
Highlights of Trends and Future Challenges in Higher Education Institutions: An Explanatory Study

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Abstract

Transformation in the systems of higher education, increasing limitations of state funding and other related issues have led to elevate discussions on this matter. Existing descriptive research inclines to examine the relatively important emerging trends and challenges that are expected to be faced by the higher education institutes. Current study generally explains the higher educational context and has highlighted various discussions, overviews, and perceptions of various scholars of the field. In the broader framework the expected outcome is applicable to the policy makers at higher education level to see a glimpse of possible rising trends and emerging challenges in the higher educational sector and act accordingly. Further in other perspective the paper can be used in the literature review for further studies that tend to deeply investigate any specific challenge of higher education. Therefore, by keeping the track of emerging trends and challenges of higher education institutions will prove to be helpful in moving a step ahead.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutes; Trends; Challenges; Developments.

1. Introduction

With the increasing importance of higher education institutions, they are on their way towards changing the demographics of learning and practicing. Previously it was very difficult for most of the population to get an access to the higher education, but the changing trends are becoming a source of its accessibility.

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Higher education was considered as luxury before but during the past few decades major proportion of the society is becoming aware of its importance; therefore, it is becoming more of an inevitability now with the increasing demand. This emerging tendency of international academic and student mobility has given rise to the phenomena of internationalization and globalization [1]. Further along with these trends a diverse set of students in higher education institutions are coming under a common platform to get an access to the international educational resources and get the maximum benefit out of that. Globalization has served as a foremost foundation of transformation in setting the trends of interdependency of nations and mobility of people to the higher level with the expansion of information technology [2]. As defined by [3] internationalization is “integrating an international [and] global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education”. Together with the acknowledgment of digital future in the higher education institutions there exists certain challenges of managing various problems. Digital generation from numerous parts of the world studying under the similar prospectus necessitates a special method of teaching as well. With the increasing number of student’s mobility will require augmented competition. Strong and effective placement and handling of Information technology will help higher education institutions to become more competitive in both contexts of nationalization and internationalization. Although scholars have focused on explaining about countries being involved in the various reforms at higher education such as the universities striving for excellence and competitiveness [4;5], quality revolution in tertiary sector [6], redefining higher education and its factors [7] etc. Therefore, the upcoming digitalized world will have its prodigious impression on all the industries in general but higher education institutes in-particular due to its growing nature of internationalization. In the context of all the changes taking place in higher education institutes the recent era has positioned universities as a commercial product, that is primarily ruled by market forces and bringing along the concept of market competitiveness [8]. Higher education institutes had to compete for getting more funding, international collaborations, effective research work and clench on the utilization of information technology in all aspects. Only maintaining the advanced eminence education and research standards will serve as the competitive advantage for an institute. All the upcoming developmental trends bring some challenges as well which are needed to be addressed at the right time, so there is a strong connection between them. Likewise, with the internationalization in higher education institutes there comes a diverse workforce in terms of students and faculty which will require diverse set of management approaches to handle them. With the increasing cost of expansion there will be strong requirement for fund generation which will subsequently necessitate some collaboration and sponsor. It must be pragmatized that concentrating only on development trends will not serve the purpose but a strong beforehand clasp on overcoming challenges is also required. Therefore, this article will address the future challenges along with the development trends.

2. Literature Review

The shift in academia of the late 20th and early 21st centuries were tended to be more extensive due to the impression placed by globalization and number of people affected from this phenomenon and in the early 21st century higher education has emerged more as a competitive enterprise [9]. The emerging trends of internationalization are pushing higher education institutes to expand their geographical boundaries as well which in return making the competition more intense. In education sector healthy competition is always virtuous because it supports institutions to generate competitive learning environment that will always aid in producing

