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Research Funding Agencies in India

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ABSTRACT

Higher Educational Institutions play a major role in preparing and developing the propitious young generation for the future. Higher Education forms basis for research, innovation, creativity and a matter of responsibility and economic support of all governments. The research-based education has now gaining much importance in the higher education system. Today, research becomes an integral part of academic role and a central factor in academic promotion. But there is a lack of awareness among academicians and research scholars to scout for appropriate sources of funds. Therefore, in the present paper an attempt has been made to explore the key governmental organizations & institutions that have played a vital role in the development of research in India and to find out the factors necessary to encourage research in India.

1. Introduction

Higher Education is a public good and a strategic necessity for all levels of education. It forms basis for research, innovation, creativity and a matter of responsibility and economic support of all governments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26, Paragraph 1) has emphasized that 'higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit'. In the past decade it was evident that higher education and research have contributed significantly to the eradication of poverty, to sustainable development and to progress towards reaching the internationally agreed upon developmental goals, which include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) (Phillips et al, 2009).

One of the areas of major contribution made by higher education to the whole of the education sector is through the research carried out and the evidence produced by researchers. The research in education is of several types: (i) thesis prepared by graduate students in the universities; (ii) doctoral thesis prepared for the awarding of the degrees; (iii) departmental research projects funded by the ministries of education; (iv) projects funded by external agencies and donor communities; (v) individual projects funded by agencies and ministries of education; or (vi) individual projects by the faculty members etc.

Thus, research-based education has now gaining much importance in the higher education system. Further, research becomes an integral part of academic role and a central factor in academic promotion. But there is a lack of awareness among academicians and research scholars to scout for appropriate sources of funds. Therefore, in the present paper an attempt has been made to explore the key governmental organizations & institutions that have played a vital role in the development of research in India and to find out the factors necessary to encourage research in India.

2. Higher Education: Indian Scenario

Higher Education in India has grown significantly since the country's independence in 1947. At the time of independence, the gross enrolment ratio in higher education was mere 0.7% with a network of 20 Universities, 500 Colleges and about 24,000 teachers. The present enrolment in higher education is about 12.5% with the target of 15% by the end of 12th plan period. The higher education institutional network has grown enormously; and it is the third largest system in the world only next to USA and China.

The higher education policy has been guided mainly by five goals which include provision of greater access by enhancing number of educational institutions; provision of equal access to all social groups; quality and excellence; promotion of relevance and value based education (XII Plan document, UGC, 2012).

3. Indian Research Scenario

In India not much funding is allotted for carrying out fundamental research in educational institutions, especially at graduate level institutions. Despite the knowledge, drive, potential and motivation, the Indian youth miserably fail in research activities, because of inadequate financing. Further, our country is losing young, energetic and research-oriented students, since they migrate to foreign countries where the universities are supported by well-equipped research laboratories.

4. Research Sponsoring Agencies in India

The following are the few funding agencies, to which researchers and academicians shall choose according to their proposed research question or proposal.

1) University Grants Commission (UGC)

The Government of India recognized the need for a central agency disbursing funds to various universities. Accordingly, University Grants Commission was constituted in 1952. UGC was made a statutory body of the Central Government by an act of Parliament "for the coordination, determination and

maintenance of standards of university education in India". The mandate of the UGC is:

- Promoting and coordinating university education
- Determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in universities.
- Framing regulations on minimum standards of education
- Monitoring developments in the field of collegiate and university education; disbursing grants to the universities and colleges
- Serving as a vital link between the Union and state governments and institutions of higher learning
- Advising and Central and State governments on the measures necessary for improvement of university education.

Funding: The UGC is an apex agency responsible for funding of Indian Universities. UGC has no funds of its own. It receives both Plan and Non-Plan grants from the Central Government to carry out the responsibilities assigned to it by law. It provides financial assistance to the universities/institutes/colleges which are fit to receive financial assistance under section 2(f) and 12(B) of UGC Act.

