

Attitude of Public towards Higher Education: Conceptual Analysis

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©Scholedge International Journal of Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies (ISSN 2394-336X), Vol.02, Issue 12 (2015) pp19-28.
Published by: Scholedge R&D Center [www.theSCHOLEDGE.org] [Email: sijmas@scholedge.org]

Abstract

Indian higher education has never received much prominence when compared to the primary level. Academicians of our country have already pointed out that for economic and social well-being of our country majorly depends on the quality and widespread of higher education in our country. The main obstruction is the misconceptions by the general public of our country which is accompanied by the economic issues. The vision of Ministry of Human Resource and Development heads the department of Higher Education whose aim is to realize India's human resource potential to its fullest in the education sector, with equity and excellence. Higher education is a costly affair when we take into consideration the fact that almost 20% of the population still lie under the poverty line. There is still a gap in the level of enrolment between males and females. The government is trying hard to overcome this disparity. Skills have often been ignored in our country's scenario. Thus, higher education should also promote and encourage technical education. An All India Survey on Higher Education was initiated only in 2011, only because none of the sources had a complete picture of the data on higher education. The large amount of population is also a problem as it becomes difficult to cater to the needs of each individual or group. The resources are scarce when compared to the people demanding for it. We should try to identify the problems, and then we should work towards solving those problems. Public of our country should be willing to send their children for higher education; they should be having a positive attitude towards higher education. This paper discusses several steps that can be undertaken to bridge the gaps in the system of higher education in India.

Keywords: Education, Higher Education in India, Attitude towards higher education

Introduction

Purkait (1996) stated that Education can be termed in three senses: knowledge, subject and a process. “Educatum” denotes the act of teaching, it covers the skills of teaching. Educare or Educere mainly indicates development of the latent faculties of the child. Certain definitions of education of are given by great and renowned educators of both east and west. Vivekananda (1861) defined Education as the manifestation of perfection already in man. On the other hand, Rousseau (1762) pointed out that Education is the child’s development from within. Plato (as cited in Myungjoon Lee, 1994) was of view that Education is the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why... education, then is a matter of correctly disciplined feelings of pleasure and pain. Dewey (1938) described Education as the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences.

The system of education has emerged during the 3rd century with Gurukula system which focused on the religious training and traditional knowledge. In the medieval period there was a great improvement and emergence in the institutions imparting higher education. It had a touch of Islamic culture with a blend of Indian tradition. The present system of education in India was introduced and founded by the British in the 20th century by the recommendations of Lord Macaulay. Three federal examining universities on the pattern of London University were established in the three main British controlled cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857.

At present, there is a national organization that plays a key role in developing policies and programmes, called the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) that prepares a National Curriculum Framework. Each state has its counterpart called the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). These are the bodies that essentially propose educational strategies, curricula, pedagogical schemes and evaluation methodologies to the states' departments of education. There are two main streams at the national level: the ICSE and the CBSE.

According to Statistics of Higher and Technical Education publication (2014) and AISHE (2014) there has been an improvement in the gross enrolment ratio of student being enrolled in higher education from 8.1 in 2001-2002 to 21.1 in 2012-2013. When compared with other countries India has a gross enrolment ratio in higher education of only 20.8 when compared to 26.7 in China, 61.7 in Germany, 76.1 in Russia, 61.9 in UK and 94.3 in USA. Only 4.18 % of public education is spent on overall education in India. The Inbound Mobility Ratio as well as the Outbound Mobility Ratio is as low as 0.1% and 0.7% in India. This disparity is mainly because the most number of population in India is under the poverty line, and the majority of Indian population cannot afford education. There is a provision of free and compulsory primary education so that rate is higher in primary education. Skills and vocation is not given much importance in our country when it comes to taking them up as a subject for higher education.

Higher Education in India

Higher education is of great importance in today's context as (a) it promotes social and economic development: Higher education enhances human and technical capabilities of society. Technical change and institutional change are the key components of development. Higher education increases our depth of knowledge, thus leading to self-development. This in turn will lead to social and economic development. (b) Related to Human Development Index: Higher education is related to human development index, it helps in promoting the disadvantaged groups.

