

IMPACT OF FOREIGN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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India may finally open its doors to foreign higher education institutions and investment. The Cabinet has approved Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal's proposed law, and it will be voted in Parliament in the near future. Indian comment has been largely favourable. What will an open door mean for Indian higher education — and to foreign institutions that may be interested in setting up shop in India? Basically, the result is likely less than is currently being envisaged, and there will be problems of implementation and of result as well.

International education can mean many different things and its definition is debated. Some have defined two general meanings according to its involvement of students. The first refers to education that transcends national borders by the exchange of people, for example, by students travelling to study at an international branch campus, as part of a study abroad program or as part of a student exchange program. The second is a comprehensive approach to education that intentionally prepares students to be active and engaged participants in an interconnected world.

The International Baccalaureate defines the term according to criteria such as the development of citizens of the world in accordance to culture, language, and social cohesion, building a sense of identity and cultural awareness, encrypting recognition and development of universal human

values, encourage discovery and enjoyment of learning, equip students with collectivist or individualistic skills and knowledge that can be applied broadly, encourage global thinking when responding to local situations, encourage diversity and flexibility in teaching pedagogies and supply appropriate forms of assessment and international benchmarking.

Understanding of a broad array of phenomena is enhanced and deepened through examination of the cultures, languages, environmental situations, governments, political relations, religions, geography, and history of the world.

While definitions vary in the precise language used, international education is generally taken to include:

- Knowledge of other world regions & cultures;
- Familiarity with international and global issues;
- Skills in working effectively in global or cross-cultural environments, and using information from different sources around the world;
- Ability to communicate in multiple languages; and
- Dispositions towards respect and concern for other cultures and peoples.

International education is also a major part of international development. Professionals and students wishing to be a part of international education development are able to learn through organizations and university and college programs. Organizations around the world use education as a means to development. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals include some objectives pertaining to education:

- Achieve universal primary education in all countries by 2015
- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015

Other mentions of education in regard to international development: Education For All (EFA): An international strategy to operationalise the Dakar Framework for Action; The World Education Forum (Dakar 2000) agreed to reach 6 goals by 2015:

- expand early childhood care and education
- improve access to complete, free schooling of good quality for all primary school-age children
- greatly increase learning opportunities for youth and adults
- improve adult literacy rates by 50%
- eliminate gender disparities in schooling
- improve all aspects of education quality.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) highlighted the central role of education in the pursuit of sustainable development.

International education both as a field of study focusing on study abroad and preparing students for international occupations as well as an active part of international development is taught in many colleges and universities around the world.

VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

Although very successful programs such as Engineers Without Borders enable students in one country to obtain an international education while working on open source appropriate technology projects abroad, the cost of this approach can be prohibitive for large scale replication. Recent work has shown that using a virtual educational exchange, can have many of the positive benefits associated with international education and cross cultural experiences, without the prohibitive costs of trips.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK

International Education Week is held in the United States by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Education. The choice of week for celebration is determined at each institution, but is generally the third week of November (the week before the week that includes Thanksgiving), which was November 17–21 in 2014, is November 16–20 in 2015, will be November 14–18 in 2016, and will be November 13–17 in 2017. The aims of this event are to provide an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education and global exchange. This joint initiative promotes programs that prepare Americans for a global milieu and attract future leaders from abroad to study, learn and exchange experiences in the U.S. This shows how International education is not just about physically crossing borders, but is also about thinking globally in local situations. Schools throughout the US celebrate this week through on-campus and off-campus events.

CHALLENGES FACING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

International education has a somewhat unusual position in higher education. While recognized as an important sphere of activity, it tends to be handled by administrative offices at the top of departments of languages and literature and international affairs. The scholars involved in international education usually have their primary involvement in other teaching and research.

