Addressing the Challenges for Global Ranking: Reviving the Teaching Ancient Universities

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Abstract

In the growth of any country Education plays a vital role. The world economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present and future wealth. As the importance of knowledge increases, significance of higher education also rises. Countries need to educate more of their young people to a higher standard for many skilled jobs. The quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions, and its availability to the wider economy, is a point of competitiveness for the different nations. This poses a serious challenge to the developing countries. Since the 1980s, many national governments and international donors have assigned higher education a relatively low priority compared to primary and secondary education, due to the belief that higher education magnifies income inequality. (The World Bank, 2004). This neglect of higher education has led to a serious impact on the quality of higher education in many countries including India. According to the reputed QS World University Rankings in 2015 and the Times Higher Education,2016 no Indian University of educational institution was listed in the top 100. This is a disgrace for a country like India which was home to globally reputed institutions like Taxila and Nalanda which attracted foreign students too. Unfortunately, that was too far in the past. At present, we need a blend of fresh ideas and teaching mechanisms to create a new educational structure that not just delivers knowledge, but also encourages new thinking and boosts the spirit of innovation in the new generation. In this context it becomes extremely important that the teaching methods and curricular structure which earned fame to the old Indian universities as a high seat of knowledge be revived. This paper is a humble effort to excavate the teaching methodologies and the curricular aspect of the past Indian universities so that it can be used to improve the quality of present Indian higher education institutions. So that Indian Universities can also raise their global position.

Key words:- Higher Education, global ranking, ancient universities

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Introduction

The role of higher education is very important in the development of a country, especially the developing countries. Higher education institutes have a scope to affect the development in different capabilities directly and indirectly through teaching, research and extension services. So, higher education, plays a necessary role in human, social, and economic development of the country (Sutton 1998; Escrigas 2008). It can be implied that India being a developing country has to improve the quality of higher education in India. The Indian higher education system is facing an unprecedented transformation in the coming decade, driven by the economic and the demographic changes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population (Everitt,2014). It is therefore essential expand the higher education in term of quantity and quality(Charafeddine,2004).

Indian Government has made immense steps to improve the qualityof higher education, which has yielded some good results. Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with four broad challenges:

• The supply-demand gap: India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.

• The low quality of teaching and learning: The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.

• Constraints on research capacity and innovation: With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

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• Uneven growth and access to opportunity: Socially, India remains highly divided; access to higher education is uneven with multidimensional inequalities in enrolment across population groups and geographies (British council, 2014).

The improper address of these challenges has lead to the deterioration of the Indian universities and other higher education institutions. This has reflected in the global ranking done by various agencies rating the universities across globe. Indian universities are not even in the first 200 universities in the entire world. The *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings which ranks the universities across the globe doesn't show any of the Indian universities in top 200 in the year 2015-16. While Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities 2016 results also do not show any of the Indian universities in top 200. This comes as a dishonor to a country which has been a seat of highest learning during the Vedic period and after that had universities that attracted many scholars and students from different parts of the world .

The agencies ranking the different universities assess the universities based on researches being conducted, teaching learning process, infrastructural facilities, researchers and alumni affiliated with the university, number of research publications. Out of all the aspects of assessment teaching learning process is very noteworthy because it would not only have a cascading effect on the future learners but will also form the foundation for future researches. The foundation of knowledge and culture laid during the teaching learning process would help the students to teach the future learners well and create innovations through research.

This implies that teaching learning should be improved in order to improve the quality of higher education in India. Rather than thinking of overhauling the teaching learning process, we can also draw some ideas from the teaching learning process that existed in the ancient universities like Nalanda, Takshila, which were considered to be the best universities of the world then. It may not be possible to imitate the entire teaching leaning process of the ancient universities but some aspects can be drawn which can be utilized in the present context also. Before the teaching learning process is elaborated it is important to know the objectives of higher education in the present day.

Present Scenario of Higher Education in India

For India to become a developed country it needs a vibrant economy determined by knowledge and a society with human values. Moreover the with the introduction of General

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Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) by WTO the service sectors, including education have been brought under the trade items, the increase in the scientific innovations and technological advancement, challenges of higher education has become world centric. Knowledge is not only going to be the driver of Indian economy, but also, it is going to permeate into all the strata of Indian society for a better quality of life and living conditions(Hiremath& Albal,2016). Thus Indian higher education has to be reoriented to meet the quality and quantity needs of the country.The key challenges that surrounds the Indian higher education are

Expansion: India's GER of16% was much below the world average of 27%, as well as that of other emerging countries such as China (26%) and Brazil (36%) in 2010.