Yet of this there is a high dropout rate among students in higher education. This is because of various reasons among which few can be listed: (a) High Cost of Education: More than 40% of the population in India lie under the below poverty line. Thus we can fairly imagine that the high cost of higher education with no compulsory schemes like primary education, is not affordable by nearly half of the population in the country. (b) Too Much Stress: Some students can't handle stress well. They are not able to handle the pressure of work combined with studies. A large number of parents are unable to support their wards through the years in college. (c) Insufficient Preparation or Motivation: Transitioning from high school to college can be a rude awakening, as studying, developing time management

skills and prioritizing become far more critical. Some students never find a balance between social life and studying. Often educational institutions fail to provide motivation, preparation and sound advice for going to college. (d) Family issues and Commitments: More adults are choosing to return to college while raising children. Because children, spouses and the college-bound parents all feel the effects of that decision. Many who dropped out said they needed to spend more time with family. Other strenuous family situations affecting studies include taking care of ill parents or other loved ones and working to help struggling parents make ends meet.

Attitude towards higher education

Attitude (Oxford Dictionary, 2015) is a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. A predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Attitude influences an individual's choice of action, and responses to challenges, incentives, and rewards (together called stimuli). (Business Dictionary, 2015)

Four major components of attitude are (1) Affective: emotions or feelings. (2) Cognitive: belief or opinions held consciously. (3) Conative: inclination for action. (4) Evaluative: positive or negative response to stimuli.

Attitude towards higher education may depend upon many things. It may depend on the job prospects from a particular course, the money spend on a particular course, the educational qualification of the parents, the income level of the family, number of siblings of the individual etc.

A person thinks about both the immediate benefits as well as about the benefits in the long-run. It depends on what the person actually wants: the immediate benefit or the benefit in the long-run. Thus, attitude towards higher education may differ largely from person to person as well as it may change in the person from time to time, with accordance to his situation and environment.

Review of Literature

Public Attitude on Higher Education (Immerwahr, 2004) is a longitudinal study stretching over period of ten years from 1993- 2003. The survey used the same set of 16 questions in all the years. In the last survey carried out, they had 801 adult respondents. The study showed that there was not much change in the public opinion regarding higher education over a period of time. The study also talks about those minority groups whose attitude towards higher education has been troubled. The study reviews the areas of stability of people in higher education and also some significant changes that take place over the period of time.

In the study: Students' attitude of University Education (Furnham and Mcmanus, 2004) authors are of the view that the students' attitude towards higher education are most of the time ignored. Initially a pilot study was done using focus groups and in-depth interviews, the students then constructed a 32 item questionnaire which was administered on 1000 fulltime undergraduates. Alongside a personality test was also administered. The study showed that only 43% young people go to the universities, while the government target was 50%. This study aimed to show whether the attitudes and beliefs were systematically linked to the student's personality, demography and what degree they were studying for. The study was conducted in top 5 universities of U.K. It was a six factor study which included extra-academic influence (or the extra-curricular influence), family and friends influence, reputation of universities, degree value, tuition fees and practical training.

In the study - Public Perceptions of Higher Education (Benjamin, 1993), author says that the wide importance of higher education as an influence on Britain's economic and social fortunes in the long term is well appreciated by most academics, but it is not yet grasped by the general public in the UK. The article discusses on three main types according to the interest and awareness of the groups: People having direct encounters with the university and education as they live in town or city, second there are the parents and other relatives of teenagers who hope to be the first members of the family to enter higher education. Despite some encouraging progress in recent years, a backlog of misconception and prejudice remains to be overcome. It thus appears that overall success of the newly unified higher-education system will depend crucially on improved public relations. The author

suggests that the Universities should take responsibility to spread higher education. This article aims to summarise the basic advantages of higher education, its claims for national investment and its need for more resolute publicity. Such aspects of higher education are perhaps all self-evident on campus, but are regrettably seldom given explicit expression. After reviewing the case for better advertising the work of universities, the discussion refers to typical portrayals of higher education in British fiction and television; and some comparisons are then made with public opinion about universities in France, Germany and the USA. The conclusion reaffirms that more could be done valuably by British universities and other institutions of learning to promote their public image.

