Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development
ISSN 2222-1700 (Paper) ISSN 2222-2855 (Online)
Vol.3, No.4, 2012

Accessibility and Equity: A Challenge for Higher Education in India

Ritimoni Bordoloi
School of Social Science, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
Pin 781006, Housefed Complex, Dispur
Mobile 9435748567 E-mail: ritimonibordoloi@gmail.com

Abstract:

Education is power. It constitutes the foundation of all the multidimensional socio-economic development of a country. In the present context, we need manpower or human capital for generating the growth and development in a country. The Government of India has taken several many initiatives for promoting education at all the stages i.e. Primary, Secondary and Higher. But still, we find such issues as a high dropout rate at all the stages of education, rural-urban disparity, gender disparity, inter-state variations pose as some of the problems that impedes the development of human resources in our country. Even the work participation rate in India indicates the necessity of proper planning of skill training and employment opportunity. Most interestingly, the existing general and conventional higher educational institutions have not effectively been able to cope with the contemporary challenges and changes with the result that the nature of curriculum which is by and large in place tends to create only degree inflation in our country. So, we need such institutes and institutional arrangement that can cater to the contemporary challenges so as to upgrade the quality of education as well as to provide need based educational programmes that can develop human power in the society. Effective or quality education especially at higher level can play a vital role in bringing around multifaceted human resource development, enabling the learner's absorption in the job market and self-employment. This paper will discuss how the accessibility of education can be promoted to all through a convenient mode of education system and how the disparities in education can be minimized, and also focus on the various strategies for strengthening higher education system in the country.

Keywords: Access, Equity and Higher Education in India

1. Background:

The present society is considered a knowledge-based society. A knowledge based society has an inbuilt requirement for the production of human capital. Education-vehicle of knowledge can supply skilled manpower for generating development in a nation. Education develops the human being in the true sense of term, developing all potentialities and capabilities through which a nation can benefit socially, economically, culturally, educationally and so on. Therefore, education is considered the bedrock of all socio-economic developments of a country.

In a democratic country like India, each and every individual has the basic right to get education irrespective of all forms of discrimination. In Indian Constitution, under the Article 45, the state has made free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. However, the effect of this provision in the Constitution i.e. *Education for All* was not implemented to the desirable extent. So the Government of India has taken so many initiatives to make education accessible for all by making education as a Fundamental Right under the 86th Amendment of the Constitution in 2002. Now in India, the Right to Education Act, 2009 has been implemented for all the children covering the age of 6-14 years. Therefore, education is now recognized as a birth right under the fundamental right of the Constitution. But still there is a high dropout at all stages of education besides various disparities like rural-urban disparity, occupational disparity, gender disparity, inter-state disparity exist to a great extent. Degree inflation is another big issue by which a large number of graduates passing out of Indian universities and institutions of higher learning do not match the requirements of employability, as a result of which such graduates swell the number of unemployed and unemployable

section of the population. There is no proportionate increase in employment opportunities in the country. Therefore, we need such an educational programme that can motivate the learners to upgrade their skills through need-based education that can help them to develop human power in a society.

Objectives of the Paper: This paper has made an attempt:

- To highlight the various challenges faced in higher education in India,
- To discuss the various disparities prevails mostly in higher education in India, and
- Finally, to focus on the various strategies for strengthening the higher education system in terms of access, equity and quality in India.

Methodology or Data Source: The paper is solely based on secondary information collected from different sources like books, journal articles, reports of various government organization and commission, articles published in national and local news papers, websites etc.

