

Higher Education In India: Progress & Emerging Issues

Abstract

Higher education has significant role in economic growth of any country including India. It provides an opportunity to critically reflect upon the social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. Keeping in above backdrop, the present paper seeks to examine the progress and emerging issues in Indian higher education system in the present era. Issues like access, equity, inclusion, quality, privatization and financing concerning higher education, are very complex and interrelated with political, economical geographical and international dimensions. To develop India as an education hub or to become a prosperous partner in global economy, India has to qualitatively strengthen education in general and higher education with research and development in particular.

Keywords: Higher education, Quality & Quantity, Financing

Introduction

Education is one of the key components of human development and greatest liberating force in any country including India. It is considered as fundamental to all round development of the individual both at material and spiritual levels Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education, and training are key to moving society toward sustainability. The Education Commission 1964-66 described the role of education in social and economic transformation through a statement- the density of a nation is shaped in its class rooms. Education creates human capital which is the core of economic progress and assumes that the externalities generated by human capital are the source of self sustaining economic process.

It hardly needs any justification that higher education is an engine of economic growth as well as human development which improves physical quality of life index (PQLI) in the knowledge economy of today. In order to become prosperous global economy with in first five ranks, India has to qualitatively strengthen her education in general and higher and technical education in particular. It provides an opportunity to reflect upon the social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. Noble Laureate, Amartya Sen (1999) argued that it is higher education besides elementary and secondary education that forms a "human capability" and a "human freedom" that helps in attaining other "freedoms". In this regard, higher education has significant role in supporting knowledge driven economic growth strategies. It provides an opportunity to critically reflect upon the social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills. Investment in education leads to the formation of human capital, comparable to physical capital & social capital, and that makes a significant contribution to economic growth (Dickens et al., 2006; Loening, 2004; Gylfason and Zoega, 2003; Barro, 2001). The major contribution to the issue on the relationship between education in general and higher education in particular and economic growth was first made by Adam Smith, followed by Marshall, Schultz, Bowman and others (Tilak, 2005).

Therefore, to develop higher education as a true engine of economic growth, continuous efforts are needed to face various problems as well as challenges regarding higher education in Indian economy. Keeping in above backdrop, the second section of the present paper describes the higher education scenario in India. Section III is dedicated on the various issues of higher education in India. Section IV, provides policy implications with challenges ahead. And lastly, Section V concludes the study.

Nidhi Walia

Assistant Professor,
Department of Commerce,
S.A.Jain. (PG) College,
Ambala, Haryana

Higher Education In India

Higher education is recognized as a critical factor in inclusive and faster growth in any country including India. It generates skilled labour force and inputs for research and development. It fosters higher growth rate and enables people to compete in a globalized world. Therefore, for the development of nation with social justice, there is a rationale for equitable and balanced progress of all the sections of the society in general and in India particular. Provision of education to the citizens of India, especially the socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged sections of the society, has been accorded a top priority in development paradigm since independence. Consequently, there has been rapid improvement in educational status with varying degrees including higher education.

Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. A large number of additional students are knocking at the doors of higher education institutions in the country. With the public funding being no more in a position to take-up the challenging task of expansion and diversification of the higher education system in the country to meet the continuously growing demands at present, there is a little option other than bringing in private initiatives in a massive way to meet the various challenges. Indian higher education has expanded exponentially over the past five decades and there has been a considerable increase in the spread of educational institutions along with enrolments at every stage. There were 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence and after then mushrooming growth have taken place in Indian higher education system. In this regard, the growth of higher education in terms of institutions and enrolments in India can be understood, analyzed and interpreted from table-1.

See Table 1 at last

The table 1 reveals that there has been appreciable growth of higher education since 1951. Number of university level institutions and colleges has grown up from 28 to 574 and 578 to 35539 respectively from 1951 to 2012. As a result, the number of teachers as well as students has also increased significantly. The growth of students' enrolment is more than the growth of number of teachers over the period of time, may be due to the massive investment by government at school level in form of primary as well as secondary education. Rise in enrolments and institutions at school level, there is mushrooming growth in higher education institutions. The table 2 shows the growth of central institutions (central, state universities, IIT, IIM etc.) during 11th five year plan (2007-12).

