

**Viability and sustainability of Higher Education:
With special reference to Self Financing
Courses.**

“Commercialization of Higher Education in India”

**Name of the Author: Ms. Anju Ailsinghani
Co- Author: Ms. Neelam Wadhvani**

Designation: Lecturer

**email Address: anjuailsinghani@gmail.com
neelam.vesit@gmail.com**

**Mobile No: +91 9324409713
+91 7709364540**

**Contact Address: Bharat College of Commerce and Science
Hendrapada, Kulgaon. Badlapur(W), 421 503.**

Abstract

Commercialization of higher education in India

This position paper outlines the present context of increasing commercialization of higher education in India, of viewing education more as commodity sold in market, set up in the form of Universities and Colleges where students are acting as consumers and Educators as service providers. The paper highlights more on commercialization of higher education in today's global market with special reference to courses offered by Universities and colleges in collaboration with foreign Universities and providing better career opportunities to its students.

History of Self Financing Courses:

The UGC initiated a major program of vocationalisation at undergraduate level during the VIIIth Plan (1994-95). The scheme was designed to ensure that graduates who pass out after completing these courses would have knowledge, skills and aptitude for gainful employment in the wage sector in general and self-employment in particular. During the 10th plan, UGC decided to recast the vocationalisation program at undergraduate level under a modified scheme of Career Orientation Program. Under the program, certificate/diploma/advanced diploma programs are being run parallel to the conventional B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. degrees. Thus, one mode of self-financing program, permitted by the UGC, is the add-on certificate/diploma/advanced diploma program

Self-financing courses in the colleges were launched as deliberate attempt to vocationalise higher education. UGC's policy, during the 10th plan, was to equip students through an add-on course with some practical knowledge along with the bachelor's degree at the first stage of higher education. UGC also supported the colleges to launch first degree if the colleges could plan professional courses to meet the market needs. There developed two types of courses – one, the regular course which was already subsidized by the government and the other, in the self-financing mode, based on the principle of the recovery of the cost of the course. Self-financing courses have now become popular in the present circumstances where market provides an opportunity for a skilled professional.

Current Scenario:

Education as Commodity Sold in the Market:

Commercialization is the term used to designate the tendencies and practices that create increasing connections between colleges and universities and the economic sector. It also refers to the process of driving public educational institutions to operate as if they were private. A relevant indicator of the commercialization of higher education on a global scale is the rapid expansion of "international trade" in education services. There has always been an international aspect to education as both students and academics have engaged in pursuit of education across borders. What is different now, however, is not only the sheer volume of these activities, but the "increasingly market oriented delivery of higher education and the prominent role played by for-profit providers offering services directly across borders.

e.g. AICTE: Collaborative degree and diploma programs which are technical in nature, namely, Engineering, Architecture, Computer Science, Business, Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Pharmacy, etc., may require the approval of statutory bodies such as the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), New Delhi. *No Objection Certificate* (NOC) will be required from the Foreign embassy or High Commission for offering programs, executive development programs, and management development programs.

Joint / Dual Degree Programs: Collaborative programs are also sometimes known as Joint Degree programs or Dual Degree programs in India. In these programs, Indian institutions will continue to offer their regular Graduate and Post-Graduate programs as per the Indian curricula and give Indian degrees and diplomas after successful completion. Simultaneously, Indian institutions will supplement their existing curricula with the additional curricula of Foreign Universities. Students who successfully complete the existing curricula and the additional curricula will be given degrees by the Foreign Universities.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a leader in this process and is currently considering a series of proposals to develop rules governing international trade in education services, just like any other commodity.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is “an effort by multinational corporations and some government agencies” in developed countries to “integrate higher education into the legal structures of the world trade through the WTO.” Among other things, the free-trade educational services context would facilitate academic mobility in terms of cross-border supply, which would include IT-facilitated education and the franchising of courses and degrees, and commercial presence, whereby the service provider establishes facilities in another country, including branch campuses and joint ventures. The steady decrease of public funding for colleges and universities means that many traditional non-profit universities with financial problems are also beginning to see their day-to-day operations in terms of financial gain and with the introduction of VI pay commission have given rise to the self financing courses and commercialization of education.