Excellence: Faculty Shortage: There is 40% and 35% shortage of faculty in state and central universities, respectively. Accredited Institutions: 62% of universities and 90% of colleges were average or below average in 2010, on the basis of their NAAC accreditation. Low Citation Impact: India's relative citation impact is half the world average.

Equity: There is wide disparity in the GER of Higher Education across states and the Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) in urban and rural areas, and gender- and community-wise. Inter-State Disparity: 47.9% in Delhi v/s. 9% in Assam (Hiremath& Albal,2016).

Apart from these the other challenges are no moral and religious education in universities to build up the character of the young men and women. Some of the leading challenges before the higher education system are few interdisciplinary learning opportunities(British council,2014); continuous up gradation of curriculum to keep in pace with rapid growth of science and technology; challenges from the international universities, maintaining the standards of higher education institutions, inadequate funding for innovative programs, collaboration of government, higher education institutions, industries, society and national research laboratories for addressing the needs of the society at large, use of ICT for resource sharing and lack of teachers with appropriate subject knowledge and lack of resources that reach the students(Bali,2014) . Moreover the high student teacher ratio, Pedagogies and assessment still focus on rote learning rather than development of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working which is the objective of higher education(British council,2014).

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Importance of Teaching Learning in Higher Education Institutes

Higher education is perceived as an important form of investment in home capital development. Higher education institutions are charged with formation of human capital through teaching, building knowledge base through research and knowledge development, and dissemination and use of knowledge by interacting with the knowledge users (Okwakol 2009). This implies that teaching learning in higher education is entrusted with the task of making better human beings who can be used as a capital for future. When the humans are to be considered as capital it entails that through appropriate teaching learning process they should acquire both the tangible (vocational or technical) skills and the intangible skills (creativity, critical inquiry, entrepreneurship, interpersonal values) to be productive and interactive members of the society(Obanya ,2002). Vocational training will help in giving the tangible skills but it should be accompanied with nurture of intangible skills. Interdisciplinary education in general higher education or creative arts cultivate values and ideals (Fraser 1998; Pring 1998). While teaching with participatory approaches can strengthen students' capacity to act as agents of change(Taylor and Fransman ,2004). The Creativity, critical enquiry and entrepreneurship can be taught through experiential (Taylor and Fransman 2004). But integrating the tangible and intangible skills requires trained teachers with a good subject knowledge.

In India 35 - 40% unfilled teaching staff in higher education institutes and the present teaching is of low quality(British council,2014). It is inevitable to bring reforms to improve the teaching learning process and to recruit the eligible candidates. The newly selected staff and the old teachers need to be trained to teaching with different approaches and methods of teaching. These steps might atleast ensure a better teaching learning in the higher education institutes leading to a one step rise to match the global standards. The usual method of teaching used these days is lecture method and use of ICT to some extent. In order to modify the pedagogies in higher education it is necessary that the objectives of higher education is observed keenly.

Objective of higher education

The macro and micro level objectives of higher education should be considered well before the teaching learning process is modified for its betterment. The objectives of higher education are as follows.

- ✓ To expand the Higher Education sector in all is modes of delivery to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education to 15% by 2011-12 to 21% by 2016-17 and 30% by the year 2020.

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- ✓ To expand institutional base of Higher Education (including technical, professional and vocational education) by creating additional capacity in existing institutions, establishing new institutions and incentivizing State Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations/civil society.
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- ✓ To provide opportunities of Higher Education to socially-deprived communities and remove disparities by promoting the inclusion of women, minorities and differently-abled persons.
- ✓ To remove regional imbalances in access to Higher Education by setting up of institutions in unnerved and underserved areas.
- ✓ To enhance plan support for infrastructure and faculty development in the institutions of higher learning and to attract talent towards careers in teaching and research.
- ✓ To create conditions for knowledge generation through improved research facilities in universities and colleges.
- ✓ To promote collaboration with International community, foreign governments, universities/institutions and regional and international institutions, for the advancement of universal knowledge and intellectual property rights.
- ✓ To promote development of Indian languages.
- ✓ To promote autonomy, innovations, academic reforms in institutions of higher learning
- ✓ To undertake institutional restructuring for improving efficiency, relevance and creativity in Higher Education. (MHRD,2016)

The objectives stated has emphasized on improving efficiency, relevance, creativity and conducting faculty development in the high education institutions to improve the higher education in all its perspectives. It can be drawn that improving efficiency, relevance and creativity can be done only through teaching learning process. Thus the objectives of higher education also emphasis on improvement of teaching learning process. But at international level also teaching learning has been considered as a main aspect for assessing the quality of a higher education institution.