quality individuals. Apart from the role of higher education institutes in developing and improving research, teaching and innovation internationalization in education is increasingly seen as means of improving institutional visibility and influence. Due to the impact of internationalization the number of students who are opting for the studies in overseas has increased dramatically in past few decades, according to some estimates from 1.3 million in 1990 to 5 million in 2014, considering the existing trend it will grow further in coming years (ICEF, 2015). In the international context classes in various higher education institutes are increasing in number with diverse set of students, where this diversity includes several attributes in terms of language proficiency, cultural, socio economic background, ethnic group and gender all of them may have a serious impact on the success of the students [10; 11]. This diverse set of students is often presumed to be a serious challenge for the academic staff who struggle to uphold academic standards, content exposure and pass rates. It is in the higher education institutes that the global contest of upsurge in diverse student participation, reduction in availability of funding and internationalization [12] are played out in an indigenous context, alongside this phenomena demand for economic, social and development needs are required to be readdressed. The different set of agendas like inclusivity and efficiency which are mainly driven by globalization needs to retain and entice new generation of academics as well. Information technology has a definite part to play in contribution of worldwide interconnectivity of higher education institutes, academic information is processed effectively and rapidly across the world. It is therefore, worthwhile to notify that information technology will have a significant impact on the structure of higher education institutes [13]. With the emergence of intense worldwide competition among higher education institutes they are consistently being pressurized to improve the quality of university education. The constant pressure for these sources are needed to be sorted out in competition to the market of higher education services, national initiatives of quality assurance and accreditation and ever fluctuating requirements of employers and business. Higher education institutes in various countries are facing rapid growth of international student enrollments which in return outstripping their capacity to handle the crowd is causing serious problems for them to maintain international quality standards of academia [14]. The substantial impact of student engagement process in developed countries like North America, United Kingdom and Australia on their education policies, experiences and traditions have significantly influenced the education policies and traditions of developing countries [15; 16] From the various studies it has been assumed that major developments in higher education institutes are specified as expansion, differentiation, greater flexibility, quality orientation, standardization, employability, internationalization, and lifelong learning [17]. It is observed that these developing trends are tied together in a single knot pulling the single string will bring several others as well i.e. increase in enrollment has bring along the expansion in facilities required by the higher education institutes. Further mass enrollment will also be resulting in diverse set of student's expectations and needs. At the same time expansion and diversification will generate a necessity for the new providers and in the larger context these trends will generate a need to guarantee the high quality in higher education institutes [9]. In the phase of competition many institutes are expanding their national boundaries by opening their facilities in other countries and bringing along various new approaches to management as well. In case of United States having different campuses in several countries like China, Australia and Denmark are on their way for developing new management approaches towards governing the universities and creating the challenging competition standards [18]. To respond towards these new challenges different higher education institutes around the globe are needed to equip themselves, so that that they can manage to compete in this market efficiently and effectively [19]. A

systematic understanding of various trends and prior planning to counter different challenges is quite necessary for the higher education institutes to be effective in the competition.

3. Explanation of Trends And Challenges For Higher Education Institutions

3.1. Internationalization

Trends

Many countries around the world are now unceasingly making effective international strategies to attract many foreigners for the sake of higher education. The focus of these strategies is mainly to promote education, international mobility, and intercultural skills. The strategic aim is to provide international compatibility of various degrees, transferability of educational achievements (ECTS) and internationalizing the curriculum to achieve the international competitiveness of higher education institutions and graduates [20]. It is trendy for the several government planning institutions to propose strategies which has a better focus on internationalizing the higher education. Most of the time different country level internationalization strategies are linked to the national prosperity of trade and economic growth but out of various forms one common aspect is the aim of international student recruitment targets achieved through the effective policies of higher education institutes. Underlying, figure-1 shows the future trend of international student recruitment from various countries, which is also highlighting the focus towards their growing importance for internationalization.