2) Department of Science and Technology (DST)

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) was established in 1971. The main goal of DST is promoting new areas of Science and Technology and to play a role of a nodal department for organising, coordinating and promoting S&T activities in the country under the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Responsibilities:

- Formulation of policies relating to science and technology matters relating to Scientific Advisory Committee of Cabinet (SACC).
- Promotion of new areas of S&T with special emphasis on emerging areas.
- Coordination and integration of areas of Science and Technology.

Major Activities

- It undertakes or financially sponsors scientific and technological surveys, research design and development;
- Providing support and grant-in-aid to the scientific research institutions, scientific research association or bodies.
- It plays a key role in matters regarding the interagency/interdepartmental coordination for evolving science and technology missions.
- Establishment of new institutions/infrastructure. It assist in harnessing and application of science and technology for weaker sections, women and other disadvantaged sections of the society.

3) Department of Biotechnology (DBT)

Since its inception, the Department has promoted and accelerated the pace of development of biotechnology in the country through several R&D projects, demonstrations and creation of infrastructural facilities. The Department has made significant achievements in the broad areas of agriculture, health care, animal sciences, environment and industry. A unique feature of the department has been the deep involvement of the scientific community of the country through a number of technical task forces, advisory committees and individual experts in identification, formulation, implementation and monitoring of various programmes and activities. DBT working under the Ministry of Science and Technology in 1986 gave a new impetus to the development of the field of modern biology and biotechnology in India.

4) Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)

The Ministry of Environment and Forests, is classified as a "Scientific Ministry" under the Government of India. Since its inception in 1985, the Ministry has funded research by diverse research institutions in several disciplines concerned with environment protection. Some indicative areas include; forest conservation, wildlife protection, biodiversity inventories, R&D in environmental management technologies, climate change, public health impacts of environmental degradation, etc. The present guidelines set forth the objectives of research support, the thrust areas of research support, procedures for inviting/receipt and processing proposals for funding support, norms for funding, conditions of support and dissemination of research findings.

The main objective of MoEF is to generate information and knowledge required for developing strategies, techniques and methodologies for better environmental management.

5) Other Research and Development Institutes

The five apex bodies which are responsible for research and development are:

1. Indian Council of Medical Research: It is the apex body for the formulation, coordination and promotion of bio medical research.

2. Indian Council of Agricultural Research: An autonomous body which coordinates guides and manages research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences.
3. Indian Council for Social Science Research: It was established in 1969 by the Government of India to promote research in social sciences.

4. Council of Scientific and Industrial Research: It was established in 1942 as an autonomous body and India's largest Research and Development organization. It activities include various fields like aero – space engineering, structural engineering, life sciences, environment etc.

5. Tata Institute of Fundamental Research: It is a Research institution in Mumbai dedicated to basic research in Mathematics and sciences.

5. Factors to be considered to encourage Research in India

There is a great need to encourage research in India. Following are the few factors which could encourage research. These are:

1. A conducive academic environment of the universities/institutions/colleges.
2. A well stocked library and reference section covering books, e-books, journals, online library etc.
3. Provision of adequate infrastructural facilities.
4. Existence of Research Laboratories having the latest equipment's.
5. Availability of adequate finance for purchase of funds.
6. Combining teaching and research related activity in the work profile of the professors.
7. Instilling a feeling of pride and purposefulness among teachers that their major task is to transformation of the economy.
8. Curriculum should focus more on practical aspects and nurture students to opt for research as a career.

6. Conclusion

Research-based education has now gaining much importance in the higher education system. Further, research becomes an integral part of academic role and a central factor in academic promotion.

Funds from various funding agencies are available in plenty. However, there is lack of awareness among academicians and research scholars to scout for appropriate sources of funds. Inadequate incentives to researcher for their research by universities/institutions/ colleges lead to researchers not actively looking for funds. There should be a conducive environment, adequate infrastructural facilities, research laboratories and curriculum should be more focused on practical aspects so that research to be opted as a career by the students.

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