

EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BODOLAND TERRITORIAL AREAS DISTRICT (BTAD) OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

A paradigm shift has been noticed in higher education now-a-days, from 'national education' to 'global education', from 'one time education for a few' to 'life-long education for all', from 'teacher-centric education' to 'learner centric education'. It has brought new challenges ahead and an opportunity for higher education. The challenges ahead are multifaceted and multidimensional. Though higher education in India is undergoing rapid changes but in the region of Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) in the state of Assam, the growth is slow and lagging in every aspect of education. However, the system has many issues of concern at present in the region as well as in the state, like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programmes by laying emphasis on values and ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. These issues are important for the region, as it is now engaged in the use of higher education as a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based information society of the 21st Century. The objectives of the present study is to focused on the overall performance of higher education system, and highlight the emerging issues and challenges of higher education in BTAD. It is primarily based on some observation and secondary sources.

Keywords: Higher education; development; challenges; issues; BTAD.

Introduction

The greatest treasure and asset of a nation are its educational institutions. They make or mar the destiny of a nation. The strength of a nation is built on human resources developed by its educational institutions which train the brains, provide skills and open a new world of opportunities and possibilities to the nation. The development of a nation and its education are closely related to each other. The importance of education is realized everywhere now and is on top of the political agenda of each nation.

Higher education system plays an important role for the nation's overall development which includes industrial, social, economic etc. The higher education sector has expanded rapidly in the

country. Yet there is inequality in growth, access and distribution in every sphere. The role of Indian higher educational institutes such as colleges and universities in the present time must provide quality based education in the field of education, research etc. to empower youth for self-sustainability. Moreover, higher education imparts knowledge, develops the student's ability and give him/her a wider perspective of the world around. Higher education becomes input to the growth and development of industry and seen as an opportunity to participate in the development process of the individual through a flexible education mode. One of the major challenges is to enhance the access to higher education and as well as the infrastructure of higher education. The state has a major role to play in this regard. Besides increasing investment and opening new colleges and universities, it must create a proper regulatory environment where good quality private service providers are attracted. There is confusion as regard to entry fees and the type of courses/programs that can be offered. This has resulted in an unhealthy nexus between politicians, Government and private service providers. The same is in the case of higher education in BTAD. Therefore, it is important to study the present challenges confronted in the region.

The Study Area

Bodoland Territorial Areas Districts (BTAD) is the administrative set up structure under Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution for the plain tribe. This territorial privilege is an outcome of the long struggle by the Bodos in the name of self-determination in late 80's. After a decade of long agitation, the Bodos have been granted the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), an autonomous administrative body having within its jurisdiction the present four districts viz. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri by craving from the parts of existing districts of Darrang, Sonipur, Kamrup, Barpeta, Nalbari, Bongaigaon and Dhubri. After its creation several plans and programs were put forward by both the government and non-government organizations as well as individuals for its development. But still development, as were expected in the region in the field of higher education is not seen. Today after a decade of its formation, the region still faces various problems in higher education such as poor infrastructure, poor management system, poor performance of students etc. To bring quality in higher education under such a circumstances seems a great challenge.

Objectives of the Study

The study analyzed the present scenario of higher education in BTAD and to find out the issues and challenges face by higher education in the region. Some suggestions will be provided to strengthen higher education sector in the region.

Methodology

This paper is an outcome of a review of a substantial number of secondary sources and personal experiences and observations on the current scenario and challenges of higher education in BTAD.

Present Scenario of Higher Education in BTAD

Most observers of higher education in the region of BTAD feel that performance of higher education institutions has been less than satisfactory in terms of access, equity and quality. Now there is an urgent need to work for the development of the educational sector to meet the need of the emerging opportunities, increasing younger generation population and challenges of the 21st century. Higher education in BTAD started after the post-independence in the late of 1950's. The first institution was Kokrajhar College which was set up with the persistent effort of the local people of the district in the year 1959. To fulfil the aspiration of the people to make the college a center of excellence the Govt. of Assam has taken over the college as a govt. in the year 2006, with proper initiative from the side of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) authority. This college is the premier educational institution of lower Assam as well as in Bodoland Territorial Council. By the year 1971-1972 colleges were established in each corner of the four districts viz Bijni college (Chirang) in 1969, Tangla college (Udalguri) in 1970, Barama College (Baksa) in 1971. At present 2017, there are more than 40 general colleges, 8 professional colleges and 1 university. All the educational institutions are under the status of central, affiliated government, affiliated provincialised, and permitted private colleges. The general colleges offered Arts, Science and Commerce courses and bearing the status of government, provincialized are affiliated to Gauhati University and few permitted private colleges are affiliated to Bodoland University. The professional institutions offered courses like Engineering, Law, B. Ed, Music and fine Arts etc.

