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**BRICS and Mortar: New Architecture in
Education**

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BRICS and Mortar: New Architecture in Education*

In the beginning of the new century and the millennium, Brazil, the Russian Federation, India and China came to be reckoned as the world's fastest growing economies. Later, these were joined by South Africa, leading to the emergence of BRICS as a political coalition of five countries. The year 2009 was a landmark in this historic development. In that year, the first BRICS Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation. The BRICS summits held annually since then have become an important political platform for the collective voice of BRICS countries in the form of BRICS Declarations.

Education is one of the most critical areas addressed in successive BRICS summits. Centrality of education in people's lives and its catalytic role for human development is widely recognised in today's world. So it was inevitable that the BRICS countries would come together and create a common plat-form on education as well. The first meeting of BRICS Education Ministers was held in November 2013 on the margins of the UNESCO General Conference. Since then, the BRICS Education Ministers have been meeting annually and issuing a separate declaration in tandem with the declaration issued at the summits.

Framework for Developing Institutionalised Cooperation

The meetings of BRICS Education Ministers provide a platform for cooperation in the fields of education with common objectives and shared aspirations. So far, steps taken towards such cooperation have centered on higher education. The BRICS Education Ministers Meeting at UNESCO in 2013 expressed the need for 'strengthening collaboration between BRICS universities and partnerships.' In 2014, the Fortaleza Declaration at the Sixth Summit encouraged the initiative to establish the BRICS Network University. Later, the Ufa Declaration (2015), mentioned above, backed 'the independent initiatives to establish the BRICS Network University and the BRICS Universities League.'

*Lecture delivered by Dr. Kishore Singh at IIC on May 3, 2017.

The creation of the BRICS University League and the establishment of the BRICS Network University are two landmark developments for forging cooperation among five countries in the field of education. The idea of BRICS University League was initiated in Shanghai in July, 2013. This took shape in October 2015 when BRICS Universities Presidents Forum was held in Beijing Normal University, bringing together representatives of around 40 leading Universities from BRICS countries. As a result, the BRICS University League came into being. It is a consortium of outstanding research universities. Its aim is to provide a platform for academic cooperation for advancing comparative research and international educational projects.

The BRICS University League is a forum for facilitating academic exchanges and cooperation between the universities. It is an autonomous body and has kept its doors open for more universities from BRICS countries to join. Universities themselves define areas and modalities of cooperation. The 'Delhi Declaration on Education' (2016) too has endorsed the need for the participation of more universities in the BRICS University League for 'collaborative research' and 'to facilitate student mobility.'¹ The importance of the BRICS University League must be appreciated as a strategic pillar for BRICS cooperation in higher education.

BRICS countries have also been seeking to promote cooperation on an institutionalised basis. It was given concrete shape at the BRICS

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Education Ministers Meeting in Moscow in November 2015 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)² on the establishment of the BRICS Network University by the Education Ministers. The MoU provides a framework for future cooperation in education based on mutual interest. It recognises the strategic importance of education for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in accordance with the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy. It sets out the principles for the functioning of the BRICS Network University –BRICS NU, along with objectives. As an educational project, BRICS NU aims at the formation of the new generation of highly qualified and motivated professionals.³ Educational programmes under it will cover different forms of education and training for satisfying the needs of the member countries. The MoU provides that the main areas of cooperation shall correspond to the priorities of member countries⁴ and specifies areas which include energy; computer science and information security; BRICS studies; ecology and climate change; water resources and pollution treatment and economics. Member countries have agreed that each of them will designate 12 Universities to participate in the BRICS NU. When implemented, it shall be the biggest network in higher education in the world, comprising 60 outstanding Universities.

Universities participating in the BRICS University League can also participate in the BRICS NU. As a result of these initiatives, BRICS is poised to emerge as an interactive academic community, endowed with common research and education agenda. The Education Ministers in their Beijing Declaration have reiterated ‘support for the BRICS Network University to collaborate in the fields of education, research and innovation.’ They have also encouraged ‘universities to participate in the BRICS University League.’⁵

Operationalising Framework for Cooperation

Cooperation among BRICS countries can be facilitated by system-wide interactions in the field of education with converging approaches. With a better understanding of the education system of each country, they can optimise their academic interactions and collaborative endeavour.

This is important for operationalising the MoU. This is also important for the BRICS University League. Being fully conversant with the system of the degrees and diplomas and qualifications obtained in higher education institutions in each of the BRICS countries is a prerequisite for progressing in that direction.

The MoU further stipulates that participating Universities in BRICS NU will cooperate in the sphere of education quality assurance; and exchange information on licensing, certification and accreditation of educational institutions/organisations as well as educational programmes.⁶ Mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas and equivalence of qualifications obtained in higher education institutions can spur the process of operationalising the development framework for further cooperation among BRICS countries. This evolving cooperation will institute BRICS degrees/diplomas/certificates, to be awarded on the completion of courses pursued in the Universities participating in the BRICS NU.