A study conducted by Malik (1988) on Certain Correlates of Dropouts in the Field of Higher Education, which was conducted keeping in mind several objectives : a) To ascertain the percentage of probable dropouts to the initial enrolment in colleges; (b) To determine the real dropouts, after excluding migration, transfer to other courses, all and those who even after leaving the colleges completed graduation elsewhere; (c) To ascertain the correlates of dropouts in the field of higher education; (d) To ascertain the causative factors of students dropping out of the courses concerned; (e) To ascertain if dropouts and non-dropouts differed in terms of some of the socio-demographic and personality variables; and (f) To ascertain if dropouts and non-dropouts differed in their attitude towards higher education, achievement motivation, adjustment areas and future plans. The study was conducted in two phases. In phase-I, an attempt was made to determine the extent of dropout. In phase-II, an attempt was made to identify the correlates of dropouts and the typical nature and characteristic features related to dropouts. There were six kinds of tools which were used to collect the data. They are as follows: 1. A preform specially devised to collect information on enrolment, number of students appearing in the final year examination, withdrawal and dropouts from the respective colleges. 2. An open ended questionnaire to ascertain the reasons for dropping out (devised specially for the purpose). 3. An attitude measurement scale (constructed specially for the purpose of study). 4. A questionnaire covering socio-demographic factors devised specially for the purpose. 5. Sentence completion test for achievement motivation (Shanthamani, and Hafeez 1968). 6. Personality Adjustment Inventory for college students (Sinha and Singh 1972). The sample size was 2304. A few of

the findings can be jotted down as below. The results showed that only 60% of the total enrolment appeared for the final year exam. Out of the 40% dropouts, nearly 22% had not attended college from the beginning itself. Nearly 18% of the total population appeared as the probable dropouts. The ratio of dropouts among males were far higher than among females. The ratio of dropouts among co-educational institutions were far higher than among female colleges. There was a significant difference between dropouts and non-dropouts regarding their plans for their future career; while the non-dropouts had clearly fixed and more ambitious goals, the dropouts had none.

Discussions and recommendations

Several steps can be taken to bridge the gaps in the system of higher education:

Parental Involvement: Involvement of parents should not be seen in a negative sense. The institutions should come together with the parents for the all-round development of the student. The institution needs to have an idea about the sociological and the psychological background of the students, which can be done by parental involvement. The parents should be aware of the positive as well as the negatives characteristics of the student so that they can take some effective measure.

Proper Administration and Implementation of Rules: There should be proper implementation of rules and proper administration of higher educational institutions. The grants and incentives should reach the institutions and they should use them in an effective and an efficient manner without any form of corruptions. The deserving candidates should be given preference according to marks and it should not be done according to the donations given by the candidate. There should be proper scrutiny by the authorities. NAAC and other organisations should take initiative to make sure all work is being done legally.

Encouraging part time courses: Many students prefer to work either in a dire need of money or just as an interest. So there should be opportunity for such people to have part-time courses so that they do not have to devote their full days' time in an educational institution instead they can just be work and earn as well as complete courses and receive degree and certificate.

Emphasis on Peer Education: This is one of the most effective ways in which there can be a reduction in the gap. The academically stronger people can help the weaker ones to perform better so that they do not feel like dropping out. This also facilitates interaction between the students and builds stronger relations. Exchange of ideas takes place and new ideas are formed.

Financial Schemes and scholarships to be restructured: Scholarships should be given to those candidates who are genuinely deserving and who genuinely need them. The authorities should keep a minimum criteria for marks, income level and other similar dimensions. Only then the deserving candidates who cannot afford will get a chance.

Emphasis on Experience: Indian system of education is very bookish and theoretical. There is not emphasis on the practical skills. Thus we need to shift focus and emphasise on developing practical knowledge and skills so that we gain knowledge on something which we could apply later on.

De-Emphasis on marks: Marks should not be the prime focus for our education. It is just a way of assessing students. They just set a standard to define student's academic achievement. Other things like extracurricular activities, leadership qualities, social work, and soft skills should also be emphasised upon.

Regular Guidance and Supervision: Guidance and counselling should be a prime part of our education system. All higher educational institutions must provide this facility. It need not be only academic counselling, but also personal counselling. Group (full class together) as well as individual counselling should be given importance.

Higher education helps in improving an individual's quality of life. Research studies show that, when one compares high school graduates and college graduates, the later have longer life spans, better health practices and dietary, better access to health care, greater economic security and stability, more prestigious employment and greater job satisfaction, less dependency on government assistance, greater knowledge of government, greater community service and leadership, more volunteer work, more self-confidence, and less criminal activity and incarceration. (Allen. H, 2007)

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