See Table 2 at last

It is clear from the table 2 that growth of central institutions has taken place in 11th five year plan in a considerable manner. The total number of institutions has increased from 70 in 2006-07 to 121 in 2011-12 which is the result of government efforts to increase the opportunities in higher education. The correct assessment of the availability of higher education can be made in terms of number of enrolments in these institutions rather than just a number of institutions and their growth. Keeping this aspect in mind,

enrolment in higher education in year 2012 can be shown from figure 1

See Figure 1 at Last

Now a days, private sector also play very prominent role in higher education to a certain extent. The figure shows the enrolment of students in private and government colleges. It is clear that out of total enrolment 39% students are enrolled in government colleges and remaining 23% & 38% are enrolled in private aided and private unaided colleges respectively.

See Figure 2 at Last

It is clear from figure 2 that the increase in the enrolment is consistent with the expansion of HEIs over the years. The total enrolment in higher education has increased from 0.21 million in 1950-51 to about 22 million in 2011-12.

To make the analysis more clear, faculty wise students' enrolment has been shown in figure 3. The available data during academic year 2012 reveal that enrolment in arts faculty is maximum (37.1 per cent) followed by science (18.7 per cent), commerce/management (17.6 per cent) and engineering/technology (16.1 per cent) faculties.

See Figure 3 at Last

Public Expenditure On Higher Education In India

Education is defined as the investment of current time and resources for future earnings. Quality of higher education can be judged by the one of the important indicator viz. magnitude of public expenditure. Public expenditure on education is critically important to improve the educational levels of population. Strong and vibrant education systems with national values cannot be built by a heavy reliance on private finances. Public expenditure on education is positively associated with economic growth.

Many studies have been made from time to time all over the world to assess the contribution of public expenditure on education to economic growth. Notable among them are, the studies made by Becker, Denison, Dholakia, Harbison and Myers, Mukerji and Krishna Rao, Psacharopoulos, Schultz, Solow, Tilak and Todaro. There is considerable evidence that investment in education has high pay off in terms of accelerating economic growth, and it is certainly true that which has a record of rapid economic development such as U.S.A., Japan and U.S.S.R., have made heavy investment in education. The following figure 4 shows the trend of public expenditure on higher education including technical education in India.

The public expenditure in education sector, especially in higher education has remained very low over the years, The National Education Policy 1968 and 1986 (revised in 1992) recommends government expenditure on education at 6% of GDP, whereas the 2010-11 (BE) expenditure was only at 3.8%.

See Figure 4 at Last

Emerging Issues In Higher Education In India

The role of higher education in the emerging scenario of knowledge economy is very crucial and multifaceted for any country in general and India in particular. The country has been facing a number of problems and there are various issues that stand before the system of higher education. Issues like access, equity, inclusion, quality, privatization and

financing concerning higher education, are very complex and interrelated with political, economical geographical and international dimensions, which are discussed as follows:

Access and Equity

Today the world economy is experiencing an unprecedented change. A paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education now a day, from 'national education' to 'global education', from 'one time education for a few' to 'life long education for all', from 'teacher- centric education' to 'learner centric education'. Consequently, access to higher education has increased to certain extent but not sufficiently. With the implementation of OBC reservations in the central education institutions, it is hoped that inclusion will be taken forward. This social inclusion will further strengthen the process of democratization not only in higher education sector but in overall economic, political and social process.

It is worth noting that while India has the second largest system of higher education, next only to USA, the total number of students hardly represent 6 per cent of the relevant age group, i.e., 18 - 23, which is much below the average of developed countries, which is about 47 per cent. It is true that enhancing social access to higher education is still important in the country. But, the major challenge before the Indian higher education system is to bring equity in quality of education across the length and breadth of the country. This is more close to the heart of students in rural, semi urban and urban areas, because they also wish to be able to participate in the new economic revolution.

The twin issues of inclusion and equity need to be given due importance while making policies for expanding access to higher education. Imbalances whether related to gender, caste, religion, regional, need to be addressed so as to provide equal opportunities to students belonging to disadvantaged or vulnerable sections of the society. To overcome the deep rooted problem of social inequity, successive governments have introduced caste based reservations in higher education. At present the caste-based reservation is applicable in only government funded institutions, which includes institutions of excellence and amount to approximately 49 per cent of the total seats. Due to the caste based reservation, better talent coming from non-reserved category is deprived of the admission in good institution, which creates social unrest and used as a tool to make vote bank by the political parties. Thus, several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Enhancing social access as well as to bring equity in quality of higher education is still important in the country.

