

RE-STRUCTURING HIGHER EDUCATION TO ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY

Dr. Vibha Sharma *

Dr. Bindu Sharma **

Abstract

India has had a rich legacy of providing multi-disciplinary education to her children in the 'Gurukuls,' and higher education in highly advanced universities which catered to the educational needs of students from different parts of the world in the bygone era. However, in the subsequent times, education system suffered immensely due to wars and invasions by foreign rulers. It was after Independence that the Government of India brought in new policies from time to time to improve the beleaguered education system. Nonetheless, a lot still needs to be done to tackle the issues of providing quality education coupled with skill enhancement, and ensuring employability in the domestic and global markets today. This paper assesses the prevailing higher education scenario in India on the basis of the available data, and recommends reforms in this sector to nurture job providers rather than job seekers.

Keywords:

Higher Education, Education Policies, Employability, Reforms in Higher Education, Skill Enhancement

*** Associate Professor & Head, Department of Public Administration, MCM DAV College, Chandigarh, India**

**** Associate Professor, PG Department of English, MCM DAV College, Chandigarh, India**

1. Introduction

Education has always been accorded a place of honour in the Indian society since times immemorial. The country boasts of a rich legacy of university education of international repute in the form of Nalanda University established in the 5th century B.C. At the pinnacle of its glory in the 7th century A.D., it had nearly 10,000 students from all across Asia pursuing advanced studies in a wide variety of disciplines. Similarly, the Takshshila University, which flourished in the 6th century B.C. in ancient Indian kingdom of Gandhar, now in Afghanistan, catered to thousands of students from as far as Syria, Babylon, China and Greece. But a series of foreign invasions destroyed this rich heritage of learning in India, plunging its people into abysmal darkness of illiteracy and backwardness. It was during the freedom struggle against the British rule that national leaders realized the fundamental significance of education in national development and vowed to establish a strong foundation of the same.

Today, India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 62% of its population in the working age group of 15-59 years, and more than 54% below 25 years of age. Its population pyramid is expected to bulge across the age group of 15-59 over the next decade [1]. During the next 20 years, the labour force in the industrialized world is expected to decline by 4%, while in India it will increase by 32%. Paradoxically this poses a formidable challenge and a huge opportunity. To reap this demographic dividend which is expected to last for next 25 years (i.e. up to 2040) far greater as compared to that of China, USA and other European countries, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute substantively to the economic growth of the country [2].

Though India has the demographic advantage of possessing the largest human resource in the world, yet the country is far from realizing its potential as the man-power capital primarily due to rampant lack of employable skills in her workforce. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) studies have found out that barely 7% of all engineering and MBA graduates are employable [3]. Before we delve into the factors which have led to this dismal state, it is important to study the efforts and policies made by the successive governments to augment the reach and level of education in the last half a century.

2. National Policies for Education

A perusal of National Policies for Education in the past reveals clearly that significant steps have been taken since independence by the Governments at the Union and the State levels to broaden the base of learning at all levels.

2.1. National Policy for Education 1968

Some of the prominent features of the Education Policy passed in 1968 [4] include:

- Providing free and compulsory basic education;
- Need to develop languages both at the regional and national levels;
- Emphasis on the education of girls to accelerate social transformation;
- Need of intensive methods to develop education for the backward classes, especially among the tribal groups;
- Spread of literacy among adults/Adult Education;
- Identification of talent for cultivation of excellence in diverse fields;
- Special emphasis on development of education for Agriculture and Industry;
- Status, emoluments and education of teachers;
- Academic freedom to teachers to pursue and publish independent studies and researches;
- Teacher education, especially in-service education, should receive due emphasis;
- Practical training in industry should form an integral part of education;
- Need to increase facilities for technical and vocational education at this stage;
- Facilities for secondary and vocational education should conform broadly to requirements of the developing economy and real employment opportunities.

2.2. National Policy of Education 1986 (modified in 1992)

This policy laid emphasis on Non-formal Education at school level, and Vocationalization of higher education [5] with the aim to:

- Enhance employability to reduce the mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled manpower, and also as an alternative to higher education. As per the policy, efforts were to be made to provide children at the higher secondary level with generic vocational courses which cut across several occupational fields and are not occupation-specific.