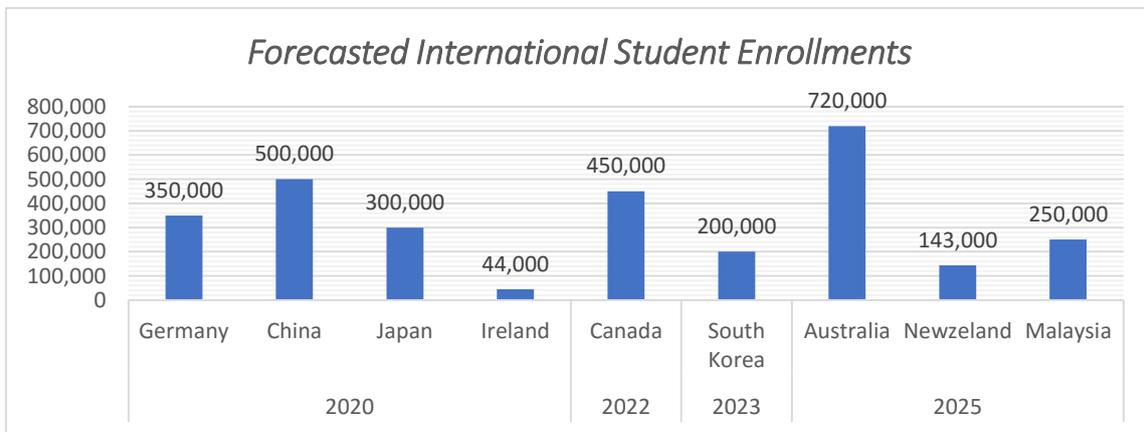


Figure 1: International Students forecast

Source: [British Council](#)

Internationalization is also referred to the practice of opening of new campuses around the world to capture the major share of the market. In this regard many universities are shifting their interests towards developing collaborations with other governments and signing memorandums in terms of opening overseas branches in academia. According to the study conducted by University of Oxford, over a last decade many international universities have opened their branch campuses overseas like Nottingham’s campus in Ningbo, China and NYU’ branch in Abu Dhabi and similarly in a broader scale Dubai’s International Academic City(DIAC) along

with Malaysian and Qatar educational cities are best known so far and overall these numbers are estimated to bring 220 campuses worldwide [21].

Challenges

In spite of the fact that there exists a wide range of internationalization trends but at the same time managing all these aspects creates a real challenge for higher education institutes [22]. Opening a campus overseas can be a very problematic situation to handle, because the first question would be weather the host campus will be able to sustain all the management approaches of parent campus or not? At the same time there will be a serious issue of sustaining the brand image, which will in turn impact the position of that higher education institute in the market [23]. At the same time it poses is real challenge for the local institutes to restructure their educational standards which is actually a problem due to their lower income levels and are than badly exposed to the rising market threats.

3.2. Expansion and Diversification

Trends

Upsurge awareness of university education among the society has given rise to the major advancements to happen for higher education institutes. One of the reasons for their developed interest in higher education institutes is depicted from the emerging trends in the last half century which shows a dramatic increase in the enrollment of higher education institutes. The figure 2 shows some statistics for the increasing trends of enrollments in higher education institutes. It is observed that the numbers are consistently increasing with the passage of time and is expected to further increase by 2025. From the figure it is observed that the trend of international enrolments has expanded since the end of last century. According to the estimation of UNESCO institute of statistic in 1970 reveals that there were around 32.5 million international students were enrolled in the higher education institutes. By 2000 this number has increased significantly to the level of 100 million and in 2010 the estimation shows the number further increased to 178 million international students in higher education institute. According to this trend of estimation it is expected that by 2025 the international enrollments in higher education institutes are expected to reach 263 million (British Council and IDP Australia, cited in Davis,2003 and Daniel, 2009).

