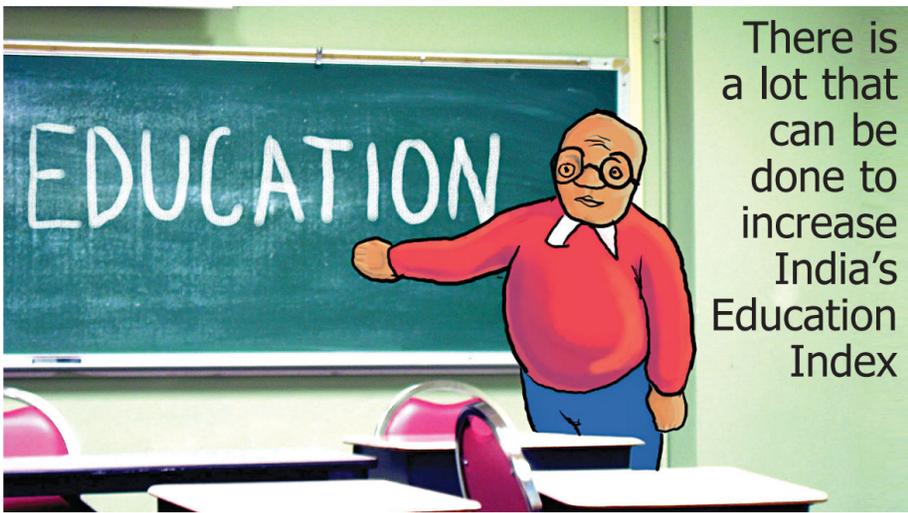# Towards an Educated India: Improving Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education

GROSS Enrolment Ratio (GER) is a statistical measure used by the United Nations to measure education index of a nation. In the context of higher education, it measures the total population of all ages enrolled in different education programs to the total population of the country in the age group of 18-23. The current level of GER in India stands at a figure of 12.4% and compares very low compared to world average of 23.2%, 36.5% for developing countries and 45% for developed countries. The government thus has an enormous task in hand to improve the GER to bring it somewhere close to other developing countries as otherwise the country would continue to remain divided not only in terms of wealth-distribution but also in the more fundamental aspects like education and health. India plans to raise the GER from current level to 30% by the year 2020. For achieving this enormous task the important remedial measure would include significant expansion of capacity including infrastructure (brick & click), teaching staff, making schemes to make higher education accessible, generation of funding, provision of technology support and addressing the issue of quality in all respects so that proliferation does not result in the dilution of quality.

Some of these issues are discussed below:

Requirement of Teaching Staff (both quantity and quality): This is a crucial issue. In a knowledge organization like an educational institution; teachers are at the core of both, knowledge creation as well as dissemination. As of today, around 35% posts are vacant in Central Universities; 33.33% in National Institute of Technology and 35.1% in other central education institutions. There is

an overall shortage of 25-30 % of faculty in higher education. One possible way to address this problem is to look at increasing the retirement age in teaching posts from existing 62 years to around 65 to 67 years. The quality of faculty members needs to be addressed by proper focus on faculty development initiatives at all levels - Central, State and Institution level. Possibly, training institutions specifically for educational institutions need to be set up.

Making Higher Education accessible: The Human Development Index for the year 2009 ranked India at 134, one of the lowest among the League of Nations. Also, India has been ranked 120 & 128 in adult literacy rate & GDP

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per capita parameters. It indicates that not only do we require more institutions to address the issue of accessibility but we also need to provide higher education at an affordable cost. While the cost of education is going up, the access opportunities for deserving candidates belonging to economically backward community is not increasing with a commensurate pace. There is a need for more merit-based scholarship schemes and also availability of easier and cheaper bank-loans.

Generation of funding requirement: The budgetary allocation for higher education by the Government of India has been increased from Rs.2,225 crores (2004) to Rs.9,600 crores (2010). But the support of the government to the education, particularly higher education is insignificant compared to some other countries, including China.

The government should seriously consider increasing the support to education. Apart from private-sector support, the provisions relating to FDI should also be eased.

Establishment of infrastructure (brick and click): Currently India has around 150 universities and it requires more than 1500 universities to achieve the set target for GER. Under the scheme of special development grants for colleges in backward area, the UGC plans to provide grants to establish 253 new colleges in districts where the GER was perceived to be dismal, but this scheme is yet to be implemented. There is a serious need of public-private partnership to start new universities. Big corporate houses

should take the lead in setting up endowments for supporting higher education institutions.

Implementation of technology (IT support): It is now agreed by everybody that technology will play the role of a catalyst to achieve the required GER. Role of distance and part time education in the space of higher education is yet to be fully exploited with the accepted level of quality.

