



QUALITY RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Since the dawn of human history, Education has been playing a vital role in providing direction for the holistic development of the individual and the progress of society as a whole. At the threshold of the 21st century, India has already realized the importance of education not only to cope with the fastest growing world but also to change its picture from a nation of poor and illiterate to a techno-centric and empowered nation. As a result, the government at both— state and centre level, is deliberately working on making education within the reach of the masses. After the achievement of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 100.28 per cent and 45.81¹ per cent at elementary and secondary level the government is looking towards the accessibility of higher education.

Status of Higher Education in India

India has the third largest higher education system in the world, next only to China and the United States. During Independence there were only 500 colleges and 20 universities with the enrolment of less than a million students. As on 31.12.2010 there are 544 Universities and university-level institutions including 42 Central Universities, 261 State Universities and 130 Deemed Universities. In addition, there are 31,324 colleges including 3,432 Women colleges². At the beginning of the session 2010-11, the numbers of students enrolled in the higher education institutions were 146.25³ lakhs including 19.19 lakhs from University Departments and 127.06 lakhs from the affiliated colleges. Though, there has been a consistent growth in enrolment in higher education over the last few years but, this is not enough when compared to other countries. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for higher education (the number of students between the ages of 18 and 24 who go for higher education) in India is about 12.9 per cent and it is very low as compared to the world average of 26 per cent, 57.7 per cent for the developed countries, and 13 per cent for developing countries.⁴ Government has set a target of increasing the GER from the present level to 15% by the end of XI Five Year Plan and to 30% by the year 2020.⁵

Present scenario of Researches in Higher Education

Research, one of the important objectives of higher education in India, is moving through a serious crisis. Less than 1 per cent of the total students enrolled in higher education are pursuing Ph.D.⁶. The number of research degrees (Ph.D.) awarded by various universities during 2007-08 was 13,237⁷. Out of which, the faculties of Sciences had the highest number with 4574 degrees, followed by the faculties of Arts with 4405 degrees. These two faculties together accounted for 67% of the total number



of doctoral degrees awarded. The research outcome in terms of quantity is quite less. Similarly, the quality of research in many institutes is questionable. The expenditure on R&D in India is only 1 per cent of its GDP compared to 2.7 per cent and 3.4 per cent by the US and Japan. However, the approach paper of 12th Five Year Plan suggests to raise the GDP on research and development to 1.5 per cent.⁸ But, increasing allocation of funds for research, perhaps, is not the single factor responsible for the quality research outcomes. The country has to travel long path for this and serious efforts are required to enhance the quality of research.

Deterrents in Quality of Research

Dissatisfaction on the quality aspects of research is as old as the history of modern Indian higher education. Indian Universities fail to compete at global level, especially, in the field of research. IIT and few university level institutions are trying to maintain the quality of research; whereas most of the universities are far away from innovative research works. The absence of good quality of research may be one of the cause of outflows of large number of Indian students to the universities of USA, UK, Australia and other countries.

Time and again, scholars and educationists advocate to augment the quality of research in higher education. But, serious deliberation is required to address the following challenges that have become the hurdle on the way of quality research in higher education.

Entry defection: Let us take the issue of those research scholars who get enrolled themselves for the Ph.D. In order to get admission in Ph.D. the aspirant scholars have to appear in the entrance test followed by an interview. Generally, the candidates applying for Ph.D. do not know the actual number of seats vacant for admission. It compels them to presume that only those candidates get admission who have close association with the senior and influential faculty of concern departments/institutions. Many of the private universities have managed to do the paper works so unfairly without caring much about the intention of UGC to enhance the quality of research. Enormous amount is being taken with annual tuition fees from the candidates seeking admission in Ph. D programme. The motto of such institutions is only to make money and nothing to do about the UGC regulation. Some of the universities are offering Ph.D. through the study centres where money is more important than the quality of work done by the researchers.

Poor Research Atmosphere: The quality of research largely depends on the research ambience of the institutions. In addition to the essential amenities like well-equipped lab, rich library with adequate books, encyclopedias, surveys, reports, periodicals, journals, digital resources, etc.; teacher's job is quite significant for setting an environment conducive to research work. But, in many universities, *inter alia*, the large faculty vacancies have become a serious concern that causes the deteriorating quality of research. The existing faculty, at the other hand, is overburdened with PG level classes, examination and evaluation duties; and official works (including inspection of affiliated



colleges in state universities). With the introduction of Academic Performance Indicators (API) system, they remain engaged in attending seminars and writing papers. They find it difficult to give ample time to the research scholars for rigorous discussion on the topic taken for the study.