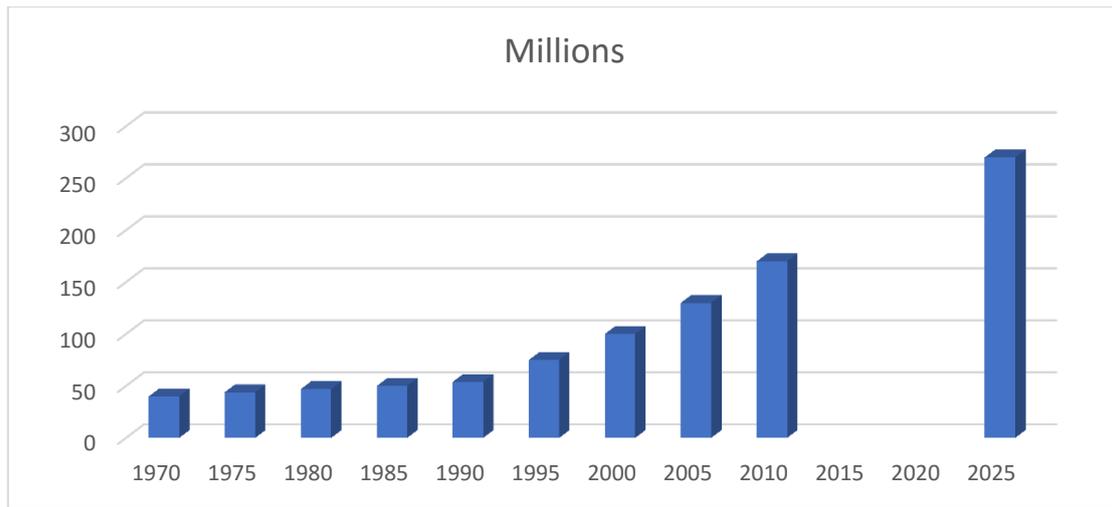


Figure 2: Trends in higher education enrollment worldwide, 1970-2025

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre for 1970-2010 and Daniel (2009) for 2025 forecast

The expansion system of higher education institutes sometimes is associated with the need for increase in diversification at various program levels, in which there is always a pressure to adapt more general programs for some more diverse set of population and keeping in mind various other regional, social and economic needs as well [24]. At the same time, it has been observed that with the continuous process of expansion, the aim of higher education institutes is now mainly to respond towards the growing diversity of students in terms of motives, talents and job perspective [25]. In short diversification always push towards requiring new set of demands from the higher education institutes and their systems.

Challenges

Attracting population from a diverse background initially seems pleasing but at the same time it requires a huge investment of time, energy and money to manage [26]. As the countries specially in Europe put huge emphasis on their regional languages must make some efforts to design some quality international courses for the students. Secondly, a lot of efforts are required to be invested in designing a competitive curriculum. In future the curriculum offered by the higher education institutes will turn out as the competitive factor in terms of attracting the candidates from the diverse backgrounds. Thirdly, higher education institutes will also need to hire some quality staff which should have the capacity to work in such intensive and diverse situations [27], because at the end it will be the staff that will serve as a bridge between the institute and students.

3.3. *New Management Approaches in Higher Education*

Trends

Once it was stated that, competition where possible, regulation where necessary [28]. Due to the prevalence of increasing competitiveness in the market of higher education its systems need some reengineering to respond

effectively. The part of management reengineering process is a vital aspect of higher education institutions. From the various literature it has been observed that autonomy, transparency, and accountability are the most significant propensities for the university management. The shift of decision-making power from government to autonomous institutions is a significant factor in defining new approaches for managing various systems of the institutions. For all higher education institutions, the need of academic freedom and financial issues has a significant impact on their success. In future this freedom of autonomy in decision making will support the institutions to become more innovative and creative in designing their unique management approaches for the improved performances [29]. As with the provision of autonomy it is very important for the private institutes to ensure the greater transparency and accountability in their new management approaches which is quite substantial for a management that is quite visionary.

Challenges

Firstly, by providing autonomy in decision making higher education institutes may enter to the situation where they can create monopoly in terms of their financial gains, to stop this a clear line for the use of powers needed to be drawn. As from the various studies it has been identified that increasing demand for the higher education is giving rise to more institutions to be formed [30], therefore it is instigating the emergence of higher education market. Secondly the strategic change of defining new approaches in academia is creating ambiguity for institutes who are not accustomed in various aspects of thinking and creating strategically [31]. Thirdly, as the education institutes are growing their business and considering students as their main customers, in the competition of trying to make more profits there is a greater chance that education quality to be ignored, as the quality education is primarily a basic right for humans which should be protected.

