP.html>

RESERVATION POLICY FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

Extent and Determinants of Support

Jungug Choi (drchoi@konkuk.ac.kr) is with the Department of Political Science, Konkuk University, South Korea. Narender Kumar (kumarr.narender@gmail.com) is with the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

This paper examines the extent and determinants of popular support for reservation policy for the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes in India, using an individual-level opinion survey data set. It argues that the reservation policy, as well as its longitudinal extension and expansion into the private sector, is more supported than opposed, even though public opinion is polarised regarding its expansion to the private sector. Aside from the control variable of reservation status, those who are highly educated, female, rich, caste conscious, or have inter-caste friendships are likely to support reservation, whereas upper castes are less likely to support it.

Source: <https://epw.in/journal/2019/51/special-articles/reservation-policy-backward-classes.html>

MHRD ORGANIZES A NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON “SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICES”

Bhubaneswar: Ministry of Human Resource Development organized a full day workshop on “Social Media management and Practices” on 27 December 2019 at VigyanBhawan New Delhi for various educational institutions and organizations. The workshop was inaugurated by Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’, Hon’ble Union Minister of HRD. The Central University of Odisha along with other centrally funded educational institutions participated in the workshop. Dr. PhagunathBhoi, Public Relation Officer represented the Central University of Odisha in the workshop. Principle DG, Press Information Bureau, Shri Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia; Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education Smt Neeta Prasad; Joint Secretary, Department of School Education, Shri R.C Meena; Additional Director General, Press Information Bureau, SmtNanuBhasin and other senior officials of the Ministry of HRD were present on this occasion.

In India, social media reach is the highest among other media. Every institution has to use social media platform to promote their best works, best practice and best things. The Social Media Champions of each institution can build the image by sharing all the achievements in the social media, said Shri Pokharial. He also said social media is an interactive media where communication process involves in both the way. It allows the institution to reach people locally, regionally, nationally and even internationally. The new innovations, ideas and quality research have to be shared in the platform to reach large people.

Keeping the importance of the Social Media he advised the educational institutions to organize seminar/workshop on Social Media in support of Press Information Bureau of their respective state.

He further said that purpose of the workshop is to bring the social media communication and outreach of various institutions under one umbrella and to open a channel for day to day communication and dialogue. Social media has become a powerful tool to connect, interact and collaborate. Use it as a tool for enhancing performance by improving delivery of services and convert the image of the organization into a brand, he added. He also promised to felicitate and reward best social media champions at national level.

During the first session of workshop Shri Abhishek Singh, Chief Executive Officer, MyGov, delivered a lecture on strategies of social media platforms for Government Communication. Shri KS Dhatwalia, Principal DG, PIB highlighted different technique used in social media. Ms NanuBhasin, Addl. DG, PIB, gave an overview of the programme and the broad purpose of bringing together the social media managers of various educational organizations of HRD ministry in her introductory speech.

In the second session Shri B. Narayanan, ADG, Social Media, PIB and Dr. Rajesh Naithani, social media Advisor to HRM elaborated the use of social media platform in various purposes. At the end of the workshop certificates are distributed to all participants.

Source: <https://indiaeducationdiary.in/mhrd-organizes-a-national-workshop-on-social-media-management-and-practices/>