

## Status of Higher Education in India: Challenges, Issues and Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

The status of higher education in India is lagging behind in many aspects based on global standards. (Bhatia & Dash, 2010) The faculties of Indian Academic Institutions face several challenges to maintain their job and the quality of the educational institutions. Indians however have been known to make a mark academically in the global perspective and have been part of many renowned types of research. Some of the finest researchers have an Indian origin. According to McNulty (2017), it was seen that Indians with American citizenship give more emphasis to academics and education. The study is an exploratory study conducted to determine the opinion of Indian researchers and academicians regarding higher education. An opinion questionnaire was conducted and 57 Indian participants who have indulged in higher education were involved in the study. The data was taken on a five-point rating scale, statistically analysed, and discussed

**Keywords:** Higher education, Indian education, Academic decline, Indian University, brain drain.

Higher education is a very serious business in the Indian subcontinent. In the last two decades, India has seen a rapid increase in capacitating higher education. (Ravi.et.al., 2019) Higher education pursuit and enrollment have increased almost four-folds since 2001. (MHRD, 2018) Higher education is pursuing an education at the degree, post-graduation or doctorate level. Indians as a community have always been keen in academic pursuit. The oldest university of India, Taxila or Takshashila dates back to 800 B.C. There are records of almost 10,500 students and scholars and almost 2000 teachers associated with Taxila. There were traces of almost 68 subjects like philosophy, astronomy, state-craft, law, plants and herbs, medicines and surgery (Taksha Institute, n.d.) Nalanda University is also one of the ancient universities in the world which dates back to the 6th Century B.C. Nalanda was the seat of Buddhist traditions and a monastic center. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018)

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### ***Role of National Academic Bodies***

Indian higher education is largely monitored by the University Grants Commission, which is a statutory body by the Union Government. It was set up after the UGC Act 1956, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development and is largely responsible for maintaining standards of higher education in India. (*The University Grants Commission Act 1956* (New Delhi)) In the year 1992, University Grants Commission established National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The aim of this body was to monitor and quality control the higher education sector in India. (NAAC-National Assessment and Accreditation Council, n.d.)

### ***Global Position of Indian Academic Institutions***

Although India seems to be invested in higher education and research, the global positioning of the academic institutes speaks differently. In the year 2019, only seven Indian Universities were ranked in the top 400 universities across the globe by the QS World University Rankings. Among these, six are the Indian Institute of Technology and the seventh one is the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. (Ahmad, 2019) Some of the factors that could be facilitating this gap could be attributed to the teaching quality. The quality of teachers generally can be attributed to a faculty's qualifications and his/her motivation to be a part of imparting knowledge. A faculty is also required to have a vast knowledge about the subject, to apply the concept to different aspects of academics and research. According to the National Education Policy Draft Report by TSR Subramanian, the standard of education provided by many colleges are quite unsatisfactory. 40% of the college teachers work on a contractual basis, and the difficulty lies in the fact that individuals with sound academic records wouldn't take this as an option. (Ahmad, 2019)

### ***Faculty in Indian Educational Institutions***

Faculty may be kept under pressure to engage in research and publish papers to facilitate their positional promotion. However, the funds allocated for research may be very limited. In India, for higher education, the maximum allocation of government funds for research goes to the premier institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology, the Indian Institute of Science, and some of the Central Universities. (Jha & Rao, 2019) Under such circumstances, it can be assumed that most of the research and publications would be compromised on their quality. Also, with the pressure of publishing papers, there would be more emphasis on research than on teaching. (Ahmad, 2019)

### ***Challenges of faculties in the Indian Education System***

The university heads in India are called Vice-Chancellors and they are expected to be in the leadership position. Universities and colleges are like organizations or industries of knowledge where the head of the organization steers the progress of the courses. However, in India, the head of the institute is not chosen on the basis of academic rigor, but in many situations, the politically connected faculty gets the chance. (Ahmad, 2019) In 2015, The Times of India reported that almost ₹20 lakhs to ₹35 lakhs gets paid as a bribe for a post of assistant professor in a government college. (Corruption ruining edu dept:Experts, 2015) This somewhere sends a clear message that the post of a faculty is not accessible by everyone.