Quality

Quality in higher education is another burning issue which can be ensured through regular review of the functions of the institution either through self assessment or through outside agencies and by accrediting the institutions. The expansion of higher education over the years has also resulted in educational malpractices which exist in the form of capitation fees being charged by the private institution

at the time of admissions and various other charges imposed upon the students.

In an environment of global competitiveness it is important that Indian products of the higher education institutions are as competent as graduates of any other country, not only in their scholastic attainments, but also in terms of the value system and richness of their personality. The employability of the students graduating from the current higher education institutes is also questionable, the standards of research and teaching at Indian universities are also far below the international standards. No Indian university is currently featured in any of the rankings of the top 200 international universities. Unless the quality and standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene. This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms to be available in the country to ensure the quality and standard of the academic/training programmes at higher educational institutions.

The assessment has to be continuous and the process has to be transparent to gain the acceptance of the society at large. Accordingly, the various regulatory bodies regulating higher education have constituted autonomous bodies for monitoring quality standards in the institutions under their purview e.g., National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) by UGC, National Board of Accreditation (NBA) by AICTE, Accreditation Board (AB) by ICAR, Distance Education Council (DEC) by NCTE etc. But, the quality norms of such councils are not comparable with international standards to a certain extent and the enforcement process is not stringent. Further political interference and corruption dilute the role and impact of these institutions in ensuring the desired quality standards.

Financing of Higher Education

One of the most important things that have to be noticed is the issue of financial constraints regarding higher education before the government. Expenditure on education in general and on higher education in particular by the government, is one of the parameters to judge the quality in education for any nation. The State Government has already been spending 20-30 per cent of its revenue budget on education. It could not afford to spend more. In India, higher education has received less attention in terms of public spending than other levels. It is not feasible for India to make massive state investments in research and development that produced research led universities in the west such as MIT, University of California, Berkeley in the US or University of Cambridge in Britain, whose intellectual properties-a consequence of such investments-attracted industry to their doorsteps. Besides, government funding on higher education has been diminishing on a year on year basis for more than one decade.

In the view of withdrawal of government support to finance higher education, private institutions have been allowed to take over the responsibility of imparting education to all. Further, in government aided universities the model of self financing and self

sustaining institutions has been introduced. All these developments have added to the cost of education significantly. Though, the education loan has been made easy to facilitate higher education still the terms and conditions imposed by banks in terms of guarantee and criteria of minimum income of family restricts the talent coming from the poor families to go for higher education.

Privatization

Over the past two decades, as earlier noted, the level of demand for higher education in India has increased well above the Government's capacity to finance. As a result, private higher education has flourished, with a boom in commercially oriented for-profit colleges.

In the present scenario, privatization of higher education is apparently a fledgling but welcome trend and is critical to maintain creativity, adaptability and quality. The economic trail of liberalization and globalization demands it. In India both public and private institutions operate simultaneously. Most of the growth in the rapidly expanding higher education sector took place in private unaided colleges or in self-financing institutions. Since grant-in-aid to private colleges is becoming difficult, many government funded institutions/universities have granted recognition/affiliation to unaided colleges and many universities have authorized new 'self-financing' courses even in government and aided colleges.

Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education in India is imparted through private institutions, mostly unaided involving high cost. However, the situation is not so simple. Private providers, in the interest of maximizing profit, have every incentive to 'minimize costs' by compromising on the quality of education provided in their institutions. Private providers are known to exploit the supply shortfall of higher education in order to maximize revenues through 'capitation fees', misrepresentation of courses, corruption in admissions practices, and other methods that ultimately harm the interests of students. Thus, there are serious implications for quality in private provision of higher education. Last but not least, quality of teaching staff is one of the considerable issues for higher education sector to sustain in the future. The National Education Policy, 1986 stated 'the status of teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society.....'. It is said that in the earlier era, teachers were less paid but they looked upon their works as a noble mission.