Global Ranking of World universities

There are different agencies which rank the universities across the world based on different criteria. The *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings considers teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook as the criteria of ranking the universities. The QS World University Rankings assesses the world universities against six indicators: academic reputation based on a global survey of academics (40 per cent), employer reputation based on a global survey of graduate employers (10 per cent),

faculty/student ratio (20 per cent), citations per faculty (20 per cent), international student ratio (5 per cent) and international staff ratio (5 per cent). While the Shanghai rankings are based on alumni and staff members of an institutions winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals; highly cited researchers in 21 broad categories; per capita academic performance of an institution; papers published in nature and science as well as papers indexed in Science Citation Index. An overview of the criteria used by various agencies to rank the universities show that teaching or academic performance of the institution plays a vital role in ranking the university. The academic performance of the students depend mainly on the teaching learning process. All these ranking agencies do not have any Indian university eeven in the top 200 ranks of the their list. This implies that the Indian universities have to develop in all the aspects used for ranking the universities. Since teaching learning process is the main aspect which would have a cascading effect on the future generation of teachers and researchers, its revival are of paramount importance.

The Pedagogies Used in the Ancient Indian Universities

Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. The art of teaching is developed when the teacher is constantly involved in the subjects that he is teaching and also when he is in close contact with the students. Since there were 100 pupils in one class for a teacher in ancient universities, the lecture was followed by discussion; the teacher could get a feedback for his art of teaching and thus could improve himself. The students were given an opportunity to reject what is unacceptable to them and then the discussion followed. Since the teacher paid individual attention to the students he could teach the students based on their capability and aptitude.

The science of teaching means the proper organization of teaching points prior to taking the class and teaching in a stepwise manner, so that the process of teaching and learning becomes smooth. In the initial stages of learning the students were asked to memorize the text, then they were asked to critically analysis of the text. The other methods used was introspection which involved Sravana (listening), Manana (contemplation) and Nididhyasana (concentrated contemplation) of the truth so as to realize it. Manana was used so that the pupil can think for himself the meaning of the lessons imparted to him orally by his teacher so that they could assimilate fully.

Storytelling was used as a method for making the students understand the doctrines given by various saints. Hands-on method– For professional courses including medical science, students/apprentices used to learn by observation and through practical method. The students

also gained knowledge and increased their intellectual capacity through debates and discussions which were held at frequently. Thus it can be said that there were three methods of teaching; verbal and explanatory, lectures and debates and discussions(Watters). Almost hundred lectures were arranged and it was obligatory for the students to attend all the lectures. Students attentively heard the discussions of the pandits and they themselves took interest in discussions. According to the requirements of their respective duties they had to perform in life towards the society

The teacher was expected to possess all moral and spiritual qualifications. The teachers felt the natural desire according to the requirements of their respective duties they had to perform in life towards the society that their truths and principles, learning and experience should survive them and promote good of the society. The life of the teacher served as a model for the pupils to follow and imitate. Thus the aim of education was the developing of the pupil's personality, his innate and latent capacities. This view of education as a process of one's inner growth and self-fulfillment evolved its own technique, its rules, methods and practices

Implication of the Ancient University Pedagogies for the Present day Universities

A higher education institutions along with providing vocational/technical or professional education should also meet the higher goals like training the students to run and modify the modern society by finding solutions for the problems and to preserve the society's culture and values (The Task Force On Higher Education And Society report,2000). For this it is inevitable that students should be taught how to learn rather than just rote memorize, to sustain in the knowledge centered world.

 If the students are to be taught how to learn, it depends on the pedagogy the teacher adopts in the class. Thus the role of teaching and learning process and certainly the role of the teacher plays a significant role.

Some of the points that can be implied for the present universities from the ancient universities are as follows.

1. **Teacher as a moral and spiritual leader**: Ancient universities emphasized a teacher to be an Acharya, the one who has a good subject knowledge and the who also was good at moral and spiritual values. So if the higher education has to be improved in the present universities teacher possessing high moral and spiritual qualities and integrity should be selected. Then only he can lead the students by being a role model to his students. These qualities should be in addition to the good content knowledge and ICT knowledge of the teacher. This implies that if the teaching learning has to be improved the selection process of the teachers

should also take into account the values that the teacher holds in addition to the academic degrees he has.

