

FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA: THE POSSIBILITIES AND POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Various changes are taking place at the global level. These changes have influenced educational sector in many ways. Earlier education was considered as a very pious act with a purpose of charity. The purpose of commercialization of education was not considered as the prime motive of educational institutions.

Most of the educational institutions presumed that education is a service that is offered for betterment of society and enriching the individual. As such education should not be offered with a profit motive. The concept of marketing and exporting educational services was not realized in a big way. Most of the institutes considered that it should be offered with in the country and that too for national development. Further, pursuing higher education was considered as individual's aim. If a person wanted to seek higher education to satisfy his personal ambition he was expected to make his own efforts. Building education with global repute was the target. However, it was only through achieving excellence and doing meritorious activities. The mission of most of the universities and institutes was excellence through quality and was never to make profit or marketing of educational services. With the advent of WTO and the need for earning foreign exchange by marketing services resulted in marketing of educational services. It encouraged cross border sale of expertise service and even to consider education as a commercial activity. The convergence of market approach to education services gave birth to idea of establishing universities and institutes in other countries that will offer quality education for profit.

THE PRINCIPAL STATEMENT OF THE PAPER

Global higher education services are diverse and within each system there are wide range of institutions with varying mission and quality. Every institution of repute at global level intends to make its mark by offering quality service, selling expertise, cultivating excellence and generating revenue by attracting students from different segments of the society. The entry of foreign universities in India is the result of this logical thinking. Foreign universities intend to enter India on a large scale despite the large number of challenges and hinderances. The limitation of Indian public universities is now rightly noticed and in order to improve the quality of education as well as infrastructure and faculty quality, permission to foreign universities is considered as a welcome step. The reputed universities like Harvard and Yale are interested in establishing their campuses in India. This will facilitate institutes of global repute and recognized brands to operate in India and establish their mark on the map of Indian education system. This will have a dual effect; on one side the level of competition will enhance which will change the level of competition and improve the approach of the Indian universities towards higher education.

Competition enhances efficiency in a general principal which will work in its own way. However, there are two critical issues which should be rightly addressed.

In what way foreign universities will benefit the Indian learners and improve the Indian education system is the prime question?

The second question is, will this open the floodgates for poor quality, profit making institutes resulting in further decay of quality of higher education in India?

Hence, the problem discussed in this paper can be stated as follows: ***“Foreign universities in India: The possibilities and potential for development of quality higher education.”***

RELEVANCE OF THE ISSUE

Since, India has adopted liberal economic system and deregulated market mechanism, the discussion as to, will India allow foreign universities to enter India has become a hot topic. It is not surprising that many foreign universities and institution are interested to offer their services in Indian market. The huge size of Indian education market, growing demand for quality higher education and the attraction for a degree from foreign university are definitely the reason behind establishing these universities.

The question becomes relevant on the following points.

- a) Should we open our education system in a manner that will permit private and foreign universities to participate in delivery and promotion of higher education?
- b) What should be the role of foreign universities and education provider in Indian context?
- c) Will this result in a challenging situation before India education providers?
- d) What are the opportunities and prospects of entry to foreign universities?

The paper is based on two basic premises

- i) Competition in education sectors enhances efficiency, efficacy, and quality of the educational services.
- ii) Permission to foreign universities will establish a set of benchmark principles which will enhance the quality of India educational services.

PRIVATE AND FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES AND PROMOTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The debate as to how to expand the base of higher education in India seems to be unending. Considering the increase in the population of learners and the need for higher education services, it seems impossible that the government of India will be able to meet the financial requirement of institutes of higher learning. Further, promotion of higher education with mere government support appears like impossibility. At present only 6% of the population can a Vail higher education. India is far below the global benchmark in terms of student population, enrolment, number of institutes and universities. The process of research and development is also very slow and sluggish and meaningful outcome as a result of research is not rightly gained. Poor quality of infrastructure, uneven students to teacher ratio, limited number of institution and growing regional imbalance are some of the critical issues that cannot be addressed unless until alternative means of higher education are rightly developed.