They were committed to their students to their subjects and to their profession. Today, high salaries are available but the commitment is less. Thus, it is the need of the hour to free the higher education system from unnecessary constraints and political interference and provide academic and administrative system which is accountable, transparent and equitable.

Policy Implications With Challenges Ahead

Indian higher education system has undergone massive expansion since independence. And thus there has been considerable improvement in the higher education in India in both quantitative as well as qualitative terms. India is not knocking at the doors of the world but world is knocking at the doors of India. It is up to us to open the doors or keep it shut

(Arjun Singh, 2007). There is a rationale for broadening our vision, developing skill and integrating all those aspects which have their direct or indirect bearing on human resource development to meet the challenges of higher education. In order to respond to the global challenges more strongly than ever before, India today needs a knowledge-oriented paradigm of development to give the country a competitive advantage in all field of knowledge.

National Knowledge Commission's (NKC) overarching aim is to transform India into a vibrant knowledge economy. This entails a radical improvement in existing systems of knowledge as well as the creation of avenues for generating new forms of knowledge. The present system of higher education produced some degree holders with mere knowledge and information in a particular area, but it has failed to develop general employability skills needed for entry level employee. Hence, it is high time for planners, policy makers and practitioners of higher education to ponder over it and make necessary reforms in the course and strategies so that employability skills can be developed among the students.

To keep the higher education within the reach of poor aspirants, there is a strong case for effective monitoring and regulation of the private sector through appropriate policy measures – a judicious mix of policies, which ensure efficient use of the available educational resources. To meet the growing demand for higher education, there is a need to search alternative sources of financing. The new challenges facing the system of higher education in the country cannot be met without a total overhaul of the structure of management of higher education institutions. This has become all the more necessary because of internationalization, which requires talent, competence, drive, initiative and innovation at several levels. Therefore, there is a rationale of good governance at all levels in higher education system.

Designing the higher education with relevance to the present as well as future demands is really a challenging task. It is important to realize that we live in a fast changing world, dictated by the developments in technology. Quick access to information has made knowledge creation fast, and the multiplier effect has made it even explosive. All this calls for a team of professionals in different areas to come together to develop proactive strategies for higher education to meet the future demands. Indian student is required to develop a multifaceted personality to cope up with the rapid changes in the world at large. Rising demand for higher education and associated shortage of faculty resources leads to inevitable trade-off between quality and quantity. Unless the quality and quantity of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene.

Conclusions

In concluding words, we can say that over the period of time, growth have been take place in higher education in terms of institutions, enrolments etc. but it is not sufficient. Indian economy is facing various challenges regarding higher education in twenty first

century, which need to overcome through appropriate policy formation and their effective implementation. To develop India as an education hub or to become a prosperous partner in global economy, India has to qualitatively strengthen education in general and higher education with research and development in particular. We need job led growth and for this, the thrust should be on quality and vocational/technical education. India has demographic advantage in the form of huge number of young people. To make the best, these young minds need to be provided opportunities for accessing quality higher education only quality human resource will ensure emergence of a true knowledge society which will ultimately enhance the country's competitiveness in the global economy. For better contribution of higher education in Indian economy, there is emergence of paradigm shift from literature type education to productive, job oriented education as per requirements.

References

1. Agarwal, P. (2006), Higher Education in India. The Need for Change. Working Paper 180. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.
http://www.icrier.org/pdf/ICRIER_WP180_Higher_Education_in_India_.pdf
2. Goel, M.M. & Walia, Suraj (2011), "Education and Economic Growth in Haryana (India): Using Granger Causality Approach" in international journal, Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol.17-1 (2011),
3. Goel, M.M. & Walia, Suraj (2011), "Higher Education: An Engine of Economic Growth in Post Reform India" Research Journal Social Sciences, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Vol. 19, No.3 (2011)
4. Gupta, P. (2011), 'Status of Higher Education in India: An Appraisal,' University News, vol. 49(37).
5. Madhavi, N.R. (2011), 'Higher Education in India: Progress and Emerging Needs', Southern Economists, October 01, 2011.
6. MHRD: Selected Educational Statistics, Department of Higher Education, GOI, New Delhi
7. Sharma, S. (2011), 'Globalization of Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities', University News, vol. 49(34).
8. Singh, A. (2004), 'Challenges in Higher Education', Economic and Political Weekly, 39 (21).
9. Singh, K.P. and Ahmad, S. (2011), 'Higher Education in India: Major Concerns', University News, vol. 49(29).
10. Srinivas, G. (2011), 'Strengthening Indian Higher Education', University News, vol. 49(28).
11. Padhi, S.K. (2011), 'Issues, Challenges and Reforms in Higher Education for a Knowledge Society,' University News, vol. 49(26).
12. University Grant Commission (UGC) Reports.
13. Walia Suraj (2010), "Analysis of Education Infrastructure in Haryana", Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra.
14. Walia, Suraj & Walia, K. Ritu (2013) "A Study of Linkage between Education and Poverty in India" Indian Journal of Applied Research, volume : 3, Issue : 12, Dec 2013

