

The feasibility and fallacies of internationalization of Higher Education in India

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Abstract – This article tracks the historical backdrop of foreign collaboration in Indian education. It critically analyses the Foreign Education Institutions Bill of 2010 in the light of the four modes of trade in higher education namely cross border supply, consumption abroad, commercial presence and presence of natural persons. It further deliberates into the various issues of concern regarding Higher education in India like enrollment, equity, infrastructure, curriculum, quality of the institutions, adequate faculty and research output in terms of the global contribution. The article concludes by providing possible suggestions and rectifications that could help change the higher education scenario for the better.

Key Words – Internationalization, Foreign Education Institutions Bill, problems and remedies in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization of higher education in India is not a new phenomenon. The Universities of Takshshila, Vikramshila, Vallabhi and Nalanda bear witness to the magnificent educational legacy. These ancient Universities attracted great scholars from all over the world particularly during the Gupta and Maurya reign. Fa-Hein and Hein-Tsang of China came to Nalanda University for education during these periods. Medieval India boasts of famous scholars like Nuniz and Peaz from Portugal, Ibn Batuta from Africa and Nicolo Conti from Italy. During the British period, eminent scholars like Max Muller and William Jones did extensive study on India literature and culture. Foreign faculties to name a few like William Ward, Joshua Marshman, William Carrey, David Hare and Alexander Duff came to India for teaching and managing educational institutions. From the time of independence several Indian scholars have gone abroad especially to England to train in subjects like engineering, medicine and law. Foreign books and journals have always been a vital source of knowledge for our university students and teachers. Thus, teaching, learning, research and institution-building have all been of part of internationalization of higher education in India.

In this millennium however, the internationalization of higher education has taken a new dimension with new modes of delivery in higher education. It is widely documented that the international mobility of students and academicians permits developing countries to acquire current knowledge and research methodologies. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) has accepted the urgency to develop India's higher education system to face the global challenge. The plan acknowledges the need for an international dimension, including linkages with other countries and international research programmes (Government of India 2007). Education is treated as a tradable service under the General Agreement on Trades in Services (1995) and the 'Foreign Education Providers Bill' of 2010 is a lead in permitting foreign investment in higher education in India. In higher education four different modes are recognized for trade in services. The first mode is 'cross-border delivery' which refers to delivery of education services and obtaining degrees via the internet that is through distance education; virtual universities, tele-education, education testing services etc. The second mode is 'consumption abroad' which refers to inflow and outflow of students for higher education. The third mode is 'commercial presence' which refers to joint degree providers, branch campuses, franchise-twining arrangements, franchise establishment of local branch campus for foreign universities etc. The fourth mode is 'movement of natural persons' which refers to temporary movement of teachers and scholars to provide education services overseas.

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill (2010)

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill particularly aims at regulating mode three of trade in educational services which is commercial presence of existing foreign providers along with regulating entry of new foreign providers. The Bill does not aid Indian institutions to go abroad, nor does it try to manage the matter of foreign students coming to India. So the bill doesn't deal with all four modes of internationalization of higher education in India. Moreover, even if foreign education providers were not allowed to set up campuses in India, they could employ other means of delivery like the distance mode or

informal twinning arrangements on which the Indian government may not have much control. In today's world, all sorts of services and online transactions are available on the net with the use of credit cards and it would be impossible to track them. Regarding twinning arrangements there is no legal barring if an Indian institution confers a student with degrees after completion of say a semester in an institution abroad because it would amount to just a matter of credit transfer. Furthermore, with all the conditions stated in the Bill like Rs.50 crores as caution deposit, strict compliance to government policies and with a clause forbidding the repatriation of profits, it is doubtful if there are going to be many takers (Gnanam, 2010).

Foreign Educational Institutions Bill and Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education

It is debatable on how the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill will be helpful in achieving India's goal of 30 per cent GER by 2020 (Shah, 2010). It may further raise the inequality between rural and urban, rich and poor; higher caste and deprived categories of students. The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill predominantly aspires to secure help from the foreign universities to improve quality of education from mediocre to excellent rather than quantitative increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education. The champions of the Bill feel that permitting foreign universities would be beneficial as they would serve as models to the indigenous ones and help in enhancing the quality of education, increase output of academic work and culture, increase student-faculty exchanges and the professional development of the faculty in terms of superior teaching and research. However these can only be ensured when Indian campuses have adequately equipped infrastructure.

Yet again, developed countries may not find it viable to transfer the entire faculty needed from their country. As of now there are about six hundred thousand teachers in our higher education system to cater to 10-12 million students (Gnanman, 2010). If the Gross Enrolment Ratio doubles or triples in a reasonable period of time, it is unrealistic to consider that the vast majority would gain from a few hundred visiting foreign nationals to serve in the Indian campuses. The education made available by foreign providers will be more expensive and indeed beyond the reach of common students. It may only be accessed by a privileged few students who are able to pay high fees. The reach of programs offered through the electronic media is also limited to those dwelling in big cities and who have access to internet technology.