2. Significance of Higher education:

As far as the higher education is concerned, it should be linked with the development of human resources and formation of human capital. In the present situation, it is observed that alleviation of poverty, giving the right direction to the youth etc. can be ensured through developing proper manpower planning which will enhance the scope of employability of our human resources. Again, India has enough potential to increase the productive use of the youths by enhancing their skills, capacities and efficiency for work. Demographically, nearly 51% of India's population is under 25 years of age and also 66% of India's population is under 35 years of age (Census of India 2001). It is the most productive age group and hence an asset (known as demographic dividend) for the country. In this context, may be the convocation lecture of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, the Ex. President of India, delivered in Jiwaji University, Guwalior, on 10th August 2004, in which he said,

> *"India has a population of one billion people. Out of this one billion, 540 million people are below the age of 25 years, which is our national strength. We have natural resources. Also we have a roadmap for transforming India into a developed nation by the year 2020. Ignited minds of 540 million youth will definitely transform India into a developed country by the year 2020."*

Today higher education is not only confined to the development of the individuals physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually, but it is also meant to equip them with necessary skills for their wellbeing as well as for the socio-economic development of the society at large.

Regarding the role of education as a means of human development as well as human resource development, Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureates in Economics, has remarked the education is ' essentially a capacity building and it widens the choice of the people and empower the nation." (Elena Philip, 2008**)** Thus, the main goals of higher education are the dissemination of knowledge, use of information networks and mass media technologies, helping in the improvement of productivity which can be defined as a way of ensuring the prospect of employability and employment.

In this globalised world, the formation of human capital is possible through education only. Human capital realizes two things, i.e. the person, and the person should be acquainted with the need-based skills. Actually, it indicates the utilization of the human resources and enhancing the capabilities of manpower for the development of the country.

2.1 Concept of Human Capital:

Human capital plays an important role in the development of a nation. It is the quality of human beings which helps a country in terms of accelerating the pace of development. The developing countries need to control diseases and improve health and nutrition. Good health for the people is essential for making them more productive workers. Investment in building the health care infrastructure and ensuring the availability of safe drinking water should be considered as extremely useful social capital. Human capital is ensured through proper education only. Educated people are generally more productive

workers because they can use the capital more effectively, adopt new technologies and learn from their mistakes. Thus, the concept of human capital is linked with the growth and development of a nation.

2.2. Motto of Higher Education:

The higher education is the platform where knowledge and information are disseminated to the learners for developing their functional skills and to make them efficient for their future living. The motto of higher is to promote the wellbeing of the people in a country. Education enhances the capacity of the human beings to develop their skills in various sectors like the various field of sciences, medicines, engineering, management etc. through which the skilled persons can contribute towards the positive transformation of a society. So education is closely related to human resource management and in the higher stage, it can boost the human resources and improve socio-economic condition particularly in the developing and under-developed countries.

3. Status of Higher Education in India:

At present, there are 504 universities and university-level institutions in India including 40 Central Universities, 243 State Universities, 130 Deemed Universities, 5 institutions established under State Act and 33 institutions of national importance. Apart from these, there are around 25,951 colleges including 2,565 women colleges imparting higher education in India. Besides the traditional universities, there are 14 open universities out of which one is a central university and others are state open universities. In addition, the Government of India during the Eleventh Five Year Plan targeted to establish 30 Central Universities (already 14 established), 8 IITs (6 already established), 8 IIMs (4 already established), 10 National Institutes of Technology (NIT) , 5 Institutes of Science and Research, 2 Schools of Architecture, 374 model degree colleges etc to build up trained and skilled manpower in the country. (MHRD, 2009-10).

4. Enrolment Scenario of Higher Education:

This growth in general education is mainly supply driven as the students fill up the seats in the educational institutions. For more comprehension of the reality about the uneven growth of enrolment in higher education specifically in our country, the disparity in educational growth can be seen among the different zones. **(Note 1)** As a result, there are surplus graduates from conventional education system where degree devaluation and declining in academic standard is another big issue affecting the quality of education. The problem of churning out of surplus graduates combined with declining quality may be seen from the report in *The Times of India* (19th August 2003) on a news in the vacancies of 'D' category in railways, for which 74 lakhs applications had applied and "those applying for jobs of khalasis, gangman and helpers included MBAs, graduates, postgraduates and engineers, where the requirement was eight class pass only". Another example of declining of the quality of education is the case of a graduate from Gonda (Singh 2004) who works in Delhi Metro for Rs.80/- for 10 hours of work. Earlier when he used to work overtime he was paid double the amount for the extra work. Now he gets the same amount for the overtime work because there is more supply of the labour. He is educated and knows that this type of job does not fit him. But the question is where he should go? The important point to note is that he can earn money through tuition but his quality of education is so poor that he can not teach a 5th standard student. These examples prove the mismatch between education and employment in our country and the failure of the Government to generate employment opportunities. There is a need to change and modify the policies of education in favour of a system of education that can promote the wellbeing of a nation. Besides these, it is also observed that the answer-scripts of the examinees have been checked or evaluated by some examiners who have lack of expertise in that particular paper and as a result, the students or the examinees were deprived in getting proper feedback and result in the examination. Thus, these are some of the instances that show the declining standard of higher education in India.