APPENDIX

Table 1

Growth of Higher Education Institutions And Their Intake Capacity In India

Year → Institutions & Enrolement ↓	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2012
No of University level institutions	28	45	93	123	177	266	574
Number of colleges	578	1816	3227	4738	7346	11146	35539
No. of teachers (in 000')	24	62	190	244	272	395	933
No. of students enrolled (in 000')	174	557	1956	2752	4925	8399	22373

Source: UGC Reports

Table 2

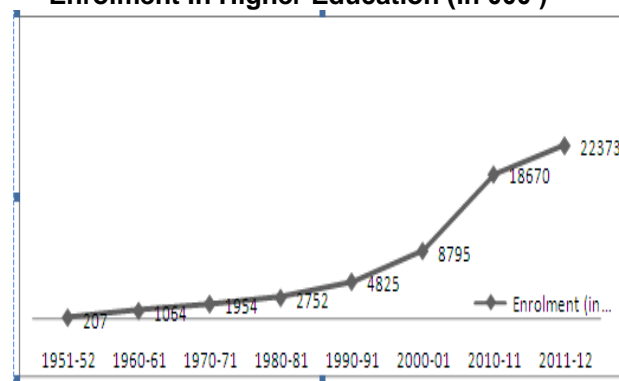
Growth Of Central Institutions During 11th Five Year Plan

Type of Institution ↓	2006-07	2011-12	Increase
Central Universities	19	40	21
Indian Institute of Technology	7	15	8
Indian Institute of Management	6	13	7
Indian Institute of Sci, Edu & Research	2	5	3
School of Planning and Architecture	1	3	2
National Institute of Technology	20	30	10
Other Technical institutions	15	15	0
TOTAL	70	121	51

Source: UGC Reports

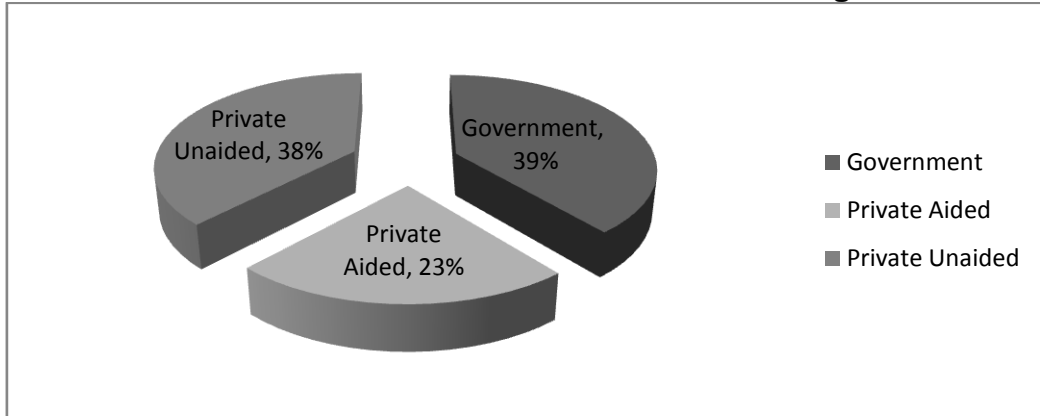
Figure 1

Enrolment In Higher Education (In 000')