The present Bodoland University is an up-gradation of Gauhati University, Kokrajhar campus to full-fledged state university in 2010 as per the provision of the Act passed by the State Legislative Assembly in 2009. At present the university is offering post-graduate courses in 19 subjects/departments. It is playing a crucial role for the near and far students of the rural areas by imparting higher education.

The overall scenario of higher education in BTAD does not match with the other regions in terms of growth, development and quality standards etc. Hence, there is enough justification for an increased assessment of the quality of the state's educational institutions.

While many reasons can be cited for the current scenario, these all boil down to decades of feudally managed, colonially modelled institutions run with inadequate funding and excessive

political and bureaucratic interference. The region should try to become “knowledge economy” to promote inclusive growth. The three major areas to be focused to ensure that higher education system is sustainable and meets quality standards are:

- Quality of Education: in terms of infrastructure, teachers, accreditation, etc.
- Affordability of Education: ensuring poor and deserving students are not denied of education.
- Ethics in Education: avoiding over commercialization of education system.

Challenges of Higher Educational in BTAD

Higher education in BTAD suffers from several systemic deficiencies. As a result, it continues to provide graduates that are unemployable despite emerging shortages of skilled manpower in an increasing number of sectors. Some of the problems of the higher education, such as – the unwieldy affiliating system, inflexible academic structure, uneven capacity across various subjects, eroding autonomy of academic institutions, and the low level of public funding are well known in every region. Many other concerns relating to the dysfunctional regulatory environment, the accreditation system that has low coverage and no consequences, absence of incentives for performing well, and the unjust public funding policies are not well recognized. There are various issues/challenges raised before higher educational institutions, some of them are as under:

Slow expansion of higher education: The growth of higher education is slow in the region. The number of colleges offering Bachelor degree courses in Arts are increasing three times higher comparing to other courses like commerce, science and professional. Every year there is a rapid increase in the enrollment of students in every section of education. The classrooms are usually overcrowded with students. These over-crowded classes create number of problems like; discomfort in the class, individual attention, evaluation, classrooms management, maintaining learning effectiveness etc.

Low level of teaching quality: Our education system is covered by issues of quality in many of its institutions. Many of the issues like lack of faculty, poor quality teaching, traditional teaching methods, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance in the education system.

Poor financing of higher education: One of the most important things that must be noticed is the issue of financial constraints regarding higher education. Expenditure on education in common and on higher education by the government is one of the parameters to judge the quality in education for all nation. Higher education of BTAD has received less attention in terms of public spending than other levels.

Inadequate facilities and infrastructure: Many of the educational institutions of BTAD does not have adequate infrastructure facilities. The educational institutions are running without proper infrastructure and have low standard library facilities, classrooms, laboratory, sanitations, lack of hostel facilities, sports facility canteen etc. which is desirable to rank the quality institutions. Internet and Wi-Fi facility is still out of reach for the students.

Lack of moral values: Rapid growth of science and technology and subsequent industrialization has caused a great and danger to our old moral and values. The younger generation's dissatisfaction and revolt is the outcome of a rotten system of values.

Low confidence level of students: Most of the students in the region have low confidence level in regards to their studies. Those students are mostly coming from the Assamese and Bodo medium courses opted in school level. In higher education, they faced problems in understanding the English lecture given by the teachers this lead them to obtained poor achievement in studies.

Lack of advance teaching methods and tools: The lack of investment in technology based learning in higher education may prove to be a significant barrier to the ability of colleges and university to compete in new or changing markets. In educational institutions teachers still stick to those older methods of teaching like blackboard, chalkboard, marker etc. Many of the teachers too are not up to date with the latest information available and what global industry demands.

Shortage of faculty: Today most of the educational institutions in the region are facing a serious faculty crunch. Many graduates and post graduate departments are functioning with less than 50 percent of the total sanctioned faculty strength. Colleges and university are not appointing teachers on regular posts. Instead they hire non-regular or contractual teachers at a pittance, many of whom are not fully qualified.

Poor socio-economic condition: This is one of the most troublesome changes that the present higher education system has imposed on the communities. Majority of the students are coming from the ordinary classes; they are unable to provide the minimum necessities of life for themselves. Economic miseries have grown due to the increasing prices, habits of wasting money on luxuries, increasing population, scarcity of food supply, corruption, selfish etc. Students from poor economic condition have to drop-out from their studies due to hike in the education system.