Again most of the foreign providers offer programs relating to business management and technology which are required by the specialized few and do not cater much to liberal disciplines that are relevant to the socio-cultural needs of the local people.

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill and Outward mobility of students

In our country 'Bilayati shiksha' has always seen to add prestige value inspite of numerous incidents of discrimination faced by Indian students in Australia, violence in the U.S and stringent visa norms in the U.K. The number of students who leave the country to study abroad has risen over the years and is no longer meant for the elite few. Many students from the large and growing middle-class prefer to get educated abroad, knowing that this can open up better job opportunities back in India on their return (Khadria, 2007). Over 40,000 Indian students are studying in US courses and several thousands in Europe and approximately 3-14 billion dollars is drained out of India for students who go abroad (Powar, 2010). Currently, Indians constitute about 7.5 per cent of the world's mobile students, the second-largest group of students after China (Agarwal, 2010). However an approximation of the percentage of students going abroad for education revealed from the students visas issued by the various consulates show that the numbers are not significant for a big country like ours (Gnanman, 2010).

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill assumes that the outflow of Indian students can be checked by endorsing foreign universities to come and offer their educational programs in India itself. It is believed that the cost of living and travel could be diminished if foreign providers operate in our country. However, it is debatable as to how far the foreign education providers can recreate the same ambience and work culture of their country in India. The presence of a few foreign universities or their branch campuses from a country may not reverse this traditional mobility of our students to foreign countries. Those Indian students who aspire for education abroad do so not only for good quality education but also to be an immigrant to these advanced countries where a better quality of life and earnings exists.

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill and Inward mobility of students

India has not been proactive in drawing international students and its coordination, communication and recruitment strategies are weak. The prevalence of international students in India is

markedly low compared to that of China. China, which hosted only a few hundred students in the early 1990s, now hosts about 200,000 students, while in India this number increased from about 13,000 students in 1990-91 to the current 18,594 (Agarwal, 2010). Most of the international students coming to India, traditionally come from neighboring countries in South Asia like Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Malaysia.

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) faces many difficulties in collecting data, particularly for students from neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh as their borders with India are porous. Most institutions recruit foreign students themselves, though some universities coordinate recruitment for affiliated colleges. The coordination mechanism for promotion of Indian higher education abroad by the University Grants Commission in 2004-05 has not been very effective. Educational Consultants India Limited is the liaison agency for the admission of foreign nationals and overseas Indians, but it recruits less than a thousand students each year. Another thousand comes through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, as a part of the public diplomacy of the government (Agarwal, 2008).

There are numerous causes for insufficient foreign student enrolment in India. Most of the international students in India are either self-financed or receive some funding from their home governments. The Indian embassies abroad do have handbooks that contain information about academic courses and universities but these are not updated on a regular basis. There is a lack of integrated sites on the internet providing comprehensible information to the students which is why Indian universities remain largely inaccessible to foreign students. Foreign students also have a difficult time in securing visas. The process starts in the months of February and March and by the time it materializes, the academic course may have already begun, leaving students little or no time to plan their trip (Sharma, 2010). Further, Indian universities lack good infrastructure like proper hostel facilities or cafeteria, lack of any international student's cell in the universities etc. Moreover, International students also face difficulties in opening bank accounts and in obtaining adequate information about transportation as roadmaps of towns are rarely available.

The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill and Faculty

Migration and exodus of teachers may be a major concern for India due to the effect of the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill on our already declining staff strength in higher education. India may face a real challenge of retaining their finest faculties. Indian

faculties might leave their home country by being allured by the Foreign Educational Providers for better facilities for undertaking research in emerging areas.

According to a recent report of HRD Ministry, premier educational institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) are facing a faculty crunch with nearly one-third of the posts vacant. According to a report published in IANS (2010) around 35 percent posts are vacant in the central universities, 25 percent in the IIMs and 33.33 percent in the National Institute of Technology (NITs). It is really a matter of concern as these massive vacant positions lead to more workload on teaching, effecting quality of teaching and research.

The Task Ahead

It is explicit that only internationalization cannot provide all the solutions in the field of higher education in India. India's higher education segment is presently encountering grave challenges like the need to expand student access, upgrading quality to accomplish excellence, mobilizing the required resources and strengthening the regulatory role. All these are complex issues and there are no simple solutions to it. The Indian government is making an effort by suggesting various reforms but it still has a long way to go.