- The establishment of vocational courses or institutions will be the responsibility of the Government as well as the employers in the public and private sectors. Special emphasis to be laid on the education of women, rural and tribal students, and deprived sections of the society.
- Graduates of the vocational courses will be given opportunities under the pre-determined conditions for professional growth, career improvement and lateral entry into courses of general, technical and professional education through appropriate bridge courses.
- Non-formal, flexible and need-based vocational programmes will also be made available to neo-literates, youth who have completed primary education, school drop-outs, persons engaged in work and unemployed or partially employed persons with special attention to women.

3. Assessment of Higher Education Sector/State of Education in the Higher Education Sector

It is a well known fact that education had flourished in the ancient era due to the iconic universities like Nalanda and Taxshishla. Equally well known is the truth that a series of foreign invasions and the colonial rule spelt doom for the rich educational traditions of those times. Since then, the growth of education has had a chequered history. In fact, it is during the last 70 years since India's Independence that persistent efforts have been made by governments to establish a sound education system. The results of some of these can be assessed through the following data:

3.1. Growth of Higher Educational Institutions

Table - 1 provides an insight into the growth of higher educational institutions since 1950-51. We find that there has been a substantial increase in the number of Colleges and Universities since 1951. While the number of Colleges has increased from a mere 578 in 1951 to 38,498 in 2014-2015, the number of Universities has risen from 27 to 760 in the same period. Evidently, persistent efforts have been undertaken by successive governments to increase the number of higher education institutions to cater to the growing demands of various regions. Please refer to Figure-1 & 2 for the graphical presentation of the stated data.

Table -1: Growth of Colleges and Universities

Level/Year	College	University
1950-51	578	27
1960-61	1819	45
1970-71	3277	82
1980-81	6963	110
1990-91	5748	184
2000-01	10152	254
2005-06	16982	350
2006-07	19812	371
2007-08	23099	406
2008-09	27882	440
2009-10	25938	436
2010-11	32974	621
2011-12	34852	642
2012-13	35525	667
2013-14	36634	723
2014-15	38498	760

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
(website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