Suggestions for Strengthening Higher Education

The prospects and development in the higher education sector needs a critical examination in a rapidly globalizing world. Expansion, inclusion and excellence are the three objectives of higher

education policy of Government of India. The government had taken many steps to increase student enrollment in higher education and quality improvement in higher educational institutions. The following are the measures for strengthening higher education in the region.

1. Expansion of higher education: There is a need of expansion of higher education in every district of BTAD. More colleges offering Science and Commerce courses, Professional institutions like engineering, law, medical, agriculture etc. need to be established in each district of BTAD especially by giving due attention to backward areas.
2. To provide need based job-oriented courses: All round development of personality is the purpose of education. But the present-day education is neither imparting true knowledge of life and nor improving the talent of a student by which one can achieve laurels in the field one is interested. So, combination of arts subjects and computer science and science and humanities or literature, vocational courses should be introduced so that such courses could be useful for the students to do jobs after recruitment in some companies which would reduce unnecessary rush to higher education. The programme must be focused on graduate studies and research and developing strategies and mechanisms for the rapid and efficient transfer of knowledge and for its application to specific national and local conditions and needs.
3. Quality of learning and teaching: Maintaining quality has the highest priority to any organization and it is mostly appropriate to the higher educational institutions. Higher educational institutions should care about the quality of learning and teaching because it is the only way to become recognized globally. The institutions will lose their potential customers if they cannot assure high quality standards. To improve the quality of learning and teaching, higher educational institutions can enable access to learning and teaching material across institutions. Therefore, students/learners can get more information about their subject area to learn as well as teachers can have more information to teach broadly in an area. Higher education institutions need to take extra care to maintain the quality of learning and teaching to ensure best possible student experience. Maintaining excellence in both teaching and learning is key to universities.
4. Quality teachers: Qualified/good faculty is a must for any higher educational institution aspiring for quality. With some restrictions on faculty appointments, the present evil of inbreeding can be eliminated, the inbreeding has destroyed many departments in education systems. Political interference in the appointment of teachers and administrators should be totally stopped. On the other hand, teachers should be encouraged to attend various conferences, seminars, workshop, orientation courses etc. in their disciplines to update their subject knowledge.
5. High-tech libraries: Our college and university libraries have a very limited collection of books, and they are all in mess. A library must be online and conducive for serious study.

The institutions should concentrate more on providing quality education which is comparable to that of national and international standards.

6. Adopting emerging technology: The new technologies offer vast opportunities for progress in all walks of life. To improve the quality of higher education there should be extensive and optional use of audio-visual technologies and the internet connectivity. Various teaching aids like OHP, projectors, multi-media etc. should be made available in educational institutions so that the teachers can use it to make their teaching effective. The course should be so designed to make good use of these modern developments.
7. Guidance and counselling: Career counselling facility should be provided in the educational institutions. For one reason or the other many students do not have any goals to strive towards. Career guidance is, therefore, a needed component in the educational setup. In counselling students, will get to know and understand their capacity and to set their goal accordingly.
8. Provision for spoken English classes: There is a need to excel in English language since majority of the students are coming from Bodo/Assamese medium as they face problem in understanding the English language. Regarding this, the educational institutions should consider the matter by taking special responsibility in providing spoken English classes.
9. Personality Development: Education must be for the flowering of personality but not for the suppression of creativity or natural skill. In the globalized world opportunity for the educated people are naturally ample in scope. As a result, business process outsourcing (BPO) activities have increased competition in the world trade leading towards the production of quality goods and their easy availability everywhere in the world market. That is the way the world can be developed for peace, prosperity and progress by able and skillful men.
10. Action Plan for Improving Quality: Academic and administrative audit must be conducted regularly in higher educational institutions by external experts for ensuring quality in all aspects of academic activities. The self-finance colleges must come forward for accreditation and fulfil the requirements of accreditation. Universities and colleges should realize the need for quality education and come forward with action plan for improving quality in higher educational institution.

Conclusion

The time now is to modernize our education system so that our region can get much more technically graduated people which can help our society to developed. Today's youth always try to go abroad for his/her higher education as they have much better facilities and quality of their system. Can't we get that quality here itself? We must stop this brain drainage so as avoid students to run away from here. Higher education with its motto, 'striving towards excellence' has a distinct role to play in uplifting the society. To overcome the issues and challenges of

higher education in BTAD our education system should acquire the following aspects: quality syllabus, quality faculty, quality teaching, quality evaluation, quality character, quality infrastructure and quality in management and administration etc. Such an education will go a long way in guiding the younger generation in the right path of progress in BTAD. Thus, to build a progressive society and to advance in all fronts the people are to rise above all differences and determine to bring about qualitative enhancement in higher education.

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