This leads to four distinctive characteristics particular to the field of international education:

1. There is little consensus concerning the guiding theme of the field as well as its scope. Should the field stress internationalization, transnationalization, or globalization?
2. International education is not a prominent feature of the contemporary higher education experience. Using enrollment in foreign languages as an indicator, 16 percent of all U.S. college students were enrolled in foreign languages in the peak period of the 1960s; the proportion is currently down to 8 percent (Hayward, 2000, p. 6).

3. There is imbalance in regional coverage. The regions and languages covered at a particular institution are a function of idiosyncratic patterns of faculty recruitment. Nationally, there is reasonable coverage of Western Europe and Latin America and most European languages compared to limited coverage of Africa and the Middle East. For students enrolled in foreign languages, Spanish is the most popular followed by the other major languages of Western Europe; 6 percent enroll in Asian languages. Languages of the Middle East make up only 2 percent (1.3 being Hebrew and .5 percent Arabic). The languages of Africa constitute only 0.15 percent of enrollments.

4. Because international education is not a primary concern of most scholars in the field, research is somewhat sporadic, non-cumulative, and tends to be carried out by national organizations as part of advocacy projects (e.g. Lambert, 1989; Brecht and Rivers, 2000). The most recent example is the American Council of Education's (ACE's) Internationalization of Higher Education: A Status Report. (Hayward, 2000). However, programs through various institutions, such as the Fulbright Commission Belgium offer research opportunities for those wishing to study abroad.

POLITICAL & EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Everyone recognises that India has a serious higher education problem. Although India's higher education system, with more than 13 million students, is the world's third largest, it only educates around 12 per cent of the age group, well under China's 27 per cent and half or more in middle-income countries. Thus, it is a challenge of providing access to India's expanding population of young people and rapidly growing middle class. India also faces a serious quality problem — given that only a tiny proportion of the higher education sector can meet international standards. The justly famous Indian Institutes of Technology and the Institutes of Management, a few specialised schools such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research constitute a tiny elite, as do one or two private institutions such as the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, and perhaps 100 top-rated undergraduate colleges. Almost all of India's 480 public universities and more than 25,000 undergraduate colleges are, by international

standards, mediocre at best. India's complex legal arrangements for reserving places in higher education to members of various disadvantaged population groups, often setting aside up to half of the seats for such groups, places further stress on the system.

CAPACITY PROBLEM IN INDIA

India faces severe problems of capacity in its educational system in part because of underinvestment over many decades. More than a third of Indians remain illiterate after more than a half century of independence. On April 1, a new law took effect that makes primary education free and compulsory. While admirable, it takes place in a context of scarcity of trained teachers, inadequate budgets, and shoddy supervision. Minister Sibal has been shaking up the higher education establishment as well. The University Grants Commission and the All-India Council for Technical Education, responsible respectively for supervising the universities and the technical institutions, are being abolished and replaced with a new combined entity. But no one knows just how the new organisation will work or who will staff it. India's higher education accrediting and quality assurance organisation, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, which was well-known for its slow movement, is being shaken up. But, again, it is unclear how it might be changed.

Current plans include the establishing of new national "world-class" universities in each of India's States, opening new IITs, and other initiatives. These plans, given the inadequate funds that have been announced and the shortage of qualified professors, are unlikely to succeed. The fact is that academic salaries do not compare favourably with remuneration offered by India's growing private sector and are uncompetitive by international standards. Many of India's top academics are teaching in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere. Even Ethiopia and Eritrea recruit Indian academics.

This lack of capacity will affect India's new open door policy. If India does open its door to foreign institutions, it will be unable to adequately regulate and evaluate them.

Minister Sibal seems to have several goals for permitting foreign universities to enter the Indian market. The foreigners are expected to provide the much needed capacity and new ideas on higher education management, curriculum, teaching methods, and research. It is hoped that they will bring investment. Top-class foreign universities are anticipated to add prestige to India's postsecondary system. All of these assumptions are at the very least questionable. While foreign transplants elsewhere in the world have provided some additional access, they have not dramatically increased student numbers. Almost all branch campuses are small and limited in scope and field. In the Persian Gulf, Vietnam, and Malaysia, where foreign branch campuses have been active, student access has been only modestly affected by them. Branch campuses are typically fairly small and almost always specialised in fields that are inexpensive to offer and have a ready clientele such as business studies, technology, and hospitality management.