Towards BRICS Degrees/Diplomas/Certificates

The Universities participating in the BRICS NU are required to work out:

- the details of structure and content of educational programmes;
- mutual recognition of the training outcomes; academic mobility forms as decided by the International Thematic Groups of the BRICS NU on the knowledge field priorities of the BRICS NU;
- principles of educational process arrangement;
- and issues of interim and final certification which are regulated by agreements between BRICS NU participants on joint training of highly qualified personnel.⁷

Upon completion of the BRICS NU educational programmes, the persons who have passed the relevant examinations and meet the requirements of conferment standards or relevant regulations of the graduation institution would receive a formal qualification of the institution, in which they

would have enrolled. They may also receive two or more degrees/diplomas in accordance with the agreements between the BRICS NU participants as well as the certificate of participation in the BRICS NU.⁸ The BRICS NU creates possibilities for BRICS degrees and diplomas to be awarded under bilateral/multilateral arrangements. Development of joint projects in different forms of postgraduate education with priority to Masters' and Ph.D programmes, as foreseen in the BRICS NU can be an immense cohesive force.

BRICS diplomas and degrees must ab initio be characterised by rigorous quality assurance with professional excellence so that they become reputed all over the world. This is all the more so as the Universities designated to participate in the BRICS NU are expected to be outstanding Universities at the national level.

Construing Convergences in Education Systems

In developing cooperation among BRICS countries and operationalising the BRICS NU, due consideration must be given to the diversity of under-graduate and post-graduate courses offered in these countries. More importantly, a good understanding of the qualifications given and degrees and diplomas awarded is necessary with a view to developing convergences.

In Brazil, four years of post-secondary studies at a certified University is required for the standard Brazilian undergraduate degree: 'bacharelado'.⁹ Students who hold a technology diploma, a licenciatura diploma, a bachelor's degree or a five-year professional diploma are qualified for admission into graduate school (*pós-graduação*). Graduate master's degrees are normally awarded following the completion of a two-year programme.

Provisions for the evaluation criteria and the assessment of institutions in Brazil are laid down by the Law on Guidelines and Bases of Education¹⁰ and on the National Assessment of Higher Education.¹¹ The Law on Guidelines and Bases of Education establishes that higher education will be provided by public or private higher education institutions, with

various degrees of specialisation. The Law provides that the authorisation and recognition of courses as well as the accreditation of higher educational institutions have limited timeframes, being periodically renewed after a regular assessment process. The National Assessment of Students Performance--ENADE--has been used as an assessment of the desired quality of Brazilian higher education. It is part of the Brazilian National Higher Education Evaluation System (SINAES) of the Ministry of Education.¹²

Education at the tertiary level in the Russian Federation comprises four levels: vocational education, including short cycle tertiary education; first cycle University education: Bakalavriat; second cycle University education--specialisation and 'Magistratura' leading to 'Magistr' degree; and Ph. D. programme: 'Candidate Nauk' (PhD) and 'Doktor Nauk' (Higher Doctorate). In 2003, the Russia Federation co-signed the Bologna Declaration and enacted in 2007 a Law that replaces the traditional five-year model of education with a two-tiered approach: a four-year bachelor (Russian: бакалавр) degree followed by a two-year master's (Russian: магистр, *magistr*) degree.

Quality control and assessment in the Russian Federation is governed by the State educational standards. Licensing for granting the right to carry out educational programmes is subject to state requirements and procedure of assessment. The State accreditation--formal recognition of the status of higher educational institutions by the State--allows them to issue state recognised diplomas if their activities conform to nationally established norms, including compliance of the content and quality of education as per the State educational standards. The National Information Center on Academic Recognition and Mobility is responsible for provision of information on Russian education and qualifications, especially in cases when such information relates to the recognition of bodies and individuals abroad as well as for a wider range of stakeholders and recognition procedure.

Higher education in China (usually known as college education) comprises tertiary vocational school (two or three years), a technological academy

(three years) and an undergraduate school (four years). Those who pass the graduate record examination are awarded the bachelor's degree. Further study for three years leads to the Master's degree, following which, one can pursue a PhD programme. Not all Chinese institutions of higher education offer degrees; many offer only graduation certificates. Regulations on Academic Degrees in China (August 2004) have the objective of raising the academic level of various branches of learning and promoting the development of education and science. (Article 1). If it is established that an entity authorised to confer academic degrees has not been able to maintain the academic standards, the State Council may suspend or revoke its status as a degree-conferring entity. (Article 18). China has an elaborate legal framework for higher education evaluation which includes undergraduate teaching evaluation.