3.4. University-Government-Industry Collaborations

Trends

For a country to be economically strong need to have strong relationship between these three main players like university, government, and industry. These players are interconnected and have huge dependencies on each other. Previously the higher education institutes have the responsibility only to perform research and teaching but now with the increasing demands of the global competitive environment they need some strong collaboration to meet these needs. According to [32] to become more productive and competitive higher education institutes needs to restructure themselves and requires having some strong organizational network to connect with the industry and supply the right quality of labor demand in the market. [33] in their triple helix model emphasized on three selections of environment namely with wealth generation (Industry), Novelty production (Academia) and public control (Government). The triple helix model basically underlines the contributions of interactions between academics, industry, and government. As the industry is not only focused on producing and delivering products to the customers but at the same time conducts some market research as well similarly, governments are not typically focused on collecting taxes and funds but also need to set some administrative bodies for participating in the various roles of industries [34].

Challenges

With the mounting economic pressures state funding for the higher education is cutting down [35] which is quite dangerous because it will impact the education standards and at the same time there is a greater chance of increase in fee structures. In this scenario all the financial pressure will be shifted on the students which can create hindrance in achieving their educational goals. According to a report published by OECD in 2017 has highlighted the fact that the spending in higher education is falling significantly specially in European countries in comparison to other developed countries since they are unable to tackle the shortages in funds (Times Higher Education, 2017). This increasing gap is a challenge which needs to be addressed.

3.5. *Information Technology and Distance Learning*

Trends

Information technology has impacted the working of various industries around the world but especially it has brought dramatic changes to the education institutes which ranges from teaching and learning, institutional management, administration and finance, research production and dissemination and to student life [36]. Effective use of technology has been a core competence for many industries from the last decade and its importance is continuing to upsurge in the future as well. There is a greater need to emphasize on the fact that information technology should be well placed to serve all the requirements of higher education institutes to compete well in the international market. Distance learning programs initiatives are one of the predictor of effective utilization of information technology to gain competitive edge in the industry. These distance learning programs are helping to diminish traditional geographic barriers in learning process [37] and trying to provide cost effective way to earn international degree.

Challenges

Initially, distance learning programs offered by many higher education institutions are providing international degrees which is creating some great threat for the existing higher education institutions [38]. Secondly, higher education institutes have a great challenge to create new curriculum and make efforts to provide convenience and time efficient activities to respond such emerging demands otherwise competitors will take advantages. Similarly, in the context of developing countries it is especially very difficult to use efficient systems to cope up with the modern requirements. As in these distance learning programs the level and intensity of interaction is not very frequent therefore a great amount of efficiency is required to make students satisfied with the challenges being faced.

4. Conclusion

The paper has reviewed some key trends and challenges that higher education institutes are and will be facing in the future. Due to the increased competition in global market higher education institutes are considerably focusing on achieving higher education standards. More specifically a considerable interest of the developed countries is observed when it comes to the internationalization of higher education. Most of the countries in

developed world are trying to penetrate into other countries where education is not of high standard and are trying to capture the local markets. Similarly, in most of the cases it's developing countries who are actually triggering all the trends and challenges of the higher education and forcing the competition in the developing countries. All these possible trends and challenges are examined to provide assistance to the policy makers both at the broader institutional level and also at the micro level as well. In the paper not any single challenges or trend has been discussed in detail but a short insight has been considered in order to give a due reflection to these factors. This might be seen as a limitation of the paper. However, changing macro and micro level societal aspects are bringing various challenges and new trends in the higher education sector which needs a close consideration. Therefore, this paper has seriously focused on some specific factors that are applicable to the higher education institutes. Finally the study can also be used in the literature reviews to investigate the impact of these challenges and trends on the existing education systems. And more importantly, some quantitative studies are needed to examine the impact of these factors on the overall educational institutional environment of a particular country i.e. whether it has fruitful or adverse impacts. So in short these emerging trends and challenges are there to bring continuous improvements in the education system.

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