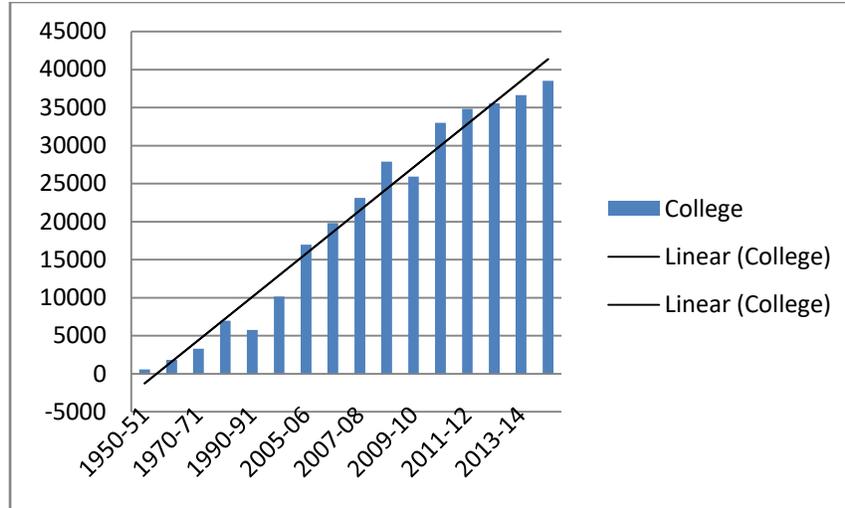


Figure – 1: Growth of Colleges

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

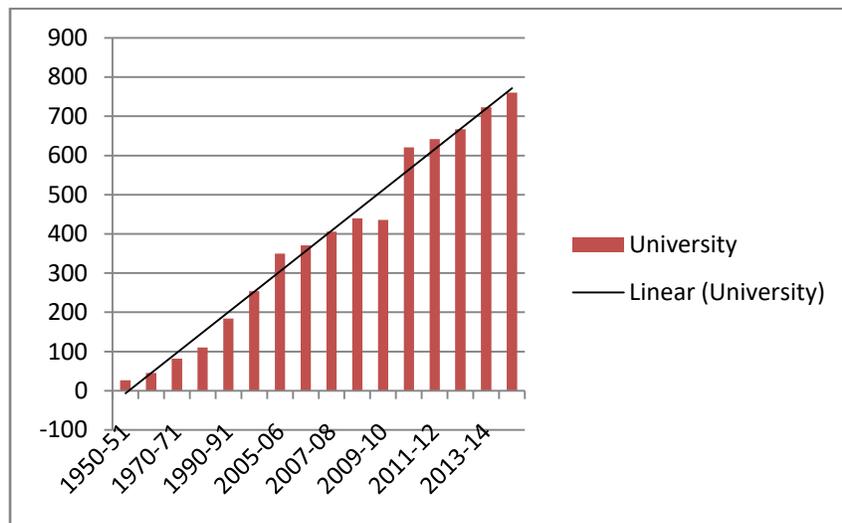


Figure – 2: Growth of Universities

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

3.2. Types of Institutions

Table - 2 provides information about various types of Institutions in the sphere of higher education up to 2014-2015. These include Central and State Universities, Open Universities,

Public Funded and Private Funded Universities, Stand-alone Institutions etc. to cater to the increasing number of students in different streams and at different levels.

Table-2: Number of Institutions by Type 2014-15

Higher Education	University	Central University	43	
		State Public University	316	
		Deemed University	122	
		State Private University	181	
		Central Open University	1	
		State Open University	13	
		Institution of National Importance	75	
		State Private Open	1	
		Institutions under State Legislatures Act	5	
		Others	3	
		Total	760	
		College		38498
		Stand Alone Institution	Diploma Level Technical	3845
			PGDM	431
			Diploma Level Nursing	3114
			Diploma Level Teacher Training	4730
			Institute under Ministries	156
			Total	12276

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

3.3. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

The gross enrolment ratio of the students in higher education from 2001-2002 to 2014-2015 can be seen in Table - 3 which exhibits an increase from a mere 8.1% in 2001-2002 to 24.3% in 2014-2015. In the case of female students, the GER shows a considerable rise from 6.7% to 23.2% during the same period. Although the increased enrolment ratio is an indication that

people are realizing the importance of education in their lives, these figures are still quite low by international standards. Figure-3 provides a graphical presentation of the stated data.

Table-3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): All Categories of Students

Level/ Year	Higher Education 18-23 years		
	Male	Female	Total
2001-02	9.3	6.7	8.1
2002-03	10.3	7.5	9.0
2003-04	10.6	7.7	9.2
2004-05	11.6	8.2	10.0
2005-06	13.5	9.4	11.6
2006-07	14.5	10.0	12.4
2007-08	15.2	10.7	13.1
2008-09	15.8	11.4	13.7
2009-10	17.1	12.7	15.0
2010-11	20.8	17.9	19.4
2011-12	22.1	19.4	20.8
2012-13	22.7	20.1	21.5
2013-14	23.9	22.0	23.0
2014-15	25.3	23.2	24.3

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
(website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

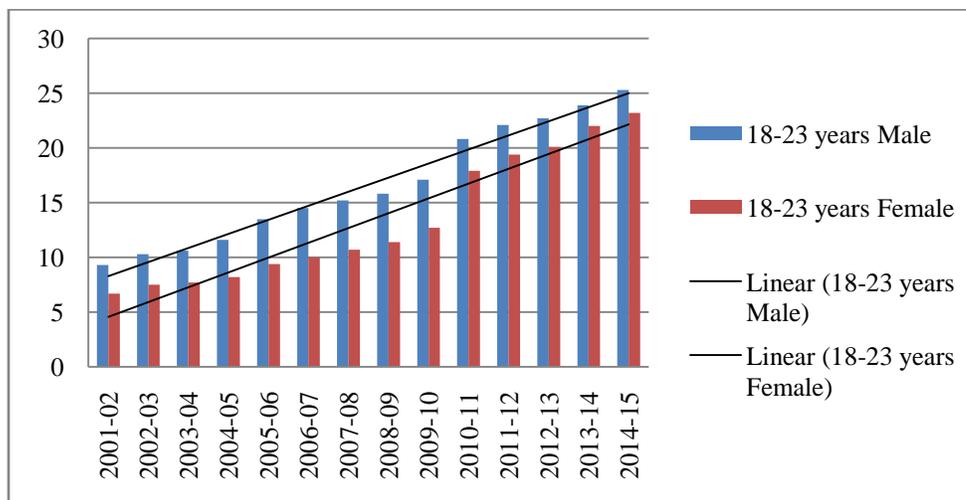


Figure – 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): All Categories of Students