In South Africa, undergraduate level programmes lead to bachelor's degree, a diploma or a higher certificate, and postgraduate level programmes to an honours bachelor's degree, a postgraduate diploma, a master's degree or a doctoral degree. Universities of Technology offer highly professionally oriented study programmes at the B. Tech level. A special feature of the education system in South Africa is that the concept of education *and training* permeates both the basic and the higher education level.

National Qualifications Framework in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister for 'the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications.'¹³ The South African Qualifications Authority as a statutory body oversees the development of this framework. The Council on Higher Education in South Africa is entrusted with developing and implementing the system of quality assurance for higher education, including programme accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion and capacity development.

The education system in India covers a wide range of institutions for higher education in academic and technical fields. They offer a very

large number of degree courses at graduate and post-graduate level.¹⁴ The University Grants Commission takes, in consultation with the Universities or other bodies concerned, ‘all such steps as it may think fit for the promotion and co-ordination of University education and for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in Universities.’¹⁵ Undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered in India lead to over 100 types of degrees and diplomas given by Universities, engineering, management, pharmacy, architecture or colleges.

India has adopted a novel system of evaluation and ranking of universities-
-National Institutional Ranking Framework—conducted by the Human Resource Development Ministry. This is a methodology to rank higher education institutions across the country based on parameters broadly covering teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practices, outreach and inclusivity and perception.

The diversity of education systems in BRICS countries makes it necessary for them to leverage rapprochement of the higher education system and develop a system of equivalence of qualifications and recognition of degrees and diplomas. They can draw upon their experiences and approaches for mutual benefit. This is essential for forging collaboration among them by way of exchange programmes, mobility of students and researchers and joint research and study programmes.

This will also constitute follow up to the Fortaleza Declaration (2014)¹⁶ which underlined the need

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to ‘increase cooperation between competent authorities for accreditation and recognition as a basis for the creation of common principles for recognition of diplomas and degrees.’ Establishing such principles would provide the necessary basis for advancing towards collaborative legal and policy approaches.

Skilled Workforce Exchange Programmes and Professional Mobility

The stream of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has received particular consideration in discussions on cooperation among BRICS countries in recognition of its critical role in developing competencies and skills. This has become indispensable for tackling issues in integrating young people to the labour market and preparing skilled workforce needed by the modern world.¹⁷ These countries, therefore attach importance to “encourage students’ mobility” and ‘possibilities of cooperation’ among them in this area.¹⁸ Efforts in that direction can be promoted by bringing their TVET streams closer and developing a system of assessing equivalence of qualifications in and mutual recognition of diplomas and degrees in this field. Here, a key issue is to devise the TVET system which gives a push to innovative activities and which builds pathways to higher technical education. A look at the profile of TVET in BRICS countries provides perspectives on building convergent approaches in this field.

In South Africa, TVET comprises vocational, occupational and artisan education and training and is offered by TVET colleges. Skills development has been identified as a key requirement for economic growth and empowerment of the previously disadvantaged majority. South Africa has several institutional mechanisms for skills development. The National Skills Authority is an advisory body to provide guidance to the Minister of Higher Education and Training on implementing the national skills development strategy. The National Qualifications Framework enables one to assess and recognise qualifications based on the achievement of specified learning outcomes prescribed by the industry. Furthermore, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations oversees the development and maintenance of the occupational qualifications and

advises the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all matters of policy in this respect.

Vocational education in China is offered in vocational junior secondary schools as part of 9 years of compulsory education. Graduates of vocational junior secondary schools can be enrolled into secondary vocational schools and those successfully completing secondary vocational education can go to post-secondary vocational schools, including higher vocational technology institutions and higher technology specialised schools.

The drive towards modernisation in the beginning of the century and educational reform in China with the Vocational Education Law as a policy base gave a tremendous push to skills development. This was aimed at diversion of students from academic to technical education in order to alleviate skill shortages and reduce the competition for university enrolment. This strategy is being continuously pursued, transforming some of the general undergraduate educational institutions into higher technical education institutes.¹⁹ It encourages mobilising industries and enterprises in order to impart strength to skills development. The national education policy in 2010 stipulated that 'Incentives shall be granted to enterprises to invest more in vocational education' and accept students for fieldwork or in-service training.²⁰ China places continued focus on skills development and professional excellence. Short-term and long-term goals of establishing a modern vocational education system, including improvement of the legal system and standardisation of the system of Chinese vocational education are set out in Planning for Building the Modern Vocational Education System (2014-2020).