Addressing the issue of quality in all respect: It is indeed sad to note that the most awaited regulatory framework of Government of India - NCHER (National Commission for Higher Education and Research) itself lacks full implementation; therefore, the complexity of the existing confusion continues with duplication and multiplicity of regulatory bodies. The answer to quality lies in providing autonomy for ensuring self-regulation and state-funded programs to monitor quality of higher education institutions.

Let's hope that some of the above suggestions are put into action soon, so that the dream of a better educated India can come true.

(This article has been authored by Prof. Vikram Parekh, Associate Professor, SIES College of Management Studies (SIESCOMS) and Founder Member of HEF. He may be contacted at vikram@yahoo.com)

> There is a lot that can be done to increase India's Education Index

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REVOLUTIONIZING CLASSROOMS

IN CONVERSATION

With a brand-name that most students reckon with, Sundaram, has crossed new boundaries by creating a comprehensive new learning system called 'e-class'. Chairman and Managing Director, AMRUT P SHAH, in an interview with KAVERI ROY talks about the journey so far. Excerpts:

How has the journey been so far, for you, both as an individual and also as a company?

I started my career in late 70s with my uncle who had a small outfit to manufacture exercise note books in Central Mumbai and that is where I learnt everything about this business. I decided to start my own business in the early 80s, formed a partnership firm with my brothers - Starline Industries and began manufacturing exercise notebooks in 1985. Thus my journey began 25 years ago. In March 1995, I formed Sundaram Multi Pap Ltd. which acquired the existing business of this partnership firm and made an IPO in February, 1996 of Rs. 180 lacs and got listed on Pune and Ahmedabad Stock Exchanges. In July 2005, BSE admitted the equity shares of the company under the "Permitted Securities" category for trading.

In 1995 the company started with a capacity of 5 tons per day of conversion of paper into stationery which has been systematically increased to 20 tons per day in 1998, to 50 tons per day in 2001, to 60 tons per day in 2003 and currently it is 120 tons per day. In fifteen years the capacity has gone up by 24 times.

Sundaram is the market leader in the field of paper stationary products. What inspired you to enter into offline Audio-Visual learning concept - "e-class"?

Sundaram is very actively pursuing its CSR role since 1998 on its own, through which it has helped create 5 schools including one for the deaf & dumb children, a hostel for the handicapped students, has tied up with the National Association for the Blind for the education of blind children etc. Since 2003 it is regularly conducting free of cost specially designed Counselling & Motivational Programmes at the district, taluka and village levels in Maharashtra for students and their parents. These regular programmes have produced amazing improvement in overall performance of the students at various examinations.

While conducting such programmes the Company noticed glaring inadequacies in the school education system like non-availability of teachers, large absence of available teachers, poor teaching methodologies, etc. which created a distinct divide like Bharat & India. This prompted us to think on how to reach out to millions of students situated in the rural and semi urban areas of India who want to pursue elementary and higher education but have no such facilities available at their doorsteps and are thus deprived. So we decided to create and develop an innovative content of all subjects exactly as per the syllabus of the State S.S.C.

Board and thus "e-Class" was born.

How far do you think is innovative educational-content going to be useful for the Indian education sector considering the current state of education?

The education content like e-class, I believe, will radically change the education system. Since the main motto of developing e-class is to make it available to reach every student of India. Our research showed that in India the total bandwidth connectivity is of the order of 9 million thus revealing that ICT model for individual students cannot work. Secondly, almost every home in India has a TV set, hence innovative education content like e-class can be developed through a simple idea of utilizing this network for delivering its educational content right at the doorsteps of students who can consume it easily and at their convenience.

What according to you are specific advantages that your venture "e-class" could bring to the field of education in India?

E-class with its innovative education content for the k-10 segment will be able to provide equivalent education irrespective of geographic and social economic background, right at the door steps of students by using the medium of television as the most conveniently available delivery platform. Looking at the reach of TV, it is easy to reach out to the student population. This can be done with the simple devise of a multimedia player that can be a plugged into TV for viewing educational content, which is branded is e-class.

How do you intend to reach out to underprivileged schools/students, considering the affordability factor?

For schools and students of the rural and the urban areas we have worked out different strategies to utilizes various NGOs, large corporates who are having excellent CSR programmes, various government funding programmes, large public charitable trusts along with our own financial support to reach out to the under-privileged in our country.

What is the role that private sector can play in education-sector?

Private sector can play a very meaningful role in making education available to all throughout the country in partnership with the government. Such partnership is valuable in so far as both the parties would be able to pull their infrastructure and finance resources to provide education at the door steps of all children in India. Education alone can lift the nation socio-economically, thereby, guaranteeing inclusive-growth.