

Higher Education in New Era- Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract: This article attempts to throw light on higher education in the generations to come. On one front, a funding crisis has created a shortfall that the universities' brightest brains are struggling to solve. Institutions' costs are rising, owing to pricey investments in technology, teachers' salaries and galloping administrative costs.

At the same time, a technological revolution is challenging higher education's business model. An explosion in online learning, much of it free, means that the knowledge once imparted to a lucky few has been released to anyone with a smartphone or laptop. These financial and technological disruptions coincide with a third great change: whereas universities used to educate only tiny elite, they are now responsible for training and retraining workers throughout their careers. How will they survive this storm and what will emerge in their place if they don't?

Keywords: Education, Institution, Development, New-Age, Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian higher education system has witnessed a metamorphosis of monumental proportions. It has burgeoned from an instrument of colonial ascendancy, as was the case with other former colonies to a system that aspires to be egalitarian and affirmative action oriented. It is imperative to factor in the country's colonial history to grasp the larger landscape. Further, the economy has had to emerge from being primarily agrarian to one that has a growing industrial and service sector presence. The Indian Education system has seen various up's and down's right from the pre-independence era to the current cosmopolite system.

1. Independence era: the weight of colonialism hung heavily on the higher education system as well as the economy. The higher education system was manifestly an area of desertion and forsaking.
2. Post-independence: the decade post-independence was characterized by Nehru's strong socialist leanings coming perhaps from the strong sway of the Soviet Union. The guiding idea was to promote industrialization through central planning. The state invested heavily in higher education in techno-engineering.
3. The '70s and '80s were marked by heavy-handed socio-democratic policy which was

Characteristically protectionist. There wasn't much to write home about on the higher education front. Unlike the preceding era, higher education was not an area of priority, and the state investments were not as impressive as the Nehruvian period. In this, India did not align itself with the Asian Tigers—the stronger economies of Eastern Asian and South East Asian countries which took deliberate steps to integrate with the West. Arguably, as a result of the above mentioned distancing from the globalization, the country suffered economic downfall that was not short of a crisis situation. The writing on the wall was loud and clear: globalize or perish. The tendency of being insular ran parallel in the higher education realm too. While countries like Brazil, Japan, UK and US moved away from liberal education in favor of technical and professional education earlier on, India rose to the possibilities far later. Powar (2012) states that in the year 2007-08, humanities/social sciences accounted for 45% of the student population, engineering and technology only 7% and medicine a meager 3%. (Powar, 2012)

India: prospects for emerging as a knowledge economy:

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh (2005) has optimistically forecast that the 21st Century will be the “knowledge century”, by which he refers to the socio-economic transformation that the country is projected to go through in the 21st century as a result of knowledge creation. Mattoo (2009) explicates the notion succinctly: “The whole idea of building a knowledge society is the idea of empowering young men and women through education and ensuring that all our delivery systems are built on the premise of the latest knowledge.”

(Bhatia K, 2010)

Education Today - An industry in disruption:

The education system today is more of large investment rather than getting quality education. The cost of tuition continues to skyrocket, putting the dream of higher education out of the reach of many and saddling others with decades of debt, even as the connection between the subjects that schools teach and the competencies that employers need grows ever less certain. Colleges and universities face two large, related challenges—how to make an education more affordable and how to increase the returns students realize on their investment. No one wants to watch another generation struggle to pay off tens of thousands of rupees in college loans on barista-level wages.

Just as iTunes, Netflix, the Kindle, and other innovations have disrupted the music and media industries, new developments are shaking higher education to its core. In much the same way these technologies and business models changed the way we interact with and consume everything from books and television to movies and other media, so, too, with education.

Science and technology have spawned new models for teaching and learning that will fundamentally alter the student experience in the years ahead. Education innovators are using technology and analytics to transform every facet of the college experience, from helping students make more informed educational investments to reducing the geographic and financial barriers to learning. Moreover, the exponential rate at which new knowledge is created today is drawing a new breed of alternative education providers into higher education. These providers are developing lower-cost, lightweight, on-demand learning solutions to help close the growing gap between the skills employers seek and the skills students possess upon graduation.