2. **Teacher student ratio**: the teacher student ratio was less, which helped the teachers to give individual attention to each student. Even the number of teachers was very large in ancient universities like Vikramshila 108 scholarly acharyas were appointed. But the present day shows over-crowded classes, high teacher pupil ratio is very leading to lack of personal attention of the teacher towards the taught(Bali,2014). This leads to responsible for the growing indiscipline among students. For this timely recruitment of the teachers in the different

3. **Teacher's attitude towards students**: in ancient universities the students debated about the topic with the teachers after reading about the topic taught and then sometimes also established some new concepts. The teacher never showed any negative attitude towards such students because their debate was based on logic(tark) and knowledge. This implies that the present day students should also be encouraged to read lot about different topics and debate, so that they increase their critical and problem solving abilities.

4. **Culture of the institutions**: the ancient universities were residential in nature with a good environment. The good environment encompasses the physical environment like places within the campus for the students to sit in silence and do manan (thinking) about the topic taught and academic environment teachers within the campus throughout the day to discuss and debate with the students. Thus the universities should have special place where the students can sit and think about the topics taught, this would increase their concentration. Since today's student is more driven by the electronic gadgets and ICT use, it better if the daily time table itself has some time for manan.

5. **Subjects of study:** Subjects like grammar, logic, literature, astronomy and astrology, medicine which were of common interest were taught profusely along with physical education in the ancient universities (Kumar,2014). This can be practiced in the higher education institutions now also. Physical education if introduced as a compulsory practice the students will stay physically fit and will improve their concentration. If not physical education but atleast one sports should played by the students in a day, such facilities should be provided by the present day universities

6. **Methods of teaching and method of learning:** the main methods of teaching in ancient universities were oral, discussions and debates, this should be encouraged among students. Nowadays the universities have debate competition, rather the debate and discussion should be done for almost all topics in the syllabi. Sravana (listening), Manana (contemplation) and Nididhyasana (concentrated contemplation) were main things focussed in the ancient universities due to which not only the students gained an in-depth understanding of the topic but also developed the qualities like humility & patience. Currently, special emphasis is given to communication and presentation skills, so that they can perform well in the corporate world, across the globe(Chordiya,2016). But along with the increase in presentation skills one should also learn to listen carefully, contemplate, so such arrangements should be made in the timetable by the university.

7. **Meditation:** Ancient university teachers used to do meditation the gain insight into knowledge and get better concentration. This can be adopted as a practice in the present higher education institutions. The methods of shravana, Manana and Nididhyansana needs a student to have mental stability, this can come if regular meditation is practiced in the higher education institutes. Either two minutes of meditation before each period can be done or once in the morning guided meditation of 20-30 minutes can be practiced in the universities by the teachers and the students

Conclusion

Higher education in India has experienced phenomenal expansion post independence. India's advancement in the space craft formation, satellite launches and the rapid industrial and technological development shows that higher education has improved a lot. But still on the global platform Indian universities don't hold a place in the top 100. The criteria on which Indian universities could not get the global ranking are lack of quality in teaching, publications and quality researches and poor infrastructure. Out of all criteria teaching learning is the most significant of assessment. It was the quality of teaching and the methods of learning in the ancient Indian universities which made the universities like Nalanda & Takshshila as the highest seat of learning during post Vedic period. So it is time that present Indian universities draw few practices which were unique to these ancient universities to improve the quality of teaching and to improve quality of learning.

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Methods of higher education have to fulfill the needs of four pillars of education, learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become. (Ganihar &Bhat 2006) Student centered education and the employment of dynamic method of education will require from teachers new attitudes and skills (Saravanakumar &Mohan 2008) . Learning to do can be done by giving practical activities, but learning to be , learning to learn and learning to become will come when the students involve in deep thinking(Manan) about the knowledge they listen and read. Thus, students will be able to learn through lectures and then will be able to do self study. Personal consultation between teachers and students and informative sessions of seminars and workshops should also be encouraged. This type of methods will help in better understanding of the knowledge by the students hence would be able to do better researches to improve its quality. India needs to make the system of education innovative and futuristic in order to respond to the changing demands of the modern society(Saravanakumar,2014). Definitely the Indian universities will rank high at global level. Such initiative of refining the teaching and learning process in the Indian universities will not only help building the global level institutes but will also make a quality society.

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