5. Education and the Mismatch

In higher education, there seems to be the problem of the mismatch. The mismatch indicates basically two things –the supposition that those who have acquired professional, technical and higher education, have greater possibilities of getting absorbed in the job market compared to those who have acquired low level of education and skills. However, even this section of skilled and educated persons fail to get absorbed in the employment market due to problems of employability of these skills in the market. Thus, this amply points at the mismatch in the supply of the educated (degree) which are product by the institution which often fails to take note of the nature of the demand of skill and education in the contemporary situation. **(Note 2)** From this, one can further infer and also conclude as substantiated by facts that where there is more supply of graduates from general education there occur large numbers of un-employment due to lack of employment opportunity and substantiate thisultimately, directly and indirectly encourages the export the brain from the state (i.e. called brain-drain), create the problems like youth unrest and ultimately drive the youths to indulge in various anti-social activities.

6. Disparities in Higher Education:

Besides this mismatch regarding the productivity level of employment in education and the nature of education being provided, specifically at the higher stage, enrolment is also abound with several disparities and variations like rural-urban disparity, inter-state variation, gender disparity, occupational disparity, etc. Generally, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) and Enrolment of Eligible Ratio (EER) have been used for estimating the access of higher education in our country. (GER measures the access level by taking the ratio of total enrolment to all persons in the age group of 18 to 23 years. NER measures the level of enrolment for age specific groups namely those in age group of 18 to 23 years. While the EER measure the level of enrolment of those who have completed higher secondary level education. These three concepts thus look at the access to higher education from three different angles. (Planning Commission Report, 11th Five Year Plans)

NSSO data of 2000, which provide detailed information of the disaggregate level of enrolment in the following way, like:

6.1 Rural and Urban:

There are significant disparities in the enrolment ratio between rural and urban area. In 2000, the GER for rural and urban area was 5.58% and 21.74% respectively-GER in urban area being four times higher compared with rural area.

The population census of 2001 came up with the GER of 8.99% for rural area and 24.52% for urban area in 2001 - the GER in rural area being all most three times lower compared with urban area.

The EER (Enrolment Eligible Ratio is useful to estimate the access to education to those who have completed the higher secondary stage of education) worked out to 51.1% for rural and 66% for urban area-later being higher by about 15 percent. This means only half of the rural boys and girls who have completed higher secondary go to higher education which is less by 15percent compared with urban area.

6.2 Inter-State Variation

It is also a significant issue in the level of higher education. While the GER at aggregate level is about 10.08% for India, the ratio for the States and Union Territories of Chandigarh (26.24%), Delhi(21.16%), Kerala (18.08%), Goa (17.54%), Pondicherry (15.37), Himachal Pradesh (15.22%) and Maharashtra (14.14%) surpasses the national average. By national comparison, the GER is lower than the national average in the States/UTs namely Lakshadweep (0.34%), D&N Haveli (2.23%), Arunachal Pradesh (2.42%), Sikkim (5.01%), Tripura (5.97%), Bihar (6.16%), West Bengal (6.30%), Meghalaya (07.13%), Mizoram (7.87), Karnataka (7.96%). ***(NSSO 2000)***

Again, if we look upon the EER it has been seen that in 2003-04, (***MHRD 2003-04***) about 59 % of those who completed higher secondary entered in higher education stream. This ratio is higher than the national average by substantial margin in Mizoram (87.1%), Manipur (87.7%), Nagaland (85.6%), J&K

(76.6%) and Kerala (70.6%). By national comparison the ratio is much lower, in Tripura (37.8%), Chattishgarh (49.6%), Orissa (50.2%), Arunachal Pradesh (53.5%). In rest of the major States the ratio was around national average of 59 %). The access to higher education is also low for girls as compared to boys.