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

3.4. Programme wise Enrolment in 2014-2015

Table - 4 gives an in-depth information about the percentage of enrolment in different programmes, both at the Masters and Bachelor levels in varied streams such as Arts, Science, Commerce etc. during 2014-2015. It is observed that maximum numbers of students are pursuing B. A. (28.44%), B. Sc (11.80%) and other courses (17.67%). It is, however, important to note that majority of these programmes are theoretical rather than skill oriented, and so they do not provide any stable employment opportunities. Figure-4 provides a graphical presentation of the stated data.

Table-4: Percentage Enrolment in various Programmes in Higher Education 2014-15

Programme	Male	Female	Total
B.A.-Bachelor of Arts	24.60	32.96	28.44
B.Sc.-Bachelor of Science	11.44	12.22	11.80
B.Com.-Bachelor of Commerce	10.96	10.77	10.87
B.Tech.-Bachelor of Technology	8.68	3.78	6.43
B.E.-Bachelor of Engineering	7.61	3.57	5.75
M.A.-Master of Arts	3.27	5.36	4.23
B.A.(Hons)-Bachelor of Arts (Honors)	3.31	4.23	3.73
B.Ed.-Bachelor of Education	1.37	2.85	2.05
M.Sc.-Master of Science	1.33	2.15	1.70
M.B.A.- Master of Business Administration	1.89	1.28	1.61
B.C.A.-Bachelor of Computer Applications	1.53	1.25	1.40
B.Sc.(Hons)-Bachelor of Science (Honors)	1.37	1.25	1.32
B.B.A.-Bachelor of Business	1.28	0.91	1.11

Administration			
M.Com.-Master of Commerce	0.84	1.33	1.07
L.L.B.-Bachelor of Law or Laws	1.05	0.54	0.82
Others	19.47	15.55	17.67

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
(website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

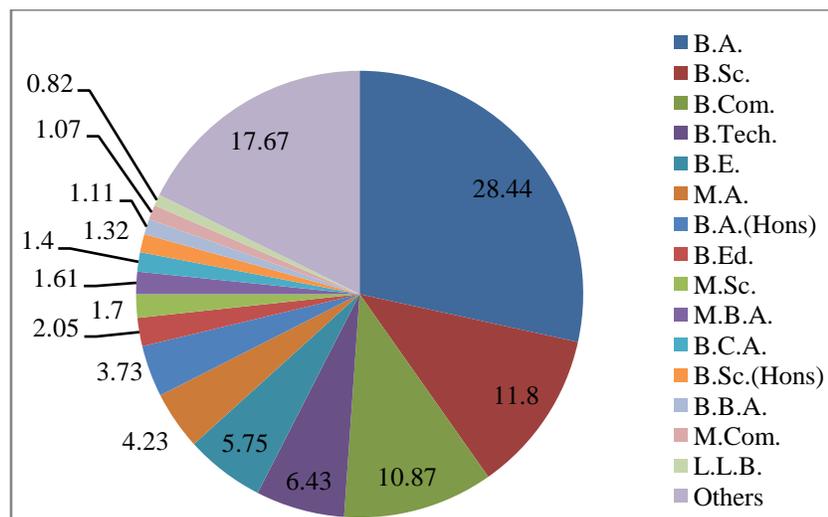


Figure-4: Percentage Enrolment in various Programmes in Higher Education 2014-15

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

3.5. Mode of Education

Table - 5 displays the mode of enrolment which reveals that 89% of the students opt for full time regular courses while 11% opt for the distance mode of education. Many of those enrolled in the latter may already be working, and have joined this mode to enhance their educational qualifications. However, the courses pursued through the distance mode are also theory based rather than practical or skill oriented. Though it may provide a qualifying degree/degree, it fails to arm the learner with employable skills.