The question of poor quality of education services, absence of transparent and rational evaluation system, outdate course curricula are still in search of a meaningful solution. On this backdrop,

permission to private and foreign universities becomes justified and acceptable.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND QUALITY REVOLUTION

The entry of foreign universities will indeed enhance educational opportunities in India. It will provide greater access to quality education for Indian students. The low-cost status in higher education, the English speaking student community, and the perceived value of higher education of a foreign institution being enormously high among the Indians would encourage the well known foreign universities to set up their campuses in India. It will mutually benefit India and foreign countries. Dr Bakul Dholakia (Former Director. IIM-A) is of the opinion that if the top-rung global B-schools like Harvard, Stanford, Kellogg and Columbia set up their campuses in India, it will go a long way in taking quality education to a larger number of students. Students can access quality education at the fraction of the cost, which would curtail a large outflow of Indian students traveling to the US and Europe in search of quality education. Some foreign institutes may charge fees in excess of that currently being charged by the country's premier B-schools like IIMs, but the students stand to benefit as they can save on their travel, lodging, boarding and other expenses. Thus a larger number of Indian students would be able to access quality higher education in the country itself at a relatively much less expenses. Further, the foreign universities will also make Indian institutions more competitive and lead to better quality of higher education in the long term. This may also trigger a national quality movement by domestic universities/institutes in higher education to upgrade themselves at global standards.

GLOBAL CONTENTS

The increasing globalization has led to the convergence of material and cultural domains across the countries on the globe. The field of higher education is not an exception. Foreign direct investment in higher education would help in imparting an international perspective to the contents of the curriculum. Though the requirements of the host country, in particular, are to be taken care of in designing and offering the educational services, the offering institution(s) being a global player(s) is well placed to infuse international perspectives in various courses and course contents. The international perspectives in major areas of management education such as finance (international finance, international accounting) marketing (global marketing), human resource management (international human resource management) and other such subjects, would be more common at various levels of management education including the undergraduate programmes. In addition, courses on foreign languages would also attract the attention of the academicians and curriculum designers. Further, a focus on cross-cultural environments with the necessary inputs aimed at fostering cultural adaptability becomes a desideratum.

MARKET-DRIVEN COURSES

The entry of foreign universities would result into offering of higher education as a business as only a dissemination of knowledge. The course offering would be governed by the prevalent market forces that have enough potential in preparing graduates as required by contemporary recruiters. The employment potentiality of a course/program not only attracts students but also generates enough revenue to the offering institutions. However, the course life too would be short lived if the underlying business domains were passing through a dramatic transformation in

quick succession. The market driven curriculum designing mandates a new model of academic management, administration and leadership. The institutional heads (Directors, Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Deans, and others) have to function like educational entrepreneurs. In addition to teaching and research, they need to be well versed in public relations with strong business acumen. They need to be trained in preparing a business plan for the various academic programmes proposed to be offered with a clear perspective on cost-benefit and break-even analyses.

COMMUNITY OF INTERNATIONAL FACULTY UNDER A SINGLE ROOF

The entry of foreign universities would accelerate the global mobility of teachers in particular and would bring together international faculty under a single roof. This would greatly benefit the students of the host country, in particular. They would get to know the comparative systems of delivery and instructional methodology of a global standard through the faculty of different foreign universities. This would also provide a greater visibility to the institution/university amidst the local institutions of the host country.

THE INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND GOVERNANCE

The foreign universities would bring with them their best teaching, research and administrative practices to the host country. A few of such best practices are outlined below:

- The students are treated as customers; this has created a deep impact on the way the universities conduct their academic and administrative affairs.
- Members of the faculty are at liberty to design their own curriculum and instructional methodology so that the given learning objectives for a given course are accomplished in full measure.
- The faculty has to announce in the beginning of the academic session about his special offerings- 'deliverables/ take-home' - in the respective courses. At the end of the semester, there would be an assessment on whether or not the 'deliverables/take-homes' were realized as declared by the faculty in the beginning of the semester.
- While teaching, emphasis is laid on the promotion of critical thinking, lateral thinking and problem solving skills among students. Students are encouraged to differ from the faculty wherever required.
- There could also be team-teaching where a team of faculty conducts the lecture sessions together. In team teaching, for instance, one faculty would provide a conceptual understanding and the theoretical underpinnings of a topic whereas the other one would update on the latest developments and share the findings of (his) current empirical research relating to the topic under consideration. Such team teaching practices foster collaborative research between the faculties.
- What is taught is tested in the examination, and the teacher who teaches the course has to administer the tests on the students. The course teacher is at full liberty to conduct the tests and award grades. The different types of valuation that are vogue in our domestic institutions such as 'double valuation', 'reevaluation' and 'challenge valuation' are not

found.