According to John Seeley Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*, the business of universities in an era of exponential change must shift from simply transferring knowledge to students to providing them with access to the latest knowledge via digital platforms, developing their skill sets through mentorship, and then immersing them in situations that encourage them to probe and push the boundaries of current knowledge and practice. Wide-ranging and thought-provoking conversations with higher education industry experts, educational technology startups, alternative education providers, college, university, and business leaders, and education policymakers led to intriguing insights on what all of these innovations could mean for the future of higher education. (John Seely Brown, 2011)

II. THE EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Fracture lines can be seen everywhere in India’s higher education system, from skyrocketing tuition costs and mounting student debt to a significant mismatch between the skills employers seek and those students possess upon graduation. These pressures, coupled with the recognition that the status quo is unsustainable, are, in turn, fueling innovation across the higher education ecosystem. While it’s still early days, we’re beginning to see the emerging outlines of a new landscape for higher education.

The emerging higher education landscape is one that is befitting of the digital era and of today’s tech-savvy students. It’s one that uses the cloud, social networks, mobile computing, and big data to create digital learning ecosystems that serve entrepreneurial learners, allowing them to design their own educational path based on the goals they want to achieve. It may or may not involve four years of study. Rather, students set their own pace, progressing not through semesters but as they master various competencies.

So how do we reach there?

Many ways can be sought to meet the challenges of higher education which are mentioned below -

Rethinking the college decision-making process:

Up to now, college rankings, campus visits, marketing materials, and advice from family, friends, and guidance and career counsellors have served as the main sources of information to guide students' college search. Now, thanks to technology, it's possible for students to employ a more data-driven approach to the college decision-making process.

As Jeffrey Selingo, author of *College Unbound: The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students*, notes, "Until recently, data science was largely absent from the high-stakes decisions made in higher education. Think about it: We have used this technology for years to help us with mundane choices like picking our next movie from Google, but not to help a student select the right college."^(Selingo, 2013)

Today, because of organizations such as LinkedIn, which provides free access to its members' aggregated education and career data, we can map the career pathways of hundreds of millions of professionals—data that students can use to make more informed college decisions. Students can see the varied paths today's professionals took to succeed in their chosen fields. For example, students can see that engineering graduates from Carnegie Mellon University most commonly work at Google, IBM, and Microsoft. They are also able to explore the less linear paths students take today, like the musical theater major who used his skills in developing compelling narratives to land a job as a game designer at Zynga.

A new model of "just right" education:

Anyone plucked from a century ago and set down in a typical lecture hall today would immediately know they were on a college campus. Students might be taking notes on laptops rather than paper, and the blackboard may have been replaced by a whiteboard or a digital "smartboard," but they'd have no doubt they were in a classroom.

This lecture-based model for learning has characterized higher education since its inception. But, with better technology and a much deeper understanding of how students learn, educators are beginning to make strides in personalizing learning by combining the best of traditional teaching with digital technology, using analytics to track student success, and focusing on competencies rather than credit hours. According to George Siemens, associate director of the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute, "The way we learn should be our most personalized experience because no two people process information the same way."

Incorporating "Made for me" education:

The Center for Digital Education reports that blended education models improve comprehension and test scores for 84 percent of students. These models blend elements of "brick-and-mortar" in-person instruction with asynchronous, self-paced online learning.

Stanford University, for instance, in partnership with the online learning platform Khan Academy, piloted a blended learning "flipped classroom" biochemistry course. Students watch video lectures online at home and then spend class time solving problems, maximizing the time students spend with professors.¹⁶ This partnership has extended into the medical school, allowing Stanford medical students to watch core curriculum videos online, and freeing up class time for students to practice that curriculum alongside their peers and professors and to explore their passion areas early in their schooling.¹⁷

The Department of Education has found the traditional lecture hall to be less effective than personalized learning models. Yet today, only 12 percent of higher education courses take advantage of blended learning, and even fewer take advantage of predictive analytics. Even so, personalized options are gaining momentum and, given their proven benefits, are certain to become increasingly common on college campuses.