6.3 Gender Disparities

The access to higher education is also low for girls as compared with boys. For instance while GER for male was 12.12% for female it was 8%. (NSSO-2000)

In higher education, the ***gender disparity*** has been observed to have continued through the year of 2003-04, with the GER for male being at 15.25% and 11% for female. Significant male-female disparities also exist in the enrolment ratio for the eligible student (EER). In 2003-04, the EER status has been 62.9% and 54.1% for male and female respectively, the female EER being lower by nine percentage points. The gender disparity has been found more prominent in the rural areas as compared to that of the urban areas**.** (***MHRD 2003-04***)

6.4 Occupation

Occupation is an important factor that has an impact on enrolment in school or colleges for acquiring education. In the rural areas, the GER is generally higher for self-employed households regularly engaged in farm and non-farm economic activities as compared with those who are engaged in daily wages in farm and non-farm activities for their living. For instance, in 2000, the GER has been found at the rate of 5% among the self-employed household in farm and non-farm activities whereas it has been found to be at the rate of 1.41% for farm wage labour and 3% for non-farm wage labour. Similarly, in the urban areas, the GER is much higher among the group of those who are engaged in regular salaried occupations and business than those who are engaged in casual works. **(NSSO 2000)**

The disparities are too deep and cuts across region, gender and occupation to name a few. These have grave implications since the different enrolment ratios, in most of the instances, are very less and the prevalent disparities therein compound the gravity of the problem especially in a country with an expanding young population.

7. Disproportionate Finance Allocation:

Budget is another important aspect in the functioning of education system. The bureaucrats, pressure groups and other forms of advocacy groups play the role in allocating the funds in each of the developmental sectors of the state. An asymmetry in the allocation of funds within the various stages of education can be observed in which politics may have a significant part to play. For example, in primary or elementary education the Government has given more focus whereas in the higher stage of education the fund allocation is proportionately rather low. Although, it is known to all that the higher educational institutions have the scope to generate the fund itself (from the fees of students, resource generation engaging the students in productive activities within the campus, etc) the policy makers taking this logic further has created a situation which in the rebound tends to keep the meritorious students outside the ambit of higher education. Making of higher education, at times, a very costly affair for those economically underprivileged has gone on to situate some of the meritorious but economically poor learners relatively deprived. Keeping out this section of meritorious students, in fact, cuts on the resource creation prospects within higher education and the society. Thus, it affects the socio- cultural, economic and intellectual development of a country and society. **(Note 3)**Therefore, equity in financing is another big issue of concern in the education system of India as a whole. This contributes to the disparities between categories especially in the EER.

8. Gross Enrolment Ratio still a big challenge for India:

Although India is demographically rich with its vibrant workforce, it still has less than 14% Gross Enrolment Ratio which is comparatively poor against the developmental requirements of the population, more so in comparison with other growing economies. For example, China (the nearest country of India) as a developing country, has 18% GER, which is still a dream for India targeted to

reach the figure such as 15% GER by 2015 and 20% GER by 2020 (end of 12th Five Year Plan). In this context, India has been lagging far behind in generating the capacity of manpower as well as human resources and human capital and also fails to provide equal opportunities of accessing higher education to the people of the state. India requires more educational avenues and incentives which could be strategically met by making higher education as accessible as possible to all in order for the nation to become a knowledge based economy that may bring in economic mobility and development in the state. Thus, India as a whole has a great demand to create the necessary educational institutions so that the vision of creating a knowledge based society becomes an achievable goal and the potential of this young expanding population is not wasted.