In the Russian Federation, second stage vocational education (non-university education) is generally imparted in *Tekhnikums* and Colleges. These can be independent educational institutions or constituent parts of higher education institutions. They offer professional education programmes of the basic and advanced type. These are well-coordinated with University level programmes in the same field of study. The Russian Federation has made the transition to the Federal State Educational

Standards and standardised higher vocational education. Under Law, admission to publicly funded educational institutions for secondary, higher or post-graduate vocational education is obtained on a competitive basis.

Brazil has a system of graduation in technology which requires two to four years of studies in a certified University or college²¹ and leads to an undergraduate diploma as a bachelor 'technologist'. Five-year professional courses also exist, leading to a professional diploma in select state-regulated careers such as architecture, engineering, veterinary, medicine, psychology, and law. As part of strengthening basic education, Brazil has introduced an innovative scheme in the form of the National Programme for the Integration of Vocational Education with Basic Education for the Young and Adults. This is aimed at expanding opportunities of technical and vocational education and training in the country. It seeks to stimulate entrepreneurship and strengthen local production arrangements with innovative ways of skills development and pathways to higher technical education.

Created in 1942 to meet a specific demand, Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (SENAI) in Brazil is a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation for the training of qualified workers for industry. Organised and run by industrial entrepreneurs (through the National Confederation of Industry and state-level federations), its main purpose is to meet industrial demands. As a result of a number of initiatives at federal, state and municipal levels, opportunities of TVET have expanded rapidly in Brazil over the last decade.

Vocational education and training in India is imparted through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) corresponding to secondary education level schools. This remains a separate stream with intake of mostly low performing students. The Polytechnics at the graduate level offer a diploma course of three years. But they suffer from lack of institutionalised collaboration with industry as well as integration with technical higher education. Skills provided in the ITIs with dismal quality and poor standards leave much to desire.

Private tertiary level technical educational institutions have mushroomed in India where access is based on payment of exorbitant fees, neglecting merit and quality standards. As a result, a very large number of engineering degree holders in the country today coming out of these private institutions are not employable on account of worthless certification and qualifications awarded. Giving high priority to skills development, India has launched the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy (2015) in a bid to train the workforce rapidly and scale up skill development efforts across the country. However, the TVET system needs to be radically transformed and modernised. Maintaining standards is essential to implementing the Apprenticeship Act (1998)²² which makes it obligatory for employers to engage apprentices in designated or optional trades. It is necessary to modernise the Act along with elaborate rules and regulations and lay down a sound legal framework for skills development through vocational education and training, integrating this further into technical higher education.

World Skills is a notable initiative in BRICS countries. Events and programmes organised around this are most significant for drawing upon best practices and opening new vistas. Moreover, BRICS Youth Policy Dialogue as a new area of cooperation²³ intended to create opportunities for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship manifests shared objectives for the drive towards skills development. Such innovative schemes and programmes are significant for stimulating entrepreneurship, necessary for responding to the rising aspirations of youth.

BRICS countries have reiterated the need to strengthen cooperation in the field of TVET, to 'share ideas and experiences in the development of vocational educators, and develop projects that are of common interest to BRICS Member States.'²⁴ Collective endeavour for this purpose requires an elaborate system of assessing equivalence of qualifications in TVET and possibly a BRICS-wide qualifications framework along with assessment systems and high quality norms and standards of TVET.

This must go beyond technical considerations and include values transmitted along with technical skills. Development of social skills,

critical thinking and cultivating work ethics with a sense of social responsibility should become part of the assessment of professional qualifications in TVET. Policy for TVET in Brazil, for example, recognises that technical education should combine the development of particular skills with broad education goals, including promotion of democratic processes within schools. Education policies in China put ‘a premium on integrating learning with thinking.’²⁵ Critical thinking and human values in TVET form part of the holistic concept of quality education in which knowledge, values, competencies and skills go hand in hand. Policy steps to embed human values in the TVET system would ensure that it does not remain merely instrumental but it is endowed with a value system as well. Besides, making TVET socially better esteemed and professionally more coveted and rewarding can go a long way in transforming this stream.

Evolving Education Systems towards Lifelong Learning and Skills Development

Lifelong learning has emerged as an important policy perspective in skills development as a ‘continuum of learning’ and training. Universities as centres of learning are diversifying their offers with courses and content tailored to the knowledge and skills needed for the economy. They are thus becoming ‘the main meeting places for learning throughout life, opening their doors to adults who wish either to resume their studies or to adapt and develop their knowledge or to satisfy their taste for learning in all areas of cultural life.’²⁶

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Initiatives for lifelong learning taken in China provide a good example. The objective of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016-20) of China²⁷ is to develop continuing education and build a lifelong education and training system that benefits all people, with open sharing of education resources. A national plan for modernising the education system is aimed at building a basic framework for lifelong education so that everyone can be taught what they want to learn, excel at what they learn, and put what they have learned to use.²⁸

A key role devolves upon the corporate sector for promoting lifelong learning and providing work experience opportunities.²⁹ Disbursement of training levies in South Africa payable by all employers in the country has the objective to ensure that training is of the appropriate quality and meets standards as laid down by the national framework. Employers have the main responsibility for developing the competences of their workforce and can take on wider corporate social responsibilities, for example, when they open up their training opportunities and resources to a wider public.