Student as Consumers being sold Commodity:

As commercialization affects all areas of life, including education, it gradually shifts society's view of education. Education is increasingly seen as a consumable commodity that increases one's chances of successfully competing in the global economy and achieving higher earnings. A sign of this change is the corporate language that has crept into now almost common usage in reference to education: students are seen as “customers,” “clients” and “products,” teachers are “service providers, learning guides and education managers”; evaluation becomes “quality control,” and education is subsumed under the general notion of “production.” The commercialization of education is not simply an economic process related to the governance and structure of colleges and universities, but also a symbolic process by which the values of the market place, associated with the idea of private, for-profit ownership, gradually replace the values associated traditionally with education and knowledge as a public good, something worthy to be pursued for its own sake and serving the needs of all members of society. In teaching the values of ethical citizenship, teachers may be hindered in their efforts by the increasingly popular, commodity-oriented perception of their relationship to their students.

“Unlike a retail clerk, the teacher’s role is not to sell a product or please customers. It is to challenge students, to provoke new ways of thinking, to make students uneasy with what they have taken for granted.”

The measure of success is not ‘customer satisfaction’ but intellectual growth. This can be a difficult and unsettling process — the opposite of what is to happen to a retail customer who is to be placated and soothed into buying a product. Today’s university students increasingly view education and the time they spend at university as a means to an economic end, a way of ensuring profitable employment. This is not to say that there should not be an economic benefit to their obtaining a degree. The financial structures of universities increasingly encourage students to see themselves as consumers of a commodity that is education. As public funding for universities decreases, ‘user-pay’ increasingly replaces it. The growing trend to raise tuition fees is thus often justified by the rules of the marketplace that perpetuate and confirm the notion that education is a commodity that is bought and sold. In this sense, it seems logical that “users should pay for this service as they would for any other service,”

However, in the context of the growing commercialization of higher education and its increasing coding as a commodity that can be purchased like any other, the concept acquires distinct market undertones. This contributes to the perception that students are consumers of a service for a very specific reason seen in limited, commercial terms — mainly as a ticket to a well-paying job.

Given the fact that both we and our students live in a commercialized world and consume a vast array of goods and services outside our academic lives, the teaching and learning of ethical citizenship is increasingly difficult as students and the public tend to perceive many of its aspects as theoretical, irrelevant and disconnected from the world outside.

Educators as Service Providers

What are the ethical and civic implications of considering educators as service providers?

Answer to this is another aspect of the commercialization of education with significant implications for the educators’ willingness to teach the values of ethical citizenship involves the redesigning of the way universities function to use more part-time and contract employees, who are paid less, have fewer benefits, fewer legal rights, and are less likely to unionize. As such, “the contingent nature of their job makes them more vulnerable,” and deprives them of the full benefits of academic freedom, the one condition put in place to allow academics to explore the full range of social, political, economic and cultural issues in their teaching and research without being constrained by their institution’s or their own economically-based alliance to any one ideology pertaining to these areas. The emphasis on the apparently stark differences between education and business should be considered in terms of their basic orientation and scope. There are moments when the scholar may be similar to the entrepreneur; the educator too, like the entrepreneur, has to worry about food, shelter and the standard of living.

Educators vs Entrepreneurs

The two are often essentially different in their basic orientation: while scholars and scientists will, more often than not, be motivated to pursue knowledge for its own sake and for the potential social benefits their research may effect, the entrepreneur will, more often than not, be motivated to pursue inventions and inventiveness for the sake of potential economic profit.

While entrepreneurs will be more likely to explain the benefit of their inventions in utilitarian terms — as satisfying a particular consumer need in society — scholars, especially those whose areas of interest and expertise involve ethics and ethical citizenship, will be more likely to explain the benefits of their research in terms of value that cannot be measured by consumer standards. Thus the scope of inquiry and interest of the scholar and the entrepreneur are different: in the one case, the scope aims toward universality, while in the other, it aims toward the fulfillment of a limited number of consumer-related needs.

Conclusion:

Given the risks of commercialization when it comes to education in general and the mission of any university, “the degree of harm caused or risk of harm” raised by a particular commercialization effort, must be assessed in all of the circumstances. As educators and citizens, we are called upon to assess critically how the increasing commercialization of higher education changes our roles of educators and citizens and how those changes will influence our ability and willingness to teach students about the values of ethical citizenship in the global world.

Although, this announcement may not address the issue of several unaccredited and unrecognized foreign collaborations already in operation, nor does it offer a framework for establishing a full-fledged branch campus, it does provide a low-intensity, high-relevance pathway for institutions who are truly interested in building collaborative academic engagements in India. It may offer more welcoming approach to “prestigious” and “prestige-seeking” segments of foreign institutions.

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