Higher Education in India

What is the issue?

Despite having the largest base of 900-plus universities in the world, only 15 higher education institutions from India are in the top 1,000.

What is the status of Indian higher education system?

- India has the largest population in the world in the age bracket of 5-24 years with 580 million people, presenting a huge opportunity in the education sector.
- India is the **world's 2nd largest higher education system**, with around 38 million students in 50,000 academic institutions (including 1,057 universities).
- It has a goal of doubling gross enrolment rates from the current 26.3% to 50% by 2035.
- India is the **2nd largest source of international students** (after China) globally.
- The government has implemented policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) and will have a strong focus on high-quality vocational education.
- It has also embraced the Education 4.0 revolution, which promotes inclusive learning and increased employability.

What are the issues in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)?

- **Top institutions** - Despite having the largest base of 900-plus universities in the world, only 15 higher education institutions from India are in the top 1,000.
- **Private sector** - 75 % of higher education is in the private sector.
- **Leadership** - In privately-run higher education institutions, the key criteria currently for leadership position is PhD qualification and IIT/IIM faculty.
- While a PhD is not a sufficient indicator of leadership qualities, IITs and IIMs have become brands.
- **Excess interference -** In private HEIs, interference by the sponsors/trustees is rampant and academic freedom is curbed.
- **Entrance exams** – Most of the entrance examinations are a test of rejection that do not assess the learnability quotient, and hence fail to attract the desirable mix of students.
- **Weak governance** - Most HEIs ignore attributes such as participation, responsiveness, transparency and inclusivity.
- **Assessments** - The expert assessors from national accrediting agencies are clueless about good governance attributes.
- **Pseudo-science** – Promotion of pseudo-science in the name of promoting Indian knowledge systems in prominent institutions seems to be harmful.
- **Division of powers** - The Constitution of India allows both the central and the state governments to enact laws related to the higher education sector, leading to

confrontation.
- Example - The recent confrontations between the governors and state governments of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala related to vice-chancellor appointments.
- **Underfunding** - Indian higher education, at both state and central levels, has been dramatically underfunded for decades.
- **Internationalisation** - India has never had an international academic strategy and has been a largely closed system for a half century.

What lies ahead?

- Academic excellence demands integrative skills across teaching, research and academic administration**.**
- Constant training and retraining of teachers is needed to avoid burnout syndrome by adding 'on the job' skills.
- Leadership coaching bridges the skill gap.
- Proper implementation of the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that promises major investment in post-secondary education with an emphasis on internationalization is the need of the hour.

References

1. The Hindu Businessline | What ails higher education in India?
2. University World News | India's higher education is opening up
3. Ministry of Education | Higher Education Schemes

Quick facts

Higher Education Schemes

- **Rashtriya Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)** - RUSA is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, launched in 2013 that aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.
- **National Research Professorship (NRP)** – It was set up to honour persons of real eminence, who have attained the age of 65 years and have made outstanding contributions in their respective fields and are still capable of productive research.
- National Initiative for Design Innovation
- Establishment of 14 World Class Central Universities
- Setting up of 374 Degree Colleges in Educationally Backward Districts
- Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme, 2009 on Model Education Loan Scheme



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