

# The problems with indian education system



The paper details the flaws in the Indian education system right from the primary school level to the post-graduate level of education. These claims are supported by statistics wherever possible. The paper goes on to discuss a few possible remedies to these flaws citing example and statistics. Most of the observations and recommendations are focused around engineering and management education. Some statistics have been picked up from a small internal survey.

## **Introduction**

The Indian education system has come a long way since independence. Several prestigious institutes have been set up including primarily, the Indian Institutes of Technology which are ranked amongst the top 50 engineering institutes in the world. The recent education boom has is a testament to how education in India has become a business today.

The full-fledged privatization of Indian educational institutions is by no means a bad thing. This model has worked quite well in the USA and UK. This model fails to be as successful in India however for the following prime reasons:

In the USA non-college educated people can still maintain a decent standard of living. In India having a college education is imperative to ensure an above average standard of living.

A pure 10th standard graduate in India earns on an average not more than Rs. 40, 000 a year.

An average BE graduate earns around Rs. 2. 5 lakhs a year

In India because of a tradition rooted in the class system 'blue-collar jobs' are considered demeaning. To attain a white collar job, even if, for an entry level clerk position, a bachelor's degree in arts or commerce is expected.

The aforementioned points created a massive market for educational institutions over the last decade. The IT boom has led to a flood of engineers being churned out by the system every year.

The value of 'degree' today, ranks above the value of education

On an average a BE graduate from an above average engineering college finds a job irrespective of the scores, academic performance and extra-curricular activities. This is driven by the sheer demand for engineers generated by India's software boom.

This demand has in turn created a large number of engineering colleges and institutes across India. It was only with the recent economic downturn that this demand saw a plunge and for the first time in the last 4 years:

22, 000 seats in the MHT-EN-CET remained empty

Students realized that a degree from a 2nd tier engineering institute held limited value when the time came to take up a job.

The education 'business' in India needs to be revamped. The unfettered and uncontrolled growth of educational institutes has led to a dip in the quality of education provided.

## **The educational landscape**

India as a culture has conventionally focused on the wrong aspects of education. This trend may be partially attributed to the 'rote' style of learning things propounded by the classic system of 'Gurukul' from ancient India. This encouragement of rote style of learning begins from the primary school level.

## **Primary and secondary school**

73% of primary schools are government funded and 27% are privately owned schools

As a general rule government schools:

Have a poor teacher to student ratio > 1: 40

Less focus on extra-curricular activities

Less focus on all-round development

Private schools provide only marginally better services. But it is clear that to succeed in India getting high marks through intense rote-style studying has become unavoidable.

Primary school and secondary school education in India suffers from the following clearly visible setbacks:

Focus on rote learning for all subjects

Logical and analytical thinking is not promoted

Students are not encouraged to develop opinions

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Students are discouraged from participating in extra-curricular activities which can help in all round development

Broken down subject-wise following deficiencies are commonly observed:

Mathematics:

More focus on learning up multiplication tables and rapid mental calculations as opposed to theory building

Sciences:

Less focus on practical experiments

Languages:

Very high focus on rote learning of poetry and literature as compared to language and vocabulary development

Social sciences:

Very high focus on rote learning of dates, names and events as compared to development of opinion and creation of social awareness

A major consequence of this rote-style of education is that students forget their lessons by the time they go to college because the object of their studies had been examination oriented. At a time when an individual is expected to study integrated circuit technology he/she may have forgotten the three orders of a lever.

## **Junior college**

In our system after the 10th standard board examinations the student has to attend 2 more years of college before moving into graduate education.

Depending upon the location of the student he/she has three choices:

State board

ISC board

CBSE board

Students who intend to get into the engineering stream have the following choices:

Get into the state board and try for local engineering colleges

Get into ISC or CBSE board and try for AIEEE national institutes of technology or give JEE to get into the prestigious IITs

Students who want to get into medicine have to work towards AICTE or give try out for the local medical colleges.

The few students who intend to avoid both are at liberty to opt for any of the boards without much consideration.