Evolving education systems towards lifelong learning need to be anchored in a legal framework. Drawing upon each other's experience, BRICS countries can take steps with a view to developing laws and education policies on lifelong learning as a follow up to the Incheon Declaration³⁰ adopted at the World Education Forum in May 2015. This Declaration expresses the commitment of governments including those from the BRICS countries to promote quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, with equitable and increased access to quality TVET as well as higher education and research. These commitments also include quality assurance, recognition, validation and accreditation of technical knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education. A normative framework along these lines is all the more important in view of the stipulation in the Moscow Declaration by the Education Ministers of BRICS countries to 'promote lifelong learning and encourage self-education through both formal and informal modes, and strive towards a state of excellence.'

Conventional International Cooperation and its Intra-BRICS Dimensions

Considerations pertaining to equivalence of qualifications and degrees and diplomas and their recognition have also relevance in the context of conventional international cooperation and its intra-BRICS dimensions. Conventional bilateral or multilateral international cooperation which extends to all regions and all countries in general also includes BRICS countries. Educational exchange programmes/Memorandum of Understandings entered into by India with 51 countries cover BRICS countries as well. They envisage cooperation through several initiatives like exchange of scholars/ students/researchers; sharing of information/publications; organising joint seminars/workshops/conferences, etc. and working towards mutual recognition of qualifications. India has also launched the Global Initiative of Academic Network (GIAN) for inviting leading academicians from across the world to come and take short courses in Indian universities and technological institutions, meeting the costs from Government. With its *de facto* leaning towards the western world, cooperation with BRICS countries does not receive the priority it deserves in this initiative. Stipulations in the Delhi Declaration adopted at the BRICS Summit (March 2012) must become the leitmotiv in the drive towards cooperation. As this Declaration states, there is a ‘storehouse of knowledge, know-how, capacities and best practices available in our countries’ that can be shared ‘for the mutual benefit of BRICS as well as other developing countries.’ Expanding ‘the number of scholarship opportunities to students across BRICS Member States’³¹ as agreed at the meeting of the Education Ministers meeting in Beijing (2017) is a promising step towards forging greater collaboration among Universities in these countries. BRICS must optimise intra-BRICS knowledge sharing possibilities, drawing upon its own assets and intellectual capital with a view to becoming a leading global education force.

The flow of students and researchers moving abroad to enhance academic credentials can be directed, as in the case of China, to developing expertise and competences for nation building. China’s National Plan

Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-20) recognises that in order to meet the requirement of opening up the Chinese economy and society to the world, large numbers of talents shall be cultivated that are imbued with global vision, well-versed in international rules, and capable of participating in international affairs and competition.

Cooperation among BRICS countries can also derive strength from regional approaches. In Brazil, for example, the Regional Academic Mobility Programme since 2006 multilaterally and within MERCOSUR is aimed at strengthening educational cooperation with member states especially in Latin America and Africa.³² The African region has greater opportunities of benefitting from South Africa's cooperation in the field of education. Such approaches are useful in broad-basing cooperation among BRICS countries for the benefit of the developing countries as well.

Intra-BRICS dimensions of conventional international cooperation are also noteworthy in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda adopted in New York in September 2015 of which education constitutes Goal 4. BRICS countries which remain committed along with other countries from all over the world to this global agenda have taken a common position to 'share the best practices available in BRICS nations on collaboration in education, innovation and research through the BRICS Network University.'³³ The BRICS countries also committed themselves along with all other countries to the Incheon Declaration (May 2015) on the 2030 Education Agenda. Their common approach in advancing towards Education 2030 targets recognises the importance of 'advocacy for global educational policies' and interest to share the experiences and practices in achieving the SDG4-Education 2030 targets in order to foster 'a more favourable policy environment', taking into account the 'common concerns and priorities of the BRICS Member States.'³⁴

While creating a more favourable policy environment, BRICS countries need to take full cognisance of some trends which may impede or

adversely affect the process of cooperation among them. How can these countries consolidate cooperation among them when confronted with the phenomenon of internationalisation of higher education? How can public authorities in these countries preserve the concept of education as a public good and social responsibility in education in the face of privatisation of higher education, reducing education to business and breeding inequities and marginalisation? Above all, how can they preserve the humanistic mission of education when materialistic pursuits are becoming predominant today?.