Few branch campuses bring much in the way of academic innovation. Typically, they use tried and true management, curriculum, and teaching methods. The branches frequently have little autonomy from their home university and are, thus, tightly controlled from abroad. While some of the ideas brought to India may be useful, not much can be expected.

Foreign providers will bring some investment to the higher education sector, particularly since the new law requires an investment of a minimum of \$11 million — a kind of entry fee — but the total amount brought into India is unlikely to be very large. Experience shows that sponsoring universities abroad seldom spend significant amounts on their branches — major investment often comes from the host countries such as the oil-rich Gulf states. It is very likely that the foreigners will be interested in “testing the waters” in India to see if their initiatives will be sustainable, and thus are likely to want to limit their initial investments.

Global experience shows that the large majority of higher education institutions entering a foreign market are not prestigious universities but rather low-end institutions seeking market access and income. The new for-profit sector is especially interested in global expansion as well.

Top universities may well establish collaborative arrangement with Indian peer institutions or study/research centres in India, but are unlikely to build full-fledged branch campuses on their own. There may be a few exceptions, such as the Georgia Institute of Technology, which is apparently thinking of a major investment in Hyderabad.

At least in the immediate and mid-term future, it is quite unlikely that foreign initiatives will do what the Indian authorities hope they will accomplish.

HALF-OPEN DOOR

India's open door comes with a variety of conditions and limitations. It might better be called the “half-open door.” These conditions may well deter many foreign institutions from involvement in India. The proposed legislation requires an investment of \$11 million upfront by a foreign provider in the India operation. Moreover, the foreign provider is restricted from making any profit on the Indian branch.

It is not clear if the Indian authorities will evaluate a foreign institution before permission is given to set up a branch campus or another initiative — or if so, who will do the vetting. It is not clear if the foreign branches will be subject to India's highly complicated and controversial reservation regime (affirmative action programmes) that often stipulates that half of the enrolments consist of designated disadvantaged sections. If the foreigners are required to admit large numbers of students from low-income families who are unlikely to afford high foreign campus fees and often require costly remedial preparation, creating financially stable branches may be close to impossible.

A further possible complication may be the role of State governments in setting their own regulations and conditions for foreign branches. Indian education is a joint responsibility of the Central and State governments — and many States have differing approaches to higher education generally and to foreign involvement in particular. Some, such as Andhra Pradesh and

Karnataka, have been quite interested. Other States such as West Bengal with its communist government may be more sceptical. And a few, such as Chhattisgarh have been known to sell access to university status to the highest bidders.

Foreign institutions will need to deal with India's often impenetrable and sometimes corrupt bureaucracy. For example, recent reports have evidence that some Indian institutions were granted a coveted "deemed" university status after questionable practices between the applicants and high government officials.

It is unclear if the foreign branches will be evaluated by the Indian authorities or overseas quality-assurance and accrediting agencies will be fully involved.

In short, many unanswered questions remain on just how foreigners will be admitted to India, how they will be managed, and who will control a highly complex set of relationships.

India's higher education needs are significant. The country needs more enrolment capacity at the bottom of the system as well as more places at its small elite sector at the top.

The system needs systemic reform. Furthermore, fresh breeze from abroad might help to galvanise local thinking. Yet, it is impossible for foreigners to solve or even make a visible dent in India's higher education system.

Foreign institutions, once they realise the challenges of the Indian environment, are unlikely to jump in a big way. Some may wish to test the waters. Many others will be deterred by the conditions put into place by the Indian authorities and the uncertainties of the local situation.

