

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE, director-general, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), writes for *Education Times*, on how India can achieve its target of gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 30% in higher education by 2020

EXCLUSIVE

THE WAY FORWARD



Chandrajit Banerjee

Every sector of the economy is feeling the heat of global slowdown, but one segment, which remains unaffected by difficult times, globally, is higher education. This is because higher education is linked with the aspirations of people.

In the last two decades, the number of engineering colleges, business schools and enrolments has gone up phenomenally in India. This is so because

there is demand from people and industry. There is a link between what industry wants and what parents send their children to colleges for.

The government has set a target of gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education of 30% by 2020. With a current GER of 20% already achieved, this target appears eminently attainable. However, India should aspire for a higher GER considering that this ratio in developed countries is 50-60%.

Private sector is increasingly being exhorted by the government to step up investment in this field but, we should remember that almost 85-90% funding for professional colleges in our country even today is from private sector.

These are self-financing colleges. But no money has gone in to public-private partnerships. Funds from government are skewed towards central institutes while state institutes are starved of resources. State governments do not provide funds for their universities and instead expect them to make do with fees. Given the shortage of funds, private sector investment should be facilitated.

Two, trying to increase GER will be impossible without teachers. There is a universal shortage of faculty in both public and private institutes. To overcome this, teacher qualification norms should be relaxed. The National Knowledge Commission has

pointed out that an MTech may not be required for teaching and that BTech graduates may be hired with a commitment to do an MTech within three to four years of their joining.

We have to give teachers, who join without adequate higher qualifications, access to further studies through distance education. There have to be avenues for top 10 courses through distance mode. People coming from industry may not be PhDs, but they have more practical knowledge. Similar relaxation has to be given for humanities courses.

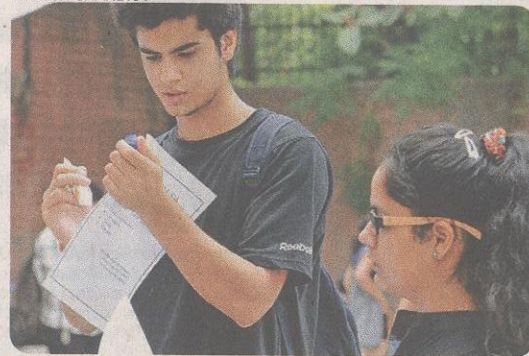
When it comes to research, we have to learn to differentiate between the requirements for research and teaching. Everybody need not do research. Industry requires a large number of people at graduate level — production, operations, monitoring, etc. It does not require too many research candidates. We have to see where it is relevant. Auto sector has done a lot of research in recent years. Ten years ago, it was zero. Pharma is doing it. Industry will not invest in research unless there is a requirement.

Another hot topic of discussion these days is the so called low-employability quotient of our graduates. The main reason for this is low focus on communication skills. In small towns and rural areas, children at school level are taught in the local language and there is little attention to English. When they enter higher education, language, therefore, becomes a major issue. To address this, communication skill training should start at the school level. Students should be enabled, at least from higher secondary level, to acquire proficiency in presentation and writing skills, in both English and local languages.

One more reason for low-employability of graduates is poor linkages between academia and industry. We at CII are conscious of the fact that as the country's largest industry organisation, we carry the onerous responsibility of working on bridging this gap. Towards that end we have set up a University-Industry Congress under which we are doing a survey of engineering colleges, along with the All India Council for Technical Education, to map their linkages with industry.

The way forward is deregulation. There are too

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many restrictions, which need to be removed. The system should be allowed to grow from demand. After all, it is paid for by the parents, not the government. It should therefore be deregulated to a point where there is enough competition to bring down the cost for students. Online content can be used to bring down costs. E-learning has to be increased. There is also a need to involve reputed overseas higher education providers in the Indian education system. This will stem the tide of students going overseas and preserve foreign exchange.

It will also add competition internally and bring new ideas and methods into higher education. There is enough space for several models to operate in the best interests of our talented students. Universities need to be given complete autonomy.

The law allows it. Due to a variety of supplemental instructions, this has been taken away.

Unlike Right to Education (RTE), any new mechanism should not end up creating more problems for parents. More deregulation, use of technology, simplification of rules, allowing colleges to compete and co-operate, greater incentives for private sector participation in higher education and liberal terms for entering into public-private partnerships are the way forward in higher education.

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