Consolidating Intra-BRICS Cooperation in Face of the Internationalisation of Higher Education

Internationalisation of higher education involves international branch campuses, joint degree programmes and direct or indirect foreign ownership or investment in domestic educational institutions. Universities from the western countries are becoming predominant players in this. Spreading their operations across political boundaries, they are establishing their seats in the developing world wherever it is lucrative. This casts its spell over the higher education system in BRICS countries and impacts the prospects of their cooperation. This could work against the objectives of

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Internationalisation of higher education carries great risk by diverting attention from the classical type of higher education by accumulating advantages in the most advanced countries and institutions, by discriminating against the most deprived and by contributing to brain drain in many poor countries.³⁵ Moreover, online education providers based overseas and operating freely via the Internet offer their own courses and award degrees free from control.

The challenge before BRICS countries is to avoid the pitfalls of the internationalisation of education. Minimising it as an external dominating factor, they must turn it into an avenue for cementing intra-BRICS cooperation. They can create and broaden sui generis educational space which gives impetus to academic exchange programmes and mobility of students and scholars within their countries and which is built upon their collective strength. While moving in that direction, BRICS countries must strive towards making their Universities coveted destination for studies abroad, especially for students and researchers from developing countries.

In this context of the internationalisation of higher education, emerging modalities of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) is another concern that calls for some detailed attention. MOOC is portrayed as an alternative path to higher education. It can pull students into the fold of so-called 'elite' universities with 'star professors', publicised as being most the prestigious. MOOC is also being fostered as a stream for giving credits. This can have repercussions on BRICS universities and qualifications obtained. In order to counter this trend, BRICS countries must devise innovative modalities for building intra-BRICS MOOCs, as well as national level MOOC-type approaches, like the SWAYAM launched in India as an online interactive learning platform aimed at making high quality education widely accessible.

BRICS-Pioneered Evaluation and Ranking of Universities

The prevailing systems of evaluation and global ranking of universities are widely publicised, bringing into spotlight universities from the western world and perpetuating their stranglehold over the global educational institutions. As a result, students from developing countries rush to these universities. This undermines the image and worth of their own universities. BRICS countries have expressed serious concern with the prevalent ranking system of universities projected worldwide, as it does not take into account ‘social function’ of higher education institutions for ‘human development.’²³⁶

It is, therefore, vital to critically review current evaluation methods and approaches in a bid to move towards a new system of evaluation and ranking of universities. It should be designed with a view to harnessing universities for promoting common well-being and a humane society and fostering the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind, as reflected in UNESCO’s institutional mission. ‘Social function’ of higher education and its contribution to ‘human development’ should be its main attributes. Key parameters for ranking universities and their evaluation are provided by the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century (1998). It stipulates that education should be geared to help protect and enhance ‘societal values’ and calls upon higher education institutions ‘to give the opportunity to students to fully develop their own abilities with a sense of social responsibility, educating them to become promoters of change that will foster equity and justice.’²³⁷ Devising a system of ranking of universities by the BRICS with new evaluation parameters can be of immense value for gaining the respectability of many well-deserving universities in BRICS as well as in other developing countries which are tendentiously rated and ranked as being of not much worth. In tune with the strategic focus of BRICS on creating a new polycentric world order, this would make the world of higher education and its evaluation and ranking ‘polycentric’, thereby mitigating the hegemony of the western world.

New evaluation parameters for rating educational institutions need to abandon the 'input-output' model which has come into vogue in education policies and which equates schools and universities with industrial units. The 'input-output' model presupposes as if there is an analogy between schools³⁸ and factories. This neglects the process of teaching and learning and the elements for assuring quality and equity³⁹ and defeats the noble cause of education. It is, therefore, necessary to discard the 'input-output' model, and instead, embrace innovative methods of "assessment of students' educational progress or achievements," considering education as a process that unfolds lifelong.

Safeguarding education from forces of privatisation

Education of which both the individual and the society are beneficiaries is a public good and a foundation of human development. This is recognised in the Incheon Declaration (2015) to which all governments of the world including those from BRICS countries remain committed. However, the concept of education as a public good is being eroded by the upsurge of private providers with profit-seeking business interests. Under the spell of neoliberal approaches, private higher education has become the fastest growing segment worldwide. As a result, public higher education has to grapple with the emerging global marketplace and the growing spirit of competition in higher education.⁴⁰ Privatisation by definition is detrimental to education as a public good, and sacrifices social interest in education for the sake of private profit. Those spearheading forces of privatisation are jeopardising public universities as if these have no legitimacy or *raison d'être*. International consortiums have become specialised in 'selling' education and one can observe the emergence of a 'quasi-market phenomenon' in the field of higher education.⁴¹ 'Edu-business' has become the new buzz word.