9. Quality status of higher education, regarding the recognition by UGC, NAAC

Despite having more than 25000 colleges and 504 universities**,** the avenues in place falls utterly short in raising the national GER in the age group of 18-24 years to above 14 percentage in India. Again, the UGC has recognized 7362 (about 28%) colleges out of more than 25000 colleges under the section of 2(f) of UGC Act and from them only 5997 colleges (about 23%) receive grants under the section of 12(B) of the UGC Act of 1956. (MHRD Report 2009-10). But NAAC is able to assess or accredit only 20% of the colleges. (Planning Commission Report)

Quality education, despite the large number of educational institutes in India is not broad based, as indicated by the above statistics. Regular assessment and accreditation by UGC-NAAC based on specific time frame with as much coverage as possible as an effective and continuous process of quality monitoring and management in higher education in India has suffered on account of lack of effective strategies, efficient ways and indecision regarding the time framework. The concerned bodies need to gear up to take up the challenge of monitoring the quality of the number of higher education institutes in India without further delay.

Compounding to this part of the problem is the huge number colleges which are not eligible for receiving grants from the UGC for quality development. Paradoxically, these institutes fail to become eligible for receiving grants as these have failed to meet the minimum prescribed requirements of physical and human infrastructure. Being situated mostly in the rural and remote areas these cater to the needs of some of the most deprived and underprivileged sections of the society.

10. Open and Distance Education, a Frontier and Strategy for Making Education Accessible to All

For promoting the practice of democratization in education, there is an urgent need to reduce these disparities from the education system and make education accessible for all irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion, class, place, occupation, etc. Thus, we need such an alternative institutional set-up besides the conventional system of education, which can reduce disparity in access to education in general and higher education in particular. Open and distance learning can be raised as an alternative way for creating and producing education as accessible as possible for all.

10.1. Open and Distance Learning and its Relevance:

The primary objective of the Open and Distance Learning is to provide knowledge and skills to those who do not have access to learning. The basic purpose of the Open University is to provide instruction to the learners at their doorsteps through various media and technology (UNESCO 2002). Therefore, the basic motto of distance education is to establish equity in education system through the various modes of education (both the correspondence and on-line learning). This system provides great opportunity to those learners who are denied access to education from traditional institutions due to various factors (like poor economic condition, Illiteracy of parents, working outside for income, etc.) and also giving the chance to those who require updating their knowledge and skills through education. The mode of Open and Distance Learning is also called as ‘Independent Learning’, ‘Flexible Learning’ as well as ‘Self-Learning’. It can help empower the learners by enabling them to take charge of their own learning facilitating them in having greater control and ownership in their learning at a minimal cost. In fact, this system promotes the capacity of the learners to organize and to structure their own learning as a result of which learners will be able to develop the key skills like self-motivation, self-

discipline and self-management that are now required in so many work context (Chandra 2005). Therefore, this system of learning can be called as 'feed by own' not 'fed by others'. Open and Distance Learning has greater scope to innovate and infuse flexibility into the system in order to cater to the needs of heterogeneous learners. In the context of flexibility, the Open University has the autonomy to adapt different approaches for the development of course materials as well as learner's support services. The utilization of on-line learning in distance and open learning makes it in a true sense open or global learning.

In India, at has present 12 open schools, 14 Open Universities - One Central Open University and 13 State Open University (Annual Report, MHRD(GOI) 2006-07) along with 140 Correspondence Course Institutes(CCIs) in conventional dual mode universities playing a vital role in promoting and enhancing the capacities and skills of the learners through the various modes of education. For ensuring access and equity in higher education level, Andhra Pradesh Open University was established in 1982which is presently known as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Open University. Indira Gandhi National open University (IGNOU), the only Central Open University was established by an Act of parliament in 1985, where the major objective is widening the access to higher education. If we analyse the trend of enrolment in different institutions of open and distance learning, we find that the numbers of enrolment has grown in a very fast pace in India. **(Note 4)**

