New perspectives in Higher Learning

Quality higher education is a vital building block in the development of the nation. Institutions of higher learning determine the career paths of the youth and in turn determine the future of the country. Over the years, with the increase in population the number of educational institutes for higher learning has increased tremendously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>16,885</td>
<td>460,000</td>
<td>9,953,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Types of Institutions (2005)
Central Universities: 18
State Universities: 205
Deemed to be Universities: 95
Institutes of National Importance: 18
Constituent and affiliated colleges: 16,885
Autonomous colleges: 204

*Source: International Institute for Educational Planning - www.unesco.org/iiep (UNESCO)*

The influx of private institutes has taken place because the government was unable to meet the demands of the growing population and literacy needs.

Classification of Institutes of Higher education
Broadly speaking, institutes of higher education can be divided into:

1. Government-aided institutes

   The government aid ensures that there is no dearth of capital requirement. The government institutes are pioneers in Indian education and therefore enjoy the advantage of the experience and an excellent alumni base. Government institutions have built a very strong reputation consisting of goodwill that has been accumulated over the years. The most important advantage however is that the fees are extremely affordable because of the heavy subsidy. The government has failed to start enough institutions to keep up with the demand. The bureaucratic set up doesnot allow ideas to flow freely and updation of syllabuses often takes too much time. Most of the government-aided institutes are not modernised enough to suit the needs of a fast-paced and demanding today.
2. Private Institutes set up by:

   a) *Industrialists/ businessmen to enhance their equity in the market*

   The capital investment infrastructure is available easily. The focus on gaining mileage for their mainline business and not on higher education. It is usually driven by people who are not even remotely connected to higher education.

   b) *The sunrise category - Education-focused politicians alongwith professionals and/or educationists*

   The classic characteristic of this kind of an institution is the commitment and focus of the founders towards imparting quality education. The higher education segment requires a sizeable amount of investment in terms of financial and intellectual capital. If coupled with passion and commitment towards providing quality education this turns out to be a winning combination. Persons associated with developing such institutes are driven by a mission to provide the best education to the youth. The gains like money, name and fame that result out of such passion are only secondary.

**Crucifying the good**

In my opinion, the entire focus must be towards encouraging the sunrise category above. The political backing will ensure the fund flow and professionalism will ensure an excellent learning environment. Such institutions are built on a solid foundation of sincerity and passion for educational excellence. This foundation will ensure that that life-span of the educational institutes is at least 500 to 1000 years.

Due to certain bad apples, all the apples in the basket get classified as bad. A section of people consider all private institutes as bad just because of the distasteful experiences with a certain few. It is important to separate the selfish few from the selfless and dedicated ones. The good and committed institutes must be identified and given special treatment by the government and society. There are a lot of institutes that have been founded by educationists/ professionals who are not cash-rich. Such institutes possess abundant intellectual capital but need the support of financial institutions to provide the necessary capital for higher education institutes.

**Innovative Options for funding private institutes of higher learning**

What I am about to suggest in the following paragraphs may be considered innovative, revolutionary and even ‘wrong’ by some.
1. Abolish ‘under the table’ practices:
All private institutes are either come under the purview of Registrar of Society’s act or the Public Charitable Trust Act. Both these acts provide controls by means of which the individuals heading the institutes cannot divert their funds for individual benefits. All financial transactions must be open, accounted for and done by cheque. Under the garb of ‘donation’, ‘capitation fee’, many institutes take money by cash. There is no account for this money. Thus siphoning off this money is most likely. The money is not used for the purpose of development of the institute. Instead it is used for filling the coffers of the promoters. Such ‘under the table’ practices must be abolished and instead all donations be made legal and thus payments can be made by cheque.

2. Cross-subsidy
In my opinion, 15% of the students who could not make it to the merit but have the financial strength to subsidise the education of five to six meritorious students, should be given the opportunity to do so and thus be given admission in return. The entire payment must be by cheque and thus accounted for. This way the entire money collected as ‘donation’ or ‘capitation fees’ will be deployed for the use of the institute. Path breaking as it may seem, this, to my opinion is the best way to fund the institute and ensure that the college funds are used for the development of the college. This will prevent pilfering of the cash and the money will appear in the books of accounts and will be used for the institution’s growth.
This concept is not very new many universities in the US ensure admissions of a candidate through a payment seat whereby the candidate’s name figures on the ‘endowment list’ as opposed to the ‘enrolment list’ that is through merit only.

Today the education scenario does not offer clarity on concepts like management seats where 50% of the students can secure admission through the management quota. I feel that even if 15% of the admissions are through legal management quota, the education of the other 85% will be cross-subsidised. The entire process must be transparent and official. E.g. if the cost of running the a programme with a batch of 100 students is 2 crores and one is able to raise 1.5 crore through management quota admissions, the rest of the students will get an affordable education of 2 lakhs for just Rs. 25,000.
This way the affordability of a government institute and a private institution will be the same for a student.
Newer perspectives to higher education must be examined, as this will open avenues for an entire new approach towards education.

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