The prime educational set-backs faced here assuming the student intends to enter a science stream are as follows:

The student may not be able to adapt to the shift of focus away from languages and social sciences

Students tend to neglect college education in favor of studying for upcoming entrance examinations including AIEEE, JEE and CETs

In essence this 2 year period proves to be a study leave of sorts. The student's studies during these two years focuses on scraping through the entrance examination at the end of the tunnel as opposed to the studies at hand.

## **Higher studies**

The Indian education system is known for its highly competitive nature. The top two most difficult academic entrance examinations in the World today are Indian. By acceptance rates:

IIT - Joint Entrance Examinations with a 0.3% acceptance rate

IIM - Common Admission Test with a 0.5% acceptance rate

Earlier academic performance is rarely an indication of success in the JEE.

Only 30% of 10th standard board toppers make it through JEE

This is largely attributed to the inclusion of languages and social sciences in the board results. But more significantly JEE demands a higher level of application of physics, chemistry and mathematics than the students are exposed to. Students are engineered to answer board examination papers in school with repeated questions and theoretical redundancies. The JEE is an examination where questions are rarely repeated year on year and it is very difficult to engineer a student to clear this examination.

Everyone wants to get into IITs but not everyone can. The JEE is one of the most difficult examinations to get through in the world ranked at number 3.

IIT - Joint Entrance examinations have an acceptance rate of less than 0.3%

The result of this acutely low figure is that 99.07% of JEE applicants have to settle for inferior options.

The unfortunate truth about Indian engineering colleges is that there are a lot of options but very few good options.

The JEE is one of the toughest exams to clear and a major

This is true for other fields as well.

In comparison most American universities provide a higher quality of education as compared to an Indian institution. The fact that out of the top 100 institutes in world today 67 are American and 4 (the IITs) are Indian supports this contention.

Barring financial constraints, it is 40 times easier to get into MIT or Stanford than it is to get into the IITs

It is 30 times easier to get into Harvard and Oxford business schools than it is to get into an IIM in terms of acceptance rates.

These eye-opening statistics clearly show the bleak situation of our higher education system. A general trend among ambitious students has been to leave the country if they don't get into the prestigious Indian institutes.



Students with financially strong backgrounds have limited incentive to stay on and go for a third tier college when they can simply go for higher education to the USA in a more world renowned and reputed university. It is hardly a wonder then that

In 2010 more than 88000 students from India travelled to the UK and USA for higher education.

This is a strong factor in the huge amount of brain-drain that has been occurring through the last decade. The statistics show that even the recession has not slowed down the exodus of Indian students to universities abroad. Once the students get settled there and have paid in dollars it almost becomes an imperative that they earn in dollars as well to cover up their

## **Recommendations for the Indian education system:**

### **At Primary and Secondary school level:**

A 'best-of' system should be introduced to encourage where only a certain number of subjects would be considered for the student's assessment. Other significant subjects must enforce a nominal passing percentage requirement. This system will help a student focus on his/her interests and not be held back or bogged down by his weaknesses.

There should be a grading system where extra-curricular and co-curricular activities should be made compulsory where every student may choose an area of his/her liking. This will work towards the student's all-round development. The student should be given credit for his/her extracurricular activities.

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A full-fledged review needs to be performed to revise the whole curriculum. Education focus needs to shift from rote-based learning to application based learning.

These steps are necessary to ensure a strong base is created for higher education.

### **At junior college(11th and 12th standard) level:**

The 2 years between 10th standard boards and graduate education are critical to every student as they help them develop a compass for the future. It is in these years that the students develop a sense of their career ambitions and goals.

During this period the student should be given exposure to all possible fields to develop a potential career.

Extensive counseling should be provided to ensure that the student develops a good idea of what is a feasible course for the future.

To the farthest extent possible entrance examination studies should be incorporated into elective geared towards the syllabi of these examinations

The above recommendations strike at the government policy level and are by no means easy to implement. Moreover while they have an almost utopian quality, these policies are bound to be bogged down by bureaucratic hurdles and administrative red tape. Most significantly implementing these policies would require the kind of political will that has not been seen at the centre or state governments since independence. These policies are bound to raise several objections amongst people doubting their soundness. They

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are however nothing but an extrapolation of the more successful education practices implemented in the USA and the UK placed into the Indian scenario.