Table -5: Enrolment in Higher Education through Regular & Distance Mode 2014-15

Mode	Female	Total	Percentage of Total
Regular	13968473	30399914	89
Distance	1754545	3811723	11
Total	15723018	34211637	100

Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (website: <http://mhrd.gov.in/statist>)

4. Analysis of Higher Education Scenario

It is disheartening to observe that despite a phenomenal expansion in the educational base in the country since independence, its quality has remained more or less stagnant and below international standards. Though the number of Universities, Colleges and the GER has increased in the last few years appreciably, the number of unemployable graduates in both technical and non-technical disciplines has also increased from 18.3% in 1951 to 73% in 2011. The prime reason behind this dismal picture is the fact that the Government of India invests a mere 4.29% of its revenue on education, with a paltry 0.54% on technical education (www.mhrd.gov.in). “The distressing fall-out of the same is endorsed by a report filed from Davos by PTI on 19 January 2016 in *The Times of India* regarding the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTC) – 2016 which states: Reflecting an acute shortage of skilled labour force and difficult business conditions, India has slipped 11 places to rank 89th on a global index of talent competitiveness far behind Switzerland, Singapore, Luxembourg, the United States and Denmark which occupy the top five slots in this category” [6].

Evidently, despite this tremendous growth in the numbers of institutions and students, the dream of vocationalization of education to provide better career opportunities to the youth envisioned in the early 1990s is yet to be realized. Our current workforce is about 450 million of which only 8.9% are engaged in the organised sector and only 5% have marketable skills as compared to 50-60% in other countries [7].

The need of the hour, therefore, is to impart practical skills to our students to generate employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship. However, it is easier said than done as

numerous challenges impede the way to success. There exists a discord between the demand and supply of skilled workforce, and also the level of competency of skills required by the industry and possessed by the trainee/recruit. Moreover, states with a strong industrial base and higher growth rate such as Punjab and Haryana offer greater job avenues but suffer from shortage of skilled labour, whereas certain states such as Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Bihar have a greater workforce but fewer employment avenues. Hence, it becomes imperative to strike a balance between the two and open more institutes such as ITIs offering core skills to students in thickly populated and economically weaker states.

Another major drawback in our system is the lack of awareness among the general public pertaining to the courses, options and opportunities available for them or their wards. It is therefore, important for the Central and State governments to advertise their policies and programmes widely through electronic and print media especially in the local languages for wider coverage and acceptability.

Moreover, a large section of society has a closed mindset towards skill-based/ vocational courses. These are generally regarded as the last choice in an education system that promotes conventional subjects/degree and careers. The dichotomy between the two has perpetuated the myth that skill-based courses are meant for the working class, that they provide only low income jobs, and that all careers which require manual skills signify low social status. This misconception needs to be removed, for in the times of fast changing market trends and the paucity of skilled workforce; skill-oriented courses are opening new employment opportunities in both domestic and global markets.

In this era of globalization, job seekers look for white collared jobs with fat pay-packages but fail to find their dream jobs for the dearth of mandatory skills to handle human and material resources. No wonder, they keep shifting from one job to another. Another fall out of the same is disgruntlement among the youth. Unemployment arising out of lack of competency despite a valid academic/professional degree can be distressing and disturbing. It also leads to domestic and social unrest in the longer run. Hence, the aim of the government should be to nurture job providers rather than churning out qualified but unemployable job seekers by re-structuring the existing education system.

5. Suggestions for Restructuring Higher Education

It goes without saying that unemployed or unemployable youth are a cumbersome burden on a nation's economy. To overcome the daunting challenge of increasing unemployment and unemployability of educated youth, it has become imperative to blend the conventional formal education with career-oriented courses seamlessly. Since there exists a wide gap between emerging trends of employability and the competencies of our graduates, the need of the hour is to re-align and re-structure our educational system as well as curricula at all levels to accord greater impetus to practical ability over theoretical and bookish knowledge. Knight and Yorke have offered a definition of employability in very apt terms by attributing it to “a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” [8]. Hence to achieve this goal, we must impart our youth with appropriate knowledge blended with life-sustaining globally viable skills.