Course work: Six-month course work seems to be more fruitful for the researchers as it provides them opportunity to understand research methodology and emerging trends in research. Some of the universities succeeded in orienting the scholars towards research methodology, whereas there are number of universities showing least seriousness towards coursework. There is also a provision of exemption from course work for the teachers having experience of three or more than three years. A person in teaching profession may not necessarily know research methodology and as a result he/she may choose a middle path to accomplish the research work.

Facts of Journal Publication: In tune with the UGC recommending mandatory publication of research papers for the Ph.D. scholars, universities have also made it a compulsion for the research scholars. Many scholars have already succeeded in searching a middle path to accomplish the research work smoothly. They write papers by manipulating the results and get them published by giving huge amount of money to the journal publishers. Papers of substandard quality can easily be published because there are number of publishers whose only motive is to gain maximum profit by publishing good number of issues of journal in a year. Those papers are not sent to the experts and referees to review its quality and authenticity. So, a research scholar, with few papers, can easily get Ph D degree, who does not know how to make research design, prepare a research proposal, analyze the results or write a paper.

Plagiarism: The wide gap between the researcher and guide gives rise to a number of problems. Due to the lack of proper guidance, the researchers often go out of the track while undertaking the research. There are many options for the directionless researchers to go against the ethics of the research. Either an already studied research is duplicated or a professional thesis writer is hired for writing the thesis. Computer shops near some of the universities sell the soft copies of old theses from different disciplines openly. They store it in their computers when any research scholar comes to their shops to get a print copy of his research work. Later on they sell it to those scholars who do their research by unfair means. Besides, there is a growing trend of cut-copy-paste in the digitalized world that has made the research work easier. In such circumstances, a good piece of research work can never be expected from those research scholars.

In the present scenario, Ph.D research seems to have lost its dignity, quality and rigourity for the factors perhaps known to everybody (may be off record). We fail to appreciate the worth of quality in research at the time when entire world is looking towards India as the supplier of skilled youth (due to the favourable demography). One of the crucial factors affecting quality research is the tendency among the Indian graduates to join MNCs offering them handsome package (on the basis of their IIT, IIM or other professional degree). It is only after exploring all the possibilities of finding a job that most of the Indian youths opt for joining the research



work, carrying forward their mental agony due to an uncertain future.

Steps taken by UGC for augmenting the Quality of MPhil and PhD

UGC, as a quality control regulatory body contemplates to augment the Quality of research work in higher education. Through its new regulation, published in The Gazette of India, 2009, UGC has taken a significant step by setting the minimum standards for admission to M. Phil and Ph.D. programs, etc. The regulation specifies that the M. Phil and Ph. D. programs cannot be conducted by any UGC affiliated institution through distance education mode. As per the regulation, entrance examination is mandatory for PhD and MPhil aspirant researchers. The concerned institutions have to conduct the test following the guideline of UGC. The entrance test will be followed by an interview where aspirants will discuss their research area. The entrance test followed by interview will definitely help the concerned institutions to understand the level of research aptitude and interest of the candidates. The allocation of supervisor will be done in a formal manner by the department based on the research interests of student, specialization of the faculty and in no case will it be left to the discretion of the student or teacher to decide on their own choice. As per the regulation, a supervisor can have eight Ph.D. and five M.Phil. However, to what extent, the universities will follow the regulation is a matter of concern.

The regulation also directs the M.Phil. and Ph.D. students to undergo the course work of minimum one semester duration related to methodology of research work or review of literature. The course will be treated as pre-research preparation and universities will fix the minimum qualifying criteria to proceed with writing of thesis. After achieving the qualifying criteria, the student starts doing the research work maintaining proper coordination with his supervisor. It is mandatory for him to publish one research paper in a refereed journal so that the researcher may demonstrate research methodology. However, the criterion to measure the quality of research paper is still a matter of concern. Before submission of thesis, he has to make a pre-MPhil/PhD presentation in the department for feedback. The teachers and research scholars give some suggestions, if it is required, to the researcher and he may apply it for the improvement of the research work. It also gives him confidence to perform better in the viva-voce examination. The idea of pre-submission seminar is a very welcome step. The success of producing quality research depends on the nature of participation of the teachers and research scholars in the pre-submission seminar.