In recent years, the government has taken steps to attract international students, including the streamlining of the visa process and the granting of multi-entry visas for long-term courses. Universities have been advised to set up international student centers, special websites, familiarization sessions and periodic monitoring of foreign students. Under the Promotion of Indian Education Abroad, during the 10th Five year plan (2002-07), the UGC has attempted to attract international students to India. The government has created an exclusive scheme called Direct Admission of Students Abroad wherein 15% seats have been reserved in premier technical institutions such as the National Institutes of Technology and centrally funded institutions for foreign nationals and non-resident Indians. The Manipal Academy of Higher Education has offshore branches in Nepal and Malaysia. Manipal Academy in India also hosts a large number of Malaysian students in medical courses because of its twinning arrangement with the medical school in Malacca. Birla Institute of Technology has campuses in Oman and Dubai. IGNOU has thousands of students registered abroad. APTECH and NIIT also have branches abroad and as many as sixteen Indian institutions have off-shore centers (Power, 2010).

To restrain outward mobility of students it is important that we create world class Universities in India which would be recognized internationally. Singapore, Dubai and Qatar have a Knowledge City which provides high quality education. The government of India plans to set up five universities to cater to the needs of overseas Indian students, with half of the seats reserved for them. The first such university at Bangalore is to be set up in partnership with the Manipal Group. Several private institutions having world-class infrastructure like the Vellore Institute of Technology which already hosts several hundred students from China. In the same lines of the Knowledge City, Education Hubs at Chandigarh and Sonapat are ongoing initiatives to allure international students. Developed as a center of excellence for education and research in hospitality and management education, Lavasa has already commenced academic programs (Agarwal, 2010).

Very few Indian institutions find a place in the global rankings of universities. The Shanghai world rankings of the top 500 universities/institutes include only three Indian Institutes of Technologies and one Indian Institute of Management at the lower end. The Times global rankings of the top 100 also find a mention of just a couple of Indian institutions. In terms of published papers, India has slipped from the 8th place in 1985 to the 14th in 2006 (Paul, 2009). The report of the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) shows that only 30 per cent of the universities and only 10 per cent of the colleges are "A" grade or "Five Star" institutions and the rest are tolerable or poor. NAAC proposes to introduce the India Education Index (IEI) for ranking institutes based on academic, research performance and other parameters. The outcome will help in the international comparison of institutes. NAAC has entered into an MOU with higher learning institutes of the United States, Taiwan, Norway, Kuwait and with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to facilitate collaborative work on quality assurance in higher education institutions (Muzammil, 2010).

In the 11th Plan, the public expenditure on education is only about three percent of the Gross National Product; more particularly, only 0.37 per cent of Gross Domestic Product is spent on higher education in India compared to 0.50 percent in China and 1.40 percent in the US (Agarwal, 2006). Although government funding has gone up over the past couple of years, public funds continue to be scarce and unevenly distributed. As a result, most institutions face economic hurdles and have raised fees, particularly for professional programs, to

substitute or supplement public funds. This has made higher education expensive and only few students qualify for loans, thereby restricting access to higher education. Thus, since the funds received by Indian universities are small, they are not in a position to cope with the Foreign Education Providers who have much better infrastructure, technology, pedagogical skills, faculties and well developed market driven courses.

The Indian government should offer tax concessions/fiscal incentives to private companies to set up campuses of higher education. The private sector should run universities not for a profit-basis but as a part of corporate social responsibility. Open Universities need to be encouraged to offer quality programs at the least cost. There is great need for providing broad band connectivity to all students along with low priced computer accessibility. If online learning can be made available in rural and small town educational institutions, then the access to and quality of higher education can be improved. A majority of the country's students (88.9 per cent) are enrolled in undergraduate programs, with merely 9.4 per cent enrolled in postgraduate and just 0.7 per cent in doctoral programs. Enrollment by major field of study is skewed in favor of the arts and humanities (45 per cent), followed by science (20.5 per cent) and commerce (18 per cent). Only 17 per cent of students pursue professional studies, which are dominated by engineering and medicine (Agarwal, 2009). Most of our public Universities lack vocational focus and churns out graduates who have difficulty securing employment. These Universities need to start innovative courses like apparel design, jewellery design, animation technology, etc., which some private Universities like Amity University and Lovely Professional University offer. Also flexibility in switching streams should be introduced. A student should be allowed to switch streams or study any subject-combination provided he has the acumen for it. The logic is that a student good in history or language can also be proficient in mathematics or physics. Moreover, Indian Universities can encourage 'brain gain' by appointing Indians who are teaching abroad to teach in Universities in India through higher remuneration and adequate resources for advancement. With the increase in the standard of living in most of the metropolis in India, many non-resident Indians have come back to India and many more are seeking ways to come back to their homeland. The Presidency University of Kolkata has introduced such a flexible curriculum and has also absorbed a number of such Indian teachers from abroad.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, higher education in India needs to adopt a holistic approach by changing and aligning with global norms to ensure an internationally comparable academic structure, academic calendar, grading procedure, methods of instruction and granting of degrees which will be recognized internationally.

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