The involvement of foreign higher education providers in India is perhaps just as murky as it was prior to Mr. Sibal's new regime.

FOREIGN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ENTRY TO INDIA

The decision to allow foreign educational institutions to operate in India in principle is good but there is more to it than meets the eye. The policy has unintended consequences of restricting than inviting educational institutions.

The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010 has been pending in the parliament for the last three years. While all the disruptions and adjournments made way for smooth functioning of parliament when it came to passing food security bill or land acquisition bill but education is far down on the priority list. The government, for all the reasons best known only to Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), has shown sudden and unusual enthusiasm to allow foreign universities through an executive order by allowing them to register under section 25 of the Companies Act. If a bill is pending in parliament, is it appropriate to pass an executive order of this nature? and if the answer is yes, then why did MHRD wait for three years to do the same?

Even if we ignore the democratic argument, there are some other fundamental issues with the approach. Education strategist Ms. Meetasenguta rightly questioned the missed opportunity and the relevance of the policy now. The answer to why we need foreign educational institutions is simple: It is not to address the supply constraints (many seats in India are already lying vacant across streams), what India desperately need is good quality research oriented institutes. The quality of Master/PhD programs even in the best of our universities is mediocre and we need established institutes which can bring new culture and infrastructure for creating better talent pool. For this to happen, we have to the top institutes in the world to open their centers in India. PMO should start the dialogue with top colleges and facilitate the process, if required, by giving necessary and reasonable concessions. But this requires two things: a) Discretion and b) Trust. The current policy environment is devoid of trust and every exercise of discretion is accompanied by a CAG imaginary notional loss figure. Considering this background, it would be

prudent to delay this process and let the next government initiate it in a more organized way and through legislative process.

Unlike FDI/FII in other sectors, which are primarily investment opportunities, education is a non-profit venture and the incentives for foreign institutions are minimal. If we read the bill, the wording is not of government requesting foreign institutions to come to India, it is more like “Be very thankful to us that we gave you an opportunity to invest hundreds of crores with zero return”. Government is of the view that a) there are thousands of universities desperate to get into India and b) we cannot allow so many institutes to step in and so we have to over regulate the entry. But the findings of the standing committee report state otherwise: “On a specific query about the Foreign Educational Institutions having approached the country, Secretary informed the Committee that in the absence of any facilitating framework, very few Foreign Educational Institutions had formally applied for setting up institutions in the country so far”

Far from providing a facilitating framework, the bill only talks about regulating the entry as we can read from the first paragraph of the statement of objectives and reasons of the bill:

“A number of Foreign Educational Institutions have been operating in the country and some of them may be resorting to various malpractices to allure and attract students. There is no comprehensive and effective policy for regulation on the operations of all the foreign educational institutions in the country. Due to lack of policy or regulatory regime it has been very difficult to make meaningful assessment of the operations of the foreign educational institutions and absence of such meaningful assessment has given rise to chances of adoption of various unfair practices besides commercialisation.”

Another intriguing (but completely normal for the government) aspect is the suspicion about everything that is foreign. The government believes that every foreign university is out there to threaten the security and integrity of India and hence their content and curriculum must also be regulated. The same kind of suspicion led to Ministry of Home affairs/MHRD (through UGC)

forcing Manipal University to terminate the MoU signed earlier this year with Beijing Institute of Technology.

According to a report in liveMint, the government will not facilitate the land acquisition process. We are left to imagine that the Director of Harvard will be sitting on a negotiating table and spending all his time on land deals and in complying with the draconian provisions of the new land acquisition act, like preparing social assessment reports and tracking the investigations by magistrate etc.

Tough regulations, no profit on Investment, uncertainty and no academic freedom — Is this how our policy should be if we are interested in getting the best foreign institutes? The institutes which can really impact will not venture into and those who are interesting in coming may not add much value. The policy as it stands, if implemented, far from benefitting students will send a bad signal to the foreign institutions.

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