Following are some suggestions to overcome the existing systemic deficiencies, skill gap and restructure the current framework of higher education so as to make it globally acceptable, practicable and productive:

- New and diverse modules of skill development should be integrated at all levels with the academic curriculum in a graded manner so that when a student passes out of the college, he possesses not only a Bachelor's degree but also a set of specialized skills which are in sync with the demand of the industry, and ensures him a respectable job.
- It is now necessary to infuse new and market-relevant components in the existing curricula. The need of the times is to impart a combination of an academic degree and a set of basic skills in computer operations, finance, communication, time management etc.
- Another step in the direction of enhancing the employability of our graduates is to make them opt for at least one compulsory skill/career-oriented course which can enable them to secure jobs in the domestic as well as global market. Some of these courses may include Office Management, Event Management, Web Designing, Commercial Art, Automobile/ Mobile Repair for boys; while girls may be offered skill based courses in Textile/Dress Designing, Jewellery Designing, Food Preservation, Dyeing/Tanning, Cooking and Baking etc. Certificates/Diplomas/Degrees in such courses can enable the graduates to opt for entrepreneurship.

- All educational institutions should adopt and promote PM's Kaushal Vikas Yojana and open Kaushal Kendras to impart practical or manual skills to every student. Keeping in consideration the dynamics of the market, it is significant to align the syllabus of career-oriented courses with the set of skills demanded by the industry. To achieve this aim, experts from both, academia and industry need to work in tandem.
- Equally significant is improving and updating the curricula of said courses consistently to match the new techniques, technological advances and emerging trends in various fields. This would certainly lend a cutting edge to our young students.
- To cater to the need of producing skilled workforce, the Government of India must establish more ITIs than mere Degree Colleges, especially in states with large population of youth such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand and others. This would not only provide the graduates practical and specialised skills and better job opportunities but also satisfy the demand of the industry and employer.
- Keeping into consideration that more than 60% of our population lives in the rural areas, it is important to include the rural youth into the mainstream of education and make them entrepreneurs rather than mere farm workers. An effective step can be to align the rural colleges with the nearest Agricultural University in the region or State to run agro-based courses in Dairy Farming, Bee Keeping, Poultry Farming, Fish Rearing, Pickle Making etc for rural/suburban students.
- Similarly, colleges in the urban and semi-urban areas can be associated with different industrial or manufacturing units in the region to offer practical training to the students. These trainees can also be offered apprenticeship or summer jobs by the same supporting industry with some stipend to promulgate the idea of "earn while you learn."
- This skill gap can be reduced with the help of agencies like Bharat Sevak Samaj (BSS) - a National Development Agency promoted by the Planning Commission, Government of India. It runs a number of courses under the Community Colleges Scheme. These colleges equip the students with necessary skills by providing vocational education so that they are able to earn their livelihood in a respectable manner. Besides the Community Colleges, BSS also offers more than 1000 vocational courses through more than 9000 institutions in India. The duration of these courses ranges from 1 month to 6 months to 2 years [9].

- Another viable option can be to establish more Community Colleges within the existing institutions to offer long/short term skill based courses [10].
- To facilitate those students who are employed, online learning through MOOCs can be promoted. Videos in MOOCs demonstrate the practical aspects pertaining to the field of study and students can refer to these again and again as per convenience for better understanding of concepts. MOOCs can certainly serve as a boon for those pursuing degrees through the distance mode.
- Similarly, on line courses of varied durations – 2 years, 1 year, 6 months or 2 months – offered by government or professional agencies should also be given some validity and recognition.
- Career counselling needs to be undertaken at the senior school level to sensitize the students and their parents regarding various courses, streams, and avenues available to them apart from the medical and engineering fields in the higher education and job sector.
- Also, we need to upgrade and modernize our institutions in terms of their infrastructure, laboratories, equipment, pedagogical aids, library facilities and computers. New initiatives of the government such as Rashtiya Uchhtar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA) are a laudable step in this direction but its impact must percolate down to every college and every student irrespective of its geographical location.
- Similarly, the significance of qualified faculty, trained instructors, experienced coaches and able administrators cannot be denied. Governments must hire the best of talent in the field of education, and make teaching a lucrative profession by offering more facilities to the teaching community apart from mere salary.

6. Conclusion

India is a land of multi-talented people. Compelled to face hardships, challenges and trials of varied kinds posed by tough competition, limited resources and a desire to achieve success, Indian youth exhibits immense capability to innovate and improvise things to suit their needs. What we need the most is to tap this innovativeness and help them create new resources and facilities for their fellow beings apart from sustaining their own selves. Hence, to achieve the goals stipulated in the ambitious schemes such as “Skill India” and “Make in India,” we need to empower our youth with essential skills, and harness their latent talent instead of doling out degrees which lead them nowhere.

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