10.2 Role of IGNOU and KKHSOU in North East and Assam

Apart from the overall growth in open and distance education in India, if we pay attention to the role of IGNOU in creating accessibility of education, especially in North-East India. It has been observed that beginning with a small number of enrolments in 1987 (year of establishment of IGNOU in North-East India), today IGNOU has more than twenty two thousand students in the North East. In the context of accessibility of education, IGNOU has been successful in providing educational opportunities at a fast rate of growth in North-East, for instance, it has been found that in 1994 the total number of students at IGNOU was 2783 whereas in the year of 2006, the total enrolment jumped to 22,599 (IJOL 2007). Recently, from the year of 2006, in Assam, the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University has been providing educational opportunity to those learners who are being deprived of getting education in time as well as for those who wish to take further education for the enhancement of their careers. In Assam the KKHSOU has succeeded to motivate a total of more than 10,383 learners in 2010-11 for the Bachelor of Preparatory Programme (BPP) course and a total of more than 15,033 learners for the Bachelor progarmmes in 2010-11. This university has even played a prominent role in providing education to those learners who are serving their time in prisons (Guwahati Central Jail, Jorhat Central Jail, Abhyapuri Jail and Biswanath Chariali Jail).Thus, the accessibility and equity in education has been made possible in the real sense of the term by the open and distance mode of learning which has played a crucial and vital role in this regard complementing the contribution of the other conventional system of learning. This is because the scope of flexibility and innovativeness in distance and open learning meets the diverse needs and expectations of the learners in a more comprehensive way.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations:

In this globalized world, for promoting social security through development in education, economic as well as social life, we need to enhance the skills and capacities of the vibrant human resources of our country. So ensuring the *accessing of higher education by all* (in order to create knowledge economy) should be the priority agenda for the Government as well as for the various private bodies in India.

Apart from the prominent role of conventional system of education, open and distance learning should be ensured and promoted in order to reduce the various disparities in education, enhancement of the skills of the people and their absorption in the various sectors of the economy, to provide education for the learners who are deprived as well as for those who wants to pursue further education, to further and intensify the process of democratization of education, etc. In fact, distance and open learning is an important strategy that can promote accessibility and equity particularly in higher education in our country. Quality of education is also another issue that has to go hand in hand with promotion of accessibility. Because, if quality is compromised with, education will not be able to ensure human resource development adequately and hence fall utterly short of contributing to all round development

of the society. The following recommendations are suggested for ensuring accessibility and equity in education in our country.

- To ensure the desired growth of GER in India as a whole, the required institutions should be set-up according to the needs and demands of the society. The motto of education, especially at higher stage, should have to make functional literate among the youth of the nation.
- The course of content should be developed taking into cognizance the present needs of the society. Therefore, before designing the courses, research should be conducted for identifying the local, regional and national needs of the learners and the society.
- Concerning the UGC recognition, adequate development assistance must be provided to those colleges who are being deprived and left out from being recognised (except the 7362 colleges from that of the 25000 in India), in order to enable them to meet the minimum eligibility requirements so as to be able to access further development grants in future.
- Transparent credit as well as choice-based credit system and which could promote mobility of the learners should be promoted as soon as possible in higher education system.
- Public awareness should be created about the importance of education through various means of ODL (Open and Distance Learning) system basically for those who are mostly not interested in sending their children to school
- For developing the skills of the great mass of the population people who are primarily engaged (50%) in the tertiary sector and the unorganised sector (11-18%) in India, various professional and vocational courses (e.g. diploma in fisheries, certificate courses in hotel management, certificate courses handloom and Mobile repairing, etc.) should be provided by the universities in the conventional mode as well as in open and distance mode.
- Online courses should be promoted to facilitate education in a global way which can lead to uniformity and equity in education.
- In this present century, the focal aims of the courses (which are offered by the university) should be on professional and vocational ones so that after gaining skill through these courses, the entrepreneurship capacity of the learners are built ensuring economic mobility in a state.
- For improving the ODL system convergence approach in between conventional and ODL systems should be adopted, wherever necessary. For improving the quality in education, there should also be exchange programme, considering education a team work between conventional and ODL systems.
- Training and counseling courses should be organized or conducted properly for the teachers as well as for those who are engaged in the teaching process, for enhancing their skills in order to utilize its various modern modes of learning.
- Various courses should be launched by using various available Information and Communication Technologies in order to utilize the local resources into the productive form where conventional and open and distance institutions can play the significant role in the formation of functional literate (trained manpower) of the masses in the society.
- In India, at present, there is need to develop and rejuvenate the manpower, through training, for those who are mostly engaged in agriculture sectors, ITI for development of small scale industries, electricity, construction, servicing in motor vehicles and other services for which there is a dearth of trained manpower. It is by enhancing such capabilities that the viability of the workforce can be boosted up in a practical way for developing the productivity of the nation. These types of training can be held both through the conventional and distance modes.
- Evaluation and assessment should be made in a continuous process for upgrading the quality and bringing the innovation and modification in education.
- At last but not the least, the financial disbursement should be proportionately made for elementary, secondary as well as higher and technical education. Besides these, colleges and universities should have their scope to generate resources themselves for economic viability, expansion and their growth.