Safeguarding education from forces of privatisation and preserving it as public good is not only a legal responsibility; it is also a moral imperative. Cooperation among BRICS countries can be a bulwark against unabashed commercialisation of education. This, can with enhanced support from government, enable public universities to preserve their independence

and save the higher education system from becoming subservient to market forces. Common legal approach by BRICS countries can be invaluable for this purpose. An example is provided by the Education Law of China which provides that ‘educational activities must conform to the public interest of the State and society’ and that ‘no organization or individual may operate a school or any other type of educational institution for profit.’⁴² Similarly, the Russian Federal Law on Education provides a number of guarantees of the social nature of education as a public good and of the social function of education. (Article 2 (1)). Such legal and policy approaches deserve to be considered in the context of expansion of private higher education in Brazil which has resulted in the weakening of public higher education⁴³ and increased educational inequalities.⁴⁴ India, where a very large number of tertiary level private educational establishments have flourished, also needs to take legal steps to stop education from being commercialised. As in the case of India, proprietors of such establishments mostly amass wealth by exorbitant admission fees. The existing provisions in India’s University Grants Commission Act require to be strengthened with effective enforcement. The provision in the Act that no candidate shall secure admission to a university course of study by ‘reason of economic power’ and thereby prevent more meritorious candidates from securing admission remains only on paper. South Africa where higher education is offered by private institutions, owned by companies and individuals, also needs to reinforce the regulatory framework. Obliging private institutions to be registered with South Africa’s Department of Higher Education and Training can be strengthened by stringent control measures in addition to accreditation by the Council on Higher Education, bearing in mind the concept of education as a public good.

In this respect, a practice which calls for earnest attention is that of access to education in private educational institutions, in which social status, economic situation or property are determinant factors, even when these are forbidden grounds of discrimination under human rights law. This not only violates the right to education but also exacerbates marginalisation and exclusion in education. BRICS countries can set an

example by outlawing this, bearing in mind their legal obligations under international human rights conventions as well as moral responsibility assumed along with other countries for the 2030 Education Agenda.

Preserving Humanistic Mission of Education

Value-based education is being eclipsed by materialistic pursuits in education which are becoming predominant today. As a result, children and youth are being deprived of basic values. Schools as places of dissemination of knowledge, morals, and values and the universities as seats of learning for the pursuit of ideals of humanity are being drawn into the stronghold of materialistic values by forces of privatisation. With the spread of corporate culture, universities are being bereft of humanism and faculties of Humanities are losing esteem for not being 'productive.'

Preserving the humanistic mission is one of the biggest moral challenges today. As stipulated in the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century (1998), radical changes are needed in higher education so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound 'crisis of values', can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate 'deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality... inspired by love for humanity and guided by wisdom.'⁴⁵

Such a mission of higher education deserves to be embraced by BRICS countries which are richly endowed with traditional wisdom and ideals. They must give this primacy in evolving new architecture in education.

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Traditions in education are their assets for fostering human values in education. India's civilisational values and spiritual heritage is an invaluable font of the humanistic mission of education. The teachings of Swami Vivekananda on universal brotherhood, considering the whole of humanity as a family are perennial for guiding us towards such ideals. In China, the concept of the quality of education centres around the holistic development of morals, intellect, physical strength and aesthetic aptitude, as outlined in the 2001 Comprehensive Curriculum Reform Guidelines. Ethics and moral values are strong pillars of the education system in China. The teachings of Confucius enlighten us on the philosophic foundations of the cultural value system in a humanistic spirit. The work of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire advances an ideal of humanisation through transformative reflection and action and stresses the importance of developing ethical and educational virtues. Tolstoy's ideas on peace and non-violence were expressed in *Unto the Last*, which influenced Mahatma Gandhi, and remain abiding values even today. Governments can be inspired by the concept of education as the most powerful weapon as Nelson Mandela said. It is first and foremost a weapon in the service of humanity and not for destroying human values. The humanistic nature of education and priority of common human values are part of the Principles of State Policy in the field of education in the Education Law of the Russian Federation. Education, according to this Law, implies a purposeful process of educating and upbringing which is implemented in the interest of a person, the society and the state. Primacy to be given to 'values education' is central to harnessing education to 'the full development of the human person' as an essential objective of education, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights conventions. Fostering human values in education deserves foremost consideration in cooperative endeavour among BRICS countries. Universities in these countries can take a lead with an important role in redeeming the noble cause of education. Philosophic foundations and traditions in education existing in BRICS countries can be a springboard to that end.

