

A perspective on higher education in Punjab: A study of district Ludhiana

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Abstract

Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. But the standard of higher education imparted in our universities and colleges is far from satisfactory. Similar situation is prevailing in Punjab. Due to huge quantitative increase in the number of higher education institutions in Punjab in the past few years it has led to the overall deterioration of higher education system. There are a number of problems facing higher education system in Punjab. Government and aided general education colleges in district Ludhiana has been particularly chosen to study some of these problems such as lack of college-industry interface, financial aspect etc. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents felt that higher education in Punjab is not according to emerging needs of society; there is necessity to develop college-industry partnership and inadequate financial support given by the state government to fill vacant posts.

Keywords: higher education, teachers, rural, urban, college-industry interface, financial support

Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of economic, social and cultural development of a country. It has emerged as the most important single input in promoting human resource development in achieving rapid economic development and technological progress^[1]. Higher education is seen as a critical pillar of human resource development because it provides not only the high-level skills necessary for every labour market but also the training essential for all professions. It is the major driving force in a country's socio-economic development^[2]. Indian higher education is one of the largest in the world. Barring a few good quality institutions in the country, the level of higher education in most of the colleges and universities is far from satisfactory. So, keeping in pace with the global standards, our higher education is gradually transforming into 'learner centric education' from 'teacher-centric education'. 'These changes have posed fresh challenges to the Indian higher education system which has a new role to provide the nation and the world at large, skilled human power at all levels, having breadth of knowledge and confidence to effectively confront the social and economic realities'^[3]. The current position of higher education in Punjab, although, considered as the core sector for achieving the objective of employment for an individual, is also oriented towards socio-economic, environmental, and human resources development. But as the higher education in Punjab, grew in size, its problems and prospects too increased both in numbers and size, and its relevance to the present socio-economic needs of the society increasingly became issues of debate^[4]. There are a number of problems faced by the higher education institutions in Punjab. Some of them are: lack of adequate infrastructure facilities, higher student-teacher ratio, lack of adequate financial support provided by the government, poor academia-industry interface, dearth of employment opportunities for youth, irrelevance of curriculum, lack of

qualified teachers, adhocism etc. are some of the problems or challenges plaguing our higher education system. According to Bhusare (2014)^[5] some of the problems in higher education in India are lesser number of institutions in rural areas as compared to urban areas, lower enrolment in rural colleges, problem of access and equity etc. After reviewing the literature, it was found out by the investigator that very little studies have been undertaken in this area. There are a number of reasons for choosing District Ludhiana for the present study. According to statistical abstract of Punjab 2016^[6], district Ludhiana has the maximum number of arts, science, commerce and home science colleges i.e. a total of 36 colleges which is highest in the region and the total number of students in B.A/B.Sc. and B.Com. Courses are 40,721 in Ludhiana district. It is very clear that vast majority of the students are getting themselves enrolled in general education courses. Another reason of choosing district Ludhiana for the present study is because it is the biggest industrial hub of Punjab and offers numerous employment opportunities to large number of youth. Many world famous hosiery units have their origin in Ludhiana. Apart from hosiery units, there are some other industries such as auto part manufactures as well as bicycle and bicycle parts manufactures in Ludhiana which can lessen the problem of unemployment if proper interface is established between college and industry. Inadequate financial support given by the Punjab government is another issue which is often debated. Keeping this in mind, investigator has taken up problems such as lack of college-industry interface and inadequate financial support in the present study.

Objectives

1. To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding higher education scenario in Punjab.
2. To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding the status of college-industry interface in higher

education institutions in the present scenario.

3. To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding financial support provided by government to deal with severe shortage of teachers.

Delimitation of the study

1. The study was delimited only to government and government aided (general education colleges) located in rural and urban areas of district Ludhiana only.
2. Sample included only the teachers working in rural and urban colleges located in district Ludhiana only.

Research method

Descriptive–survey technique was used in the present study.

Sample

Stratified random sampling technique of sampling will be used in the present study. The sample consisted of a total of 60 respondents which comprised only teachers working in rural and urban colleges in district Ludhiana, out of which a sample of 30 teachers from rural colleges (15 each from government and aided colleges) and another sample of 30 teachers was taken up from urban colleges (15 each from government and aided colleges) respectively.

Tools used

A self-constructed questionnaire was prepared and administered to teachers of both urban and rural colleges. Other than primary sources, secondary sources of data like books, journals (online and print both), government reports and documents, newspaper articles were also consulted in the course of present study. Responses to the following questions were in Yes/No format.

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Percentage method was applied in order to analyse the results of the present study. Objective wise analysis and interpretation of results are as follows:

Objective I

To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding higher education scenario in Punjab.

Following questions were asked from the respondents to seek opinions regarding higher education scenario in Punjab.

A question ‘Do you think that system of higher education in Punjab is according to emerging needs of society or not?’ In response to this question, 66.67% teachers teaching in rural colleges and 93.33% teachers teaching in urban colleges responded negatively stating that higher education in Punjab is not according to present societal needs. However a substantial percentage of 33.33% and a microscopic percentage 6.67% of the rural and urban teachers respectively responded in favour of this question. The reasons particularly specified by the respondents were that there is dearth of professional courses especially in humanities. Curriculum of most of the courses in arts, science and humanities is irrelevant and outdated and is not in tune with the global standards. It is not according to industry needs. There is lack of practical training / employability skills required by the industry which is one of the major reasons of unemployment. Other reasons cited were

inadequacy while communicating in foreign languages like English, lack of leadership qualities, problem solving ability etc. After percentage analysis, chi square test was applied to find out significant difference (if any), in the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers. The calculated value of chi square test was 5.1 which is greater than the tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. The value reveals similarities between the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers regarding higher education scenario in Punjab.