References:

Aggarwal, D. D. (2007): "Future of Distance Education", Sarup and Sons, New Delhi

Basu,.S. (2008): "Innovation in Open and Distance Learning", *Second* Foundation Day Lecture, Guwahati.

Bhat, M. A. (2006): "Quality Concerns in Education", Rawat Publications

Chandra, R. (ed) (2005): "Trends in Higher Education", Kalpaz Publications, Delhi.

Davis George (edited) (2008): "Quality Education, Prospects and Challenges", A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi

Philip, Elena (2008*):* "Producing Workers: Employability and Quality in Higher Education", *Quality Education, Prospects and Challenges, Davis George (ed),* A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi

Srivastava, M. et.al. (2007*):* "Reaching out to the Un-reached through ODL: Role of IGNOU in the North East Region", *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Vol.16, No.2

Singh, A. K. (2006): "Degree Devaluation in Higher Education, Unemployment and Unemployability among the Graduates in India", *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, Vol. XX, October.

Singh, B. S. (2004): "Future of Midday Meals", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 28

Sukhadeo, T. (2006): "Higher Education in India, Emerging Issues Related to Access, Inclusiveness and Quality", Nehru Memorial Lecture, New Delhi, November 24.

UNESCO (2002*):* "Open and Distance Learning Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations", Paris: UNESCO

Government Reports:

- Census of India 2001
- NSSO Report 55th Round
- Planning Commission Report, Government of India
- Seventh All India School Education Survey, Schooling Facilities in Rural Area, 2007, NCERT Publications.
- MHRD Report, Government of India

Note 1:

The following table shows the educational disparity among the six zones.

Table1. Enrolment in Higher Education: Total, General and Technical

Zones	*General Education*	*Percentage*	*Technical Education*	*Percentage*	*Total*
Central Zone	506919	81.40	115849	18.60	622768
East Zone	1614424	88.90	201502	11.10	1815926
North Zone	1835460	85.92	300904	14.08	2136364
North-East Zone	290052	81.48	65944	18.52	355996
South Zone	1548038	68.10	725212	31.90	2273250
West Zone	1917866	82.94	394603	17.06	2312469
All India	7712759	81.04	1804014	18.96	9516773

Source: Adapted from Selected Educational Statistics, (2004)

Above table shows that the percentage of enrolment in general higher education has shown higher growth than in the professional or technical education in all the six Zones of India. On all India basis in the enrolment in higher education, only around 19 percent are pursuing a professional or technical education and the remaining 81 percent are into general or conventional education.

Note 2:

The following table shows the productivity level and non-productivity level of different categories of education levels.