Serving the non-traditional majority:

In the recent past, the traditional college experience involved a four-year degree, earned while attending classes full-time, and living on campus, complete with student activities. And it's still a reality for some, of course.

Today, however, the non-traditional student is the new norm. They come from a variety of backgrounds and situations that do not lend themselves to the old model of higher education; they have varying levels of education and experience, likely cannot afford 6 hours for studying in a college, need to juggle between socialising on social media as well.

For these students, competency-based models are emerging as an attractive alternative to the traditional credit hour model. Rather than using “butts in seats” as the yardstick for measuring success (How many credit hours did you complete?), competency-based degree programs focus on whether students are actually mastering the material. Selingo points out that the idea behind this is simple, “Degrees should be based on how much students know, and not how much time they spend in a classroom.” (Selingo, 2013)

The emergence of alternative education providers:

Today, alternative education providers primarily serve college degree holders—both recent graduates seeking a bridge to employment and those further along in their careers looking to gain new skills without the commitment of going back to school. But, as alternative education options proliferate and gain status, they could become a first stop for students seeking to further explore their interests and to test different career options before committing to a six-figure college education, serving as a new gap-year option. For others, they may become an increasingly attractive substitute for a traditional four-year degree.

The rise of on-demand learning:

Given the dynamism of the higher education market, it can be difficult to navigate the evolving landscape and determine which options best meet a potential learner’s needs. As alternative models proliferate, institutions will need ways to compare the relative merits of various credentials.

By helping students identify clear career paths and the knowledge and skills required by employers along different paths, students can enroll in the right courses to better position themselves for job opportunities.

Adopt lifelong learning models:

The days when student life ended with a college degree are all but gone. By 2020, the knowledge college students acquire will have an expected shelf life of less than five years. Given the accelerating rate at which knowledge is being created, some students entering college today may graduate into jobs that did not exist when they enrolled. To keep up with this pace of change, lifelong learning will become a permanent fixture of professional life. As futurist Alvin Toffler observed, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

The shift to lifelong learning in turn will prompt Institutes to rethink their teaching and professional development strategies, in order to allow their students to upgrade their knowledge and skills continuously. Teaching and learning in the coming years will not depend on books and notes; rather, they would depend on experience, expertise and competency.

Promote rigorous evaluation of new models:

If we are to reap the full benefits of the revolution in higher education, policies concerning financial aid and accreditation will need to be re-examined. In the meantime, the institutions can focus on adapting to the changing landscape by rigorously evaluating the relative effectiveness of new education models. Beyond building on the foundation of research that’s already been done by the institutions, foundations, and others on new education models (including online, blended, and competency-based learning), the search can be expanded in its use of innovation and challenges to promote new solutions with demonstrated outcomes.

Looking ahead:

What is most striking about the education world these days is not that people are being forced to change their behaviour, but that the enticements to change are growing exponentially. New possibilities and opportunities are transforming the landscape for higher education. These range from the technological (the rise of online and blended learning) to the cultural (the growing willingness to engage in alternative educational pathways) to the entrepreneurial (the recognition that governments and traditional universities alone are unable to solve our education challenges).

There remains a lot of work to be done to retrofit the current system of higher education for a new era of lifelong learning. Financing and accreditation, models of learning (followed by unlearning and then relearning), hiring, and professional development practices will all need to evolve. As Dennis Yang, president and chief operating officer of Udemy, observes:

“Education is no longer something that happens between the ages of 6 to 22, and then it’s over. The line between the years we learn and the years we earn has blurred; to stay relevant, workers must train nonstop. Even if educational institutions evolve and ensure newly minted workers are ready for employment, workers must continue learning throughout their lives to stay relevant.

To succeed in an era of exponential change, students must become adept lifelong learners. As the number and diversity of learning options expands, students will need to become well-informed consumers of higher education, as demand will ultimately dictate how the landscape for higher education evolves in the years ahead.

Yet what is most exciting about this particular moment is that the opportunities seem limitless for making higher education more affordable, accessible, and relevant. The challenge is to embrace the extraordinary innovation taking place. Finding our way in this new era will take work, but there’s no question that we have crossed its brink.

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