Once the thesis is submitted, it is sent to two experts, including one from outside state. After getting satisfactory reports from both the experts, the candidate is asked to appear in the viva-voce examination where he needs to justify the research work by making presentation and interaction with the examiner. To check plagiarism, researchers will have to submit theses on a CD so that the content can be checked for duplication and cheating before handing out degrees. UGC has asked all state, central, private and deemed universities to prepare a database of research work and digitalise them. Once the degree is awarded, concerned institute shall submit a soft copy of the M.Phil/Ph. D. thesis to the UGC within thirty days of the award. UGC will make the thesis available to all institutions by hosting the same in INFLIBNET. The initiatives



taken by the UGC will definitely help in enhancing the quality of research, but for that, the research institutions have to work wholeheartedly.

Suggestions

Despite the efforts made by the UGC, the Universities fail to produce quality research. Most of the universities are busy in diluting the UGC regulations in this regard by setting easy questions in entrance test, by having entrance tests twice a year, by making exceptions to entrance test requirements and so on.⁹ It would not be fair to say that students are the only factor for the poor quality of research work in higher education. In a recently released QS world university ranking, none of the Indian universities has come within the rank of 200.¹⁰ The most miserable part is that we are falling far behind the countries like South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and of course, China and Japan in higher education. Other than the types of students, the parameters of QS ranking consider the academic reputation, international faculty, citation, etc. for evaluating the quality of the University. A survey conducted by the UGC shows that a quarter of the faculty in Indian higher education institutions spends less than five hours per week on research.¹¹ If a research of substantial quality is expected from the students then the teachers have to become role model. The teachers need to have a serious engagement in innovative research works and produce more cited papers. University cannot grow without recruiting adequate number of quality teachers. Instead of establishing new institutions, there is an urgent need to maintain the quality of existing institutions. An effective and visionary teacher having research aptitude can be more useful in providing precise direction to the students in their research works. A less experienced teacher should be encouraged to work jointly with the senior teachers. If a paper is published by any of the faculty, he should be appreciated by his colleagues including the head of the department in a formal gathering where he should give a presentation of the published research work. The research scholars should participate in such presentations followed by a healthy discussion.

One of the essential elements of improving the quality of research programme is filtering the students through entrance test. Only those candidates, having research aptitude, should be allowed to enrol in Ph.D. UGC should prepare a syllabus and blueprint for the entrance test and every institution should strictly abide by the guidelines while conducting the test. After the admission, it should be mandatory for every scholar to attend the course work. Presently, the scholars avail exemption from course work under different clauses.

Selection of an original topic of priority area is a difficult task that every scholar needs to perform. But, many times it has been observed that the same topic is registered at two different universities. The UGC, in order to get rid of such kind of problems, should create a website where information of all Indian Universities regarding the registration of topics in a particular subject for Ph.D. is available. Universities should organize national level seminars and conferences on research methodology and it should be made compulsory for the scholars to attend at least one seminar in a year. Similarly, workshops on writing research papers should be conducted at regular



intervals so that they can learn how to write a paper of good quality for publishing the same in a reputed journal. While pursuing Ph.D., the research scholars of private and newly established universities should be allowed to enjoy the library, e-resources and other academic amenities of the reputed universities.

It takes month for scholars to understand the research methodology. Many scholars prepare synopsis so hurriedly without knowing the basics of research. So, in order to make the base stronger, research methodology as a subject should be introduced at PG level. In some of the disciplines like education and psychology, the students are already studying research at PG level and also they are asked to write dissertations followed by viva-voce taken by external examiner. It not only motivates them to do Ph.D. but also helps them undertake the research work in a more effective way. The above suggestions can be quite helpful to improve the quality of Ph.D. in Indian universities. But more than that, it is the reputation of the university, vision of the leadership, competence of the faculty and above all the passion of the scholars that can take the university to new heights. So, the innovative, need based and good quality of research can be produced only by the diligent efforts from every stake holder of the university.

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