Following are recommendations at a graduate and post-graduate level of higher education. Higher education in India is not controlled by the government to the extent primary and secondary school education is.

### **At the graduate and post-graduate level:**

The most glaring deficiency at the graduate and post-graduate level of education in India is the inflexibility of the system. The single-track attitude of Indian education has led to extreme focus on specialization and the aversion to shift streams and take electives unrelated to the stream. US universities have a highly flexible system at the graduate level allowing someone to start off as with a computer science major and shift into economics through the course of his bachelor degree. The 'credit' system works greatly towards this.

Following are a few facilities that a 'new age' university may provide:

Indian colleges usually lack the 'University format' prevalent throughout the western world. Barring a few, most Universities do not have a common campus and several colleges function almost as autonomous entities. Setting up 'University towns' is a solution that may work towards this end. Real-estate in large cities is hard to come by; setting up towns with self-sustaining infrastructure could work towards this end.

Flexibility in electives can be implemented more easily in the ' University format'. While flexibility is detrimental at the post-graduate level it is certainly a feasible option. Credit systems prevalent in the west can be used to achieve this end.

72 % of engineering graduates aspire to get placements in management consultancies and banks\*

This is attributed to a higher level of remuneration offered by these corporations. It would hence be profitable to the universities if they offered electives relevant to economic, management and finance along with engineering.

The universities need to have a high quality of education and need to revamp their system. Most new age colleges blindly follow outdate practices to adhere to prescribed norms to be associated with a University.

Mumbai University has seen a sharp decline in quality over the past decade. Colleges tend to adhere to non-value adding activities like maintaining lab-journals. In reality students rarely actually perform the experiment. A large amount of students time is spent conforming to degree requirements then actually learning something.

84% of Mumbai university engineering graduates are dissatisfied with their education\*

75% of Mumbai university engineering graduates do not know how to use MS Excel\*

If the process were consisted irrespective of how inexorably marred with red-tape and formality it were, then it would be acceptable. But the evaluations in the centralized examinations in the first and fourth years are rampant with administrative incompetence.

A Mumbai university teacher is given around Rs. 30 paise per paper for evaluation

This shocking statistic clearly shows that the teacher rarely has any strong incentive to evaluate the paper sincerely. It should hardly come as a surprise then that

Around 30000 papers are sent for reevaluation every year despite the cumbersome procedure and a Rs. 500 fee

The new-age university needs to avoid the mistakes made by Mumbai University. It has degenerated in terms of quality of education over the years. The university must maintain a high standard to ensure that it remains economically sustainable while catering to the needs of the students.

Things move slowly at the government level but if the private sector were given a strong incentive (financial) then certainly world class universities can be set up. Students in India are willing to pay a large amount of money for education a good university abroad.

An average student pays \$50000 as the total expenditure for a post-graduation degree and \$80000 for a graduation degree including sundry expenses abroad

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Amounting to more than Rs. 300000.

It is clear that there is a large enough market of students from economically strong backgrounds that would be willing to pay a large sum of money necessary to maintain an international standard of quality of education.

For a private university it will be difficult to build up a brand name instantly. The best way for the private sector to ensure a rapid brand building exercise could be:

Associated with a corporate brand like the TATA's have done with their institutes. People are more likely to join institutes associated with respected corporations.

Get international brand associations with other world class universities. Having an association with Harvard or MIT would certainly justify the high fees that these institutions are likely to charge

Since sundry costs in India will be considerably lower than those of foreign institutions it is undeniable that student will end up spending considerably less than the expenditure incurred in education abroad.

A university providing a world class education at premium costs but lesser than the costs of education abroad would cater to a large untapped niche audience. There is a large potential for such world class universities.

## **Conclusion**

The recommendations made in this paper are by no means easy to implement. But as mentioned in the beginning education has become highly

privatized and become a business. The recommendations provided in the paper requiring a change in governmental policies will be extremely difficult to implement. It will be an unpopular move for any government to stir up a system that has been designed to be politically correct as opposed to productive. But at the university level strong measures can be taken to encourage private investors into the idea of a network of world class universities to rival the IITs and the IIMs.