Another question stated as ‘Are there any variations in rural and urban higher education institutions as regards higher education scenario?’ Majority of the respondents i.e. 60% from rural colleges and 56.67% from urban colleges agreed that there are variations in colleges located in rural and urban areas. Various reasons cited by teachers were: better infrastructure available in urban colleges, transportation problem in rural area colleges, and optimum student-teacher ratio in urban college though not always, shortage of good quality higher education institutions in rural areas etc. A substantial percentage of 40% and 43.33% respondents from rural and urban colleges respectively responded negatively stating that there are no such regional variations in rural and urban colleges with respect to higher education. Chi square came out to be 1.67 which is lesser than the tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant difference between the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers regarding any kind of variations existing in rural and urban higher education institutions as regards higher education scenario.

Another question stated as ‘Do you think that education provided in colleges is good enough to get employment?’ In response to this question, a large majority of teachers i.e. 70% from rural colleges and 56.67% teachers from urban colleges responded in negative stating that education provided in colleges is not good enough to get employment. While some of the teachers from rural colleges i.e. 30% and 43.33% from urban colleges agreed stating that education provided in colleges is good enough to get employment. Chi square came out to be 1.15 which is lesser than the tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant difference between the opinions expressed by rural and urban respondents.

Objective II

To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding the status of college-industry interface in higher education institutions in the present scenario.

Following questions were asked from the respondents regarding the necessity of college-industry interface in higher education institution located in district Ludhiana.

Do you think that there is any necessity to develop college-industry interface in your institution? Majority of respondents i.e. 76.67% and 83.33% from rural and urban colleges respectively felt that there is a necessity to develop college-industry interface so that students who pass out from these colleges get placed in these industries. While some of them i.e. 23.33% and 16.67% from rural and urban colleges do not find it necessary to develop college-industry interface. Chi square came out to be 0.42 which is much lesser than the

tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant difference between the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers regarding necessity to develop college-industry interface in their institution.

Do you think that private colleges are in a much better position than government colleges in developing strong college-industry interface? Cent percent of the teachers i.e. 100% from rural as well as from urban colleges agreed with this point that private colleges are in a much better position than government colleges when it comes to developing strong college-industry interface.

Some of the recommendations given in this regard are: 'Industries may be encouraged to be partners with educational institutions directly for the development of human resources dedicated to their interests. This could happen in the areas of creating infrastructure, faculty sharing and direct support with funds' [7]. Punjab government should formulate its own higher education policy whereby developing college-industry partnership should be made mandatory in both public and private colleges. It becomes even more important in general education colleges where majority of the students are enrolled than any other course. Developing such partnerships will be win-win situation for all viz. Academia, industry as well as for students. To a large extent it will lessen the problem of unemployment because courses that in tune to industry requirements will be taught in colleges.

Objective III

To study the opinions of teachers (rural-urban both) regarding financial support being provided by government to deal with severe shortage of teachers.

Following questions were asked from the teachers (rural-urban both) regarding financial support being provided by government to deal with severe shortage of teachers by making new appointments. The first question asked in this category was 'Is state government giving sufficient financial support to overcome acute shortage of teachers?' In response to this question, majority of them i.e. 53.33% and 63.33% of the respondents from rural and urban colleges respectively responded negatively stating that state government isn't giving enough financial support to the colleges to overcome acute shortage of teachers. A significant percentage of 46.67% and 36.67% of the rural and urban teachers respectively responded negatively to this question. Chi square value came out to be 0.62 which is much lesser than the tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant difference between the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers regarding financial support being provided by government to deal with severe shortage of teachers.

The next question was 'Do you think that state government is making new appointments in state colleges to fill large number of posts lying vacant in colleges?' Response given to this question was almost the same as 80% of the rural teachers and 90% of the urban teachers responded negatively stating that state government is not making new appointments in state colleges to fill large number of posts lying vacant in colleges. Some of them i.e. 20% of the rural teachers and 10% of the urban teachers responded negatively stating that state government was making new appointments in state colleges to

fill large number of posts lying vacant in colleges. Chi square value came out to be 0.52 which is much lesser than the tabulated value of (3.841) for $df=1$ at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no significant difference between the opinions expressed by rural and urban teachers

But they also made this clear that such appointments were being done only in government-aided colleges with an initial contract period of three years and not in government colleges. So still there are large numbers of posts lying vacant in government colleges. 'The institution of part-time, ad hoc or contract teachers began to proliferate adding to the damage and consequently the quality of teaching began to suffer' [8]. An adhoc teacher is continuously surrounded by a sense of insecurity relating to his/her job. In this case it becomes impossible for a teacher to discharge his/her duties in a most efficient manner. Ultimately it has a negative impact on teaching which is further deteriorating our higher education system. Most of the colleges located in far flung rural areas, are running without adequate number of teachers. Except permanent teachers, adhoc / part time teachers are paid meagre salaries. They are not able to do full justice to their job. So, it becomes utmost important for the government to fill all the posts lying vacant in government colleges at the earliest to prevent the system of higher education in the state from further degeneration.

Conclusion

Summing up the above discussion, it has become quite clear that tertiary education in Punjab is not according to emerging needs of society. There exist variations in rural and urban colleges with respect to higher education. Building college-industry interface is the need of the hour if we want to take to match our higher education system with the global standards. Private colleges are in a better position than government colleges in developing college-industry partnership. In order to improve the standard of higher education in Punjab, then state government should start filling all the vacant posts left in colleges. 'If the government of Punjab has desirable intentions and is willing to bring about qualitative improvement in higher education, then the suggested measures might be helpful in reshaping the existing system of higher education' [9].

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