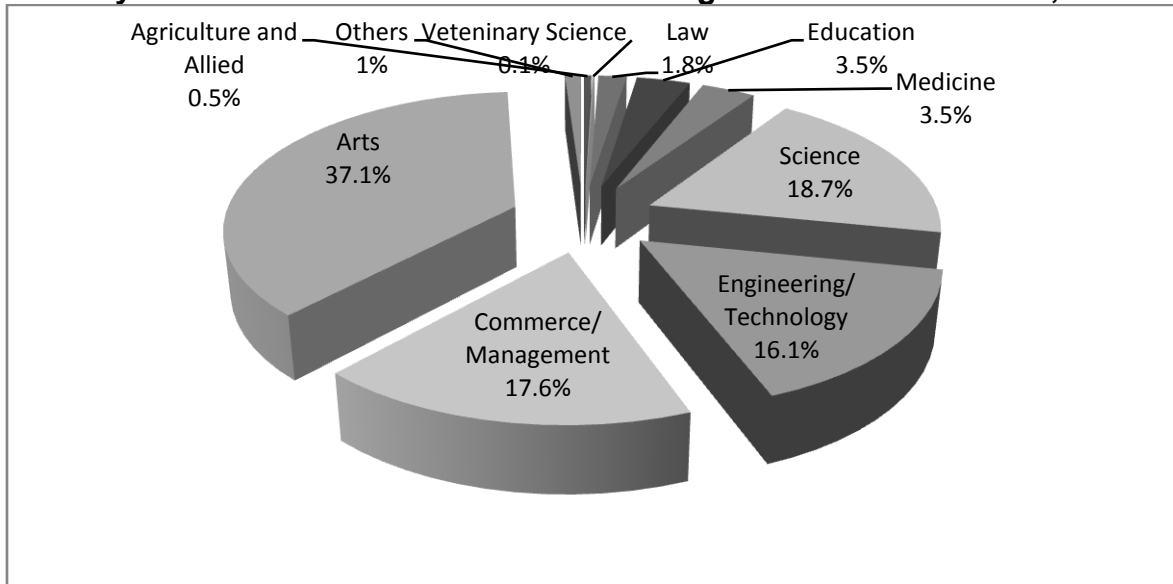
Source: UGC Higher Education at a Glance - June, 2013

Figure 2
Enrolment In Private And Government Colleges



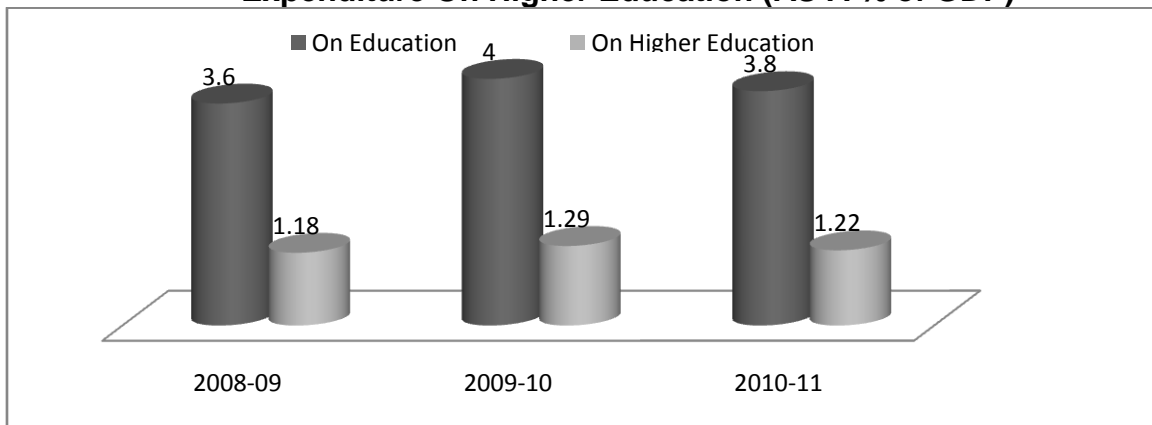
Source: UGC Reports

Figure 3
Faculty-Wise Distribution Of Enrolment In Higher Education In India, 2012



Source: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) - Social Sector

Figure 4
Expenditure On Higher Education (AS A % of GDP)



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, MHRD