Table 2. Education specific work participation rate:

Educational Level	*WPR*	*Educational Level*	*WPR*
Illiterate	35.6	General Graduates	61.4
Just literate	23.3	Agriculture graduates	63.4
Primary	36.3	Engineering graduates	75.2
Middle	44.9	Medical graduates	76.9
Secondary	49.1	Technical diploma	64.5
Higher Secondary	46.1	Craft diploma	56

Source: NSSO-1999-2000, 55th Round

Table 3.Education specific unemployment rates:

Educational Level	Unemployment rate	Educational Level	Unemployment rate
Illiterate	0.4	General Graduates	10.4
Just literate	1.2	Agriculture graduates	09.8
Primary	1.9	Engineering graduates	06.8
Middle	3.9	Medical graduates	01.5
Secondary	6.3	Technical diploma	13.7
Higher Secondary	9.1	Craft diploma	11.8

Source: NSSO-1999-2000, 55th Round

For instance, the graduates in general, graduates of the medical science, graduates of engineering and the graduates in agricultural science besides those acquiring diploma in technical subjects and craft, have more than 50% contribution to the work participation rate in the country. Again, the figure of unemployment rate is also seem to be high (more than 10%) who have acquired the degree of craft, technical diploma, general education from colleges. It is because there are not enough jobs or demands for those who have attained such levels of skills or degrees.

Note 3:

The following table shows the reality about the allocation of funds in various sectors of education.

Table 4 Plan and Non-plan budget expenditure in the various sectors of education (Revenue Account) ***(Figure in Rs. Thousand Crore)***

Year	***Elementary***	***Secondary***	***Higher***	***Technical***	***Higher+ Technical***	***Total***
1993-94	10822	7759	3104	1018	4122	23413
1994-95	12639	9050	3525	1189	4714	27232
1995-96	15218	10344	3871	1290	5161	31517
1996-97	17850	11736	4288	1450	5738	36372
1997-98	20392	13262	4859	1623	6482	41109
1998-99	25150	16782	6117	2073	8190	51225
1999-2000	27905	20845	8248	2459	10707	61281
2000-01	29758	19743	9195	2528	11723	62498
2001-02	32493	20431	8087	2560	10647	64847
2002-03	33474	22049	8859	2820	11679	68561
2003-04(R)	38260	23983	9380	3138	12518	76387
2004-05(B)	40586	24990	9562	3387	12949	80286

Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, MHRD, Govt. of India, Various Years.

The trend of public expenditure on education is disproportionately allotted. In the above table it seems that during 1993-94 to 2004-05, the public expenditure in elementary education has gone up by four times. But in the context of secondary and higher education the allocation of public expenditure is comparatively less than in the elementary education. In the year of 2004-05, the public expenditure on elementary, secondary, higher and technical remained 50 percent, 30 percent, 12 percent and 4 percent respectively. Thus, the attention of the Government for allocating fund towards higher education is less than that of elementary education.

Note 4:

The following table shows the enrolment in open universities and open schools in different courses for the period of 1996-97 to 2002-03.

Table2. Enrolment in Distance Education in India (1996-97 to 2002-03)

Year	Total Enrolment in Open Universities	Growth Rate (in %)	Total Enrolment in Open Schools	Growth Rate (in %)
1996-97	294947	-	103382	-
1997-98	316089	7.17	131468	27.16
1998-99	247168	-21.80	132744	0.97
1999-2000	381862	54.49	132744	0.00
2000-01	379286	-0.67	225245	69.68
2001-02	632214	66.68	229472	1.87
2002-03	765489	21.08	280446	22.21

Source: MHRD, Govt. of India.

In the above table we have seen that although the total growth of enrolment has decreased in the year1998-99 in open universities, but in later years the trend of enrolment has been found positive to a greater extent although there was slight decrease in 2000-01. Bedsides these, not only in open universities but at open schools also, the trend of enrolment has found positive growth in every year compared to the previous years. Thus, in India, this trend of enrolment provides the opportunities to learning for those who are deprived to take education from conventional system due to various factors like economic, illiteracy of the parents, educational backwardness, outside work etc and also give the opportunity for those learners who want to take further education to fulfill their own expectation (like for the engaging in jobs, own academic satisfaction, build-up the suitable career etc.)