Perspectives on Future Cooperation

The creation of the BRICS University League and the establishment of the BRICS Network University for forging cooperation among leading

universities and research-and-education centres of excellence are of historical importance. These landmark developments must be seen in unison, with an eye on their potential role covering the entire gamut of activities in the field of higher education. The development frame work by way of the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoU) is characterised by the preponderance of technical fields. This is highly important for building competencies and skills. The MoU also states that ‘Knowledge field priorities of the BRICS NU activity shall correspond to the priorities and main areas of cooperation amongst the BRICS member countries, as they are stated in the Article 3 of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation between the BRICS member countries.’⁴⁶ Joint projects in different forms of postgraduate education with priority to Masters’ and Ph.D programmes envisaged in the MoU should thus adopt a holistic approach on science, technology and innovation.

The MoU also has the aim of promoting ‘research and innovation.’ This is especially significant. Basic/fundamental research has been the bedrock of progress in applied sciences and technology innovations. This however does not get full support in the developing world. Common policy approaches targeted at Research and Development (R and D), devoting to basic/fundamental research a certain minimum percentage of GDP or the national budget can raise its profile in cooperative endeavour among BRICS countries.

Cooperation in humanities and social sciences is equally important and must be fostered along with cooperation in technical areas. Developments towards future cooperation among BRICS countries clearly signal that it will not remain limited to technical areas only. BRICS leaders place great hopes on the transformative power of higher education. They have recognised the ‘contribution’ that it makes for ‘the development of high-level human resources and intellectual support for the economic and social development.’⁴⁷ This will require mutually reinforcing and synergetic approaches between the BRICS University League and the BRICS Network University

New dimensions of future cooperation among BRICS countries are inspired by cultural and civilisational ethos. This is reflected in the

Xiamen Declaration (September 2017) which expresses the resolve of the BRICS leaders to “promote mutual learning between our cultures and civilisations, making BRICS partnership closer to our people’s hearts” and to ‘cultivate common values on the basis of diversity and sharing.’⁴⁸ Thus, the BRICS agenda for cooperation in the field of education is becoming more ambitious and aspirational. The new vision which it embodies will have a far-reaching impact on charting the future of BRICS, founded on ‘common values.’ The BRICS countries seem poised to take on the daunting challenge of ‘cultivating’ these common values.

This would demand collective measures and concerted action for devising bold educational projects and programmes engaging the BRICS intellectual community with a view to progress towards future cooperation. The expanding horizons of cooperation seem propitious for fostering value-based education. This might reverse the trend towards materialistic pursuits in education. It might also mitigate a commercial and corporate value system propagated by private providers in education who cater to a particular social strata and establish a learning system devoid of cultural diversity. Future cooperation can be expected to make respect for cultural diversity a cherished objective of education. Moreover, this can valorise traditional values in education with which BRICS countries are richly endowed. All these and other related steps towards future cooperation demand greater space for human and social sciences for promoting ‘mutual learning’ between ‘cultures and civilisations’ of BRICS countries. Commitment by the Education Ministers from these countries to ‘increase cultural cooperation through language education and multilingualism to promote mutual understanding of the history and culture of BRICS Member States’⁴⁹ opens a vast area of future cooperation with further demands on education policies, programmes and projects.

Progress in that direction also relates to the education system as a subject of study in university education faculties or centres in BRICS countries. Initiating graduate and post-graduate courses of study *on the education system* in these countries must become an important aspect of future cooperation. The diversity of their education system is their richness

also, as it is valuable for drawing upon each other's experiences and approaches for mutual benefit.

Promoting knowledge and understanding of political systems among BRICS countries is another area of critical importance. Each of the BRICS countries has its own political system which must become well known among all of them. This also calls for measures aimed at promoting studies and research in this area in universities with a view to making each other's political system better known. University courses and research and study programmes on this should also include international relations and BRICS. Introducing new courses on these lines would build bridges of greater reciprocal understanding and rapprochement. This would bring the BRICS academic community closer, bound by knowledge-sharing with a sense of oneness.

Emerging architecture in education in BRICS countries has systemic implications for education laws in these countries. Almost all countries have education law(s) which provide their education system with a legal framework. As of now, these differ considerably in BRICS countries. Studies and research in this field in a comparative perspective can be highly useful to analyse underlying concepts, approaches as well as legal and policy issues. This can enable to harmonise education laws and then devise a BRICS-wide education law framework for providing an enduring and homogenous basis for future collaboration

With over 40 per cent of the world population, BRICS can become the leading voice in charting the global education agenda. To that end, the evolution of the new education architecture of the BRICS countries would demand progress on several fronts, highlighted above. A common vision and mission of education in the face of challenges of globalisation is of paramount importance in the drive towards future cooperation among BRICS countries, with new dynamics of south-south cooperation for the benefit of the developing world. This will have a great impact on global developments today and tomorrow.

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