- A faculty's efforts in enabling slow-learners through remedial teaching, and counseling are recognized, appreciated, and suitably rewarded.
- The students' feedback is taken in each course at the end of the semester, and members of the faculty are encouraged to improve upon their performance wherever required. The students have to also suggest on whether they would recommend the respective course teacher(s) to the next batch of students.
- Possession of Ph.D. is a prerequisite for a faculty in the university. Consistent publication in refereed journals is indispensable for continuation in the service and for elevation to higher positions. 'Publish or perish' is the *mantra* for the faculty members.
- Continuous research and publication is construed to be a form of regular updating and knowledge creation in the chosen area(s). This keeps the faculty active in research till retirement.
- Each university has its own research grants. In addition, the universities also generate their research funds from industries based on the research capabilities of the faculty and their contribution to solving industry related problems.
- The research programs (Ph.Ds;) are fulltime and rigorous. They normally extend for a period of four years and are financially supported by the university. Research students have to necessarily register for the basic courses in research methodology, statistics and quantitative techniques.
- It is a tech-savvy administration. All the communications between the administration and the faculty, faculty and faculty students are done through e-mails. Even the student counseling and clarification of doubts are often conducted through e-mails between the faculty and the students.
- The meetings are scheduled and often brief. The matters where there is an opinion division among the faculty/administrators are sorted out through voting.
- The universities conduct studies on their contribution to the socio-economic development of the region in which the university is operating. These studies are conducted on a continuing basis to assess the developmental role of the university.

An American university willing to enter India would bring along with it all such best practices that would create a salutary effect on the teaching, research, and governance of the domestic universities. As a result, the students and other stakeholders in higher education in our country would be inspired and benefited.

GOVERNANCE AND LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Greater autonomy to premier Indian institutes will be one of the logical fallouts of the entry of foreign institutes into the country. It will pave the way for greater autonomy to them and will enable them to incorporate suitable changes in educational programs with utmost speed, innovation and quality in their design, delivery and governance on par with foreign universities. That would be one way to ensure that effective domestic competition is provided. It would further encourage all domestic higher education institutions to go for accreditation by the

international accreditation agencies. The competition between the domestic and international universities/institutes would improve their quality, efficiency and accountability.

ROLE OF FOREIGN EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Once we admit the fact that there is a room for private players both domestic and foreign universities in the field of education. The issue as to what role foreign universities and education providers should play becomes more critical. The perceived gap between demand and supply of higher education has to be met mostly by developing and expanding domestic institution as well as supplementing this in the form of foreign university and institutions.

Foreign education providers can play multiple roles in order to enhance quality higher education in India. A few important aspects related with role of foreign education providers are highlighted below:

- a) This century is rightly called as knowledge century. The expansion of knowledge in every sphere demands upgraded and undated education foreign universities can play the principal role of providing latest knowledge in the field of vital areas like technology, science, medicine etc.
- b) Research and development cannot take place without intensive offers; critical knowledge inputs, high caliber academicians, huge investment in infrastructure and appropriate academic climate. Institutes and reputed universities from other countries can establish their universities and academies and help India in this context. The issues of brain drain and transfer of funds to other countries can be met to a great extent when the same quality education by the same educational institute is offered in India. Local talent can get opportunities of learning new things at low cost, thus the demand for quality manpower at domestic level can be rightly met.

CHALLENGE BEFORE DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONS

How and in what manner Indian institution will respond to the new scenario emerging from entry of foreign institutes is another important point. The threat, internal and external is definitely alarming. The nature of competition is almost unknown. The foreign universities also have the advantage of branding and established image. Further, then attraction for a foreign level (product or service) in Indian mind is significant. Thus, the challenge is two fold, on one side there is a competition from high quality from established institutions, on the other the users have strong inclination for these services due to their image, perceived understanding of quality and presumed feeling of superiority. Thus, there is an absence of level playing field.

FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES: OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS

The entry of foreign universities and institutes in Indian context is not an unmixed blessing. There are many challenges which will pose threat before the domestic universities as well as it will be a fair deal from the view point of enhancement of quality of educational services. The likely opportunities before the domestic institutions can be enlisted as follows:

- i. Allowing globally reputed institutions will improve visible and invisible standard of education in India.

- ii. It will set benchmarks to enhance the competence and caliber of domestic institution.
- iii. A fair competition always improves the chances of success as it enhances hidden inherent caliber and core competence. The existing weaknesses and structural drawbacks in the domestic institution will slowly weather away due to growing competition and pressure from different stake holders.

CONCLUSIONS

At present the foreign universities have not entered the Indian education scenario but the preparations are being made to welcome such institutions. Instead of getting lured by imaginary ideas about benefits and advantage of these institutions, a realistic assessment of their contribution should be made. Similarly, there are no reasons to carry doubts and synic ideas about vices and imaginary threats of these institutions. This is a changed situation. It is advisable to be proactive when the change occurs.

The liberalization of higher education in the form of foreign direct investment is hoped to provide competition to domestic universities/institutes, stimulate them to rethink their ways of working and improve the quality of education at a lesser cost.

There is a need to ponder over the current preparedness and action plans of the domestic institutions in combating the competition from the foreign universities. This preparedness would go a long way in improving the design, quality of service delivery and governance of the domestic higher education institutions vis-a-vis the foreign universities/institutes.

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