### ***Reservation and status for minority community***

Another phenomenon that could be affecting the higher education system in India is seats reserved for minorities. The objective behind this is not a malicious one and was intended to have equal representation of minorities like scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, other

backward castes and religious minorities. The long-term plan somewhere was to do away with the age-old practice of discrimination that was prevalent in the nation. However, the reservations for seats in higher education may not be a successful plan to resolve the crisis of discrimination. Data suggests that this has created further discrimination among students, and colleges have failed to receive academically oriented, quality students. A recent report by India Today in 2019, suggested that 10 percent of reservations were approved by the prime minister of India for jobs and higher education. (Upadhyay, 2019)

### *Indian Education System and Employment*

An important function of higher education is employment prospects. With the rise in pursuit of higher education, it is expected that India needs to make provisions to accommodate the citizens in the job market. But sadly, the actual scenario is somewhat different. Over the past ten years, there has been a sharp decline in the percentage of employment. From 40% in 2005, the number has come down to 18% in 2017. (Acharya, 2018)

The current study focuses on finding out the opinion of individuals who are or have pursued higher education in the past, about the current notion of higher education in India. The need of the study emerges from the data which proves the current position of India in the aspect of higher education among the whole world. It is important to determine what we Indians feel about this pressing issue and if a change in the scenario can be anticipated after this.

## **METHODS**

### *Research Design*

The study follows a cross-sectional design as a section of the society- individuals who are or have pursued higher education in the past have been chosen for the study. The study is a non-experimental survey, where data has been collected based on an opinion questionnaire. The study follows an exploratory design as the goal was to explore the opinions of participants about higher education status currently in India.

### *Sample*

A non-probability sampling procedure was chosen, where sampling was done following a convenient and snowball sampling method. The participants' characteristics are as follows:

- Only individuals above 18 years of age were chosen for the study.
- Individuals who have pursued higher education or are currently pursuing higher education were chosen for the study. Higher education in this context is any education acquired after 12 years of schooling.
- Individuals who follow (read, write and speak) English were chosen for the study.
- The participants who did not have graduation as their minimum educational qualifications were excluded from the study.
- The participants who had not yet attained 18 years of age, but were pursuing higher education were excluded from the study.
- All the participants who were not Indian national were excluded from the study.

### *Method of Data Collection*

The participants were given a socio-demographic data sheet using google forms. A message regarding confidentiality of responses was mentioned and it was also conveyed through the form that their participation is completely voluntary. Once, the socio-demographic data sheet was filled, the survey questionnaire containing questions asking the participants to rate

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their opinion on higher education was given. The participants had to rate each question on a five-point rating scale.

### *Analysis of Data*

The data analysis was done following a quantitative method. The socio-demographic details were analyzed first. The count of each socio-demographic data was chosen. Percentage was chosen to analyze the ratings of each participant. The results were then discussed.

## **RESULTS**

The results have been tabulated considering two aspects. The first tabulation was done based on the socio-demographic data. The second tabulation was done based on the responses and the ratings of the participants on the five-point rating scale.

### *Results depicting socio-demographic details*

The analysis of the socio-demographic data shows that, a data of total 57 participants. The participants range in age from 20 years to 66 years of age. The maximum age representation is from the age group 22 years. 12 participants out of 57 participants (an approximate estimate of 21%) who have responded belonged to this age group.

The data shows a high representation of female participants as compared to male participants. Out of 57 participants, 46 participants (almost 80.7%) are female, whereas, 11 participants (almost 19.3%) are male.

The participants have different educational qualifications. 18 participants had completed graduation (almost 31.6%), 32 participants had completed post-graduation (almost 56.1%), 5 participants (almost 8.8%) had completed M.Phil. or any equivalent Pre-doctoral degree and 2 participants (almost 3.5%) had completed a PhD or equivalent Doctoral degree.

The participants come from varied occupational backgrounds. The majority of the participants are students, 21 out of 57 participants (almost 36.8%), 17 participants out of 57 belong to a teaching profession (almost 29.8%), 15 participants are from the service sector (26.3%) and the rest 4 participants are full-time research scholars (7%).

The participants are from varied residential backgrounds as well. 52 participants are from urban backgrounds (91.2%) and the remaining 5 participants were from the sub-urban background. All 57 participants were of Indian nationality.

### *Results based on the response and ratings of the participants*

The analysis of the results is done based on the mean of 57 responses to each question. The table below contains the data of all participants and their average performance.

*Table 1 Showing the mean of 57 responses to the questions.*

Questions	Mean Score
India was a country under colonial rule for about 200 years. Do you feel this has an impact on the current education structure in India?	4.07
Do you feel that the higher education system in India is shaped by the current socio-political scenario?	3.75

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Do you feel religious orientation has a role to play in education in India?	3.67
What is your opinion on a visible gender difference in the pursuit of higher education in India?	3.59
The knowledge one gathers in higher education is often connected to occupational engagement. What is your opinion on this?	3.65
Today, not a single Indian University finds a place in the top 200 positions in the global ranking of Universities. What is your opinion on this?	3.60
What is your opinion on the Quality of academicians teaching at the college/ University level in India?	2.85
How much empathy and understanding is shown by an academician towards his/her students currently in India?	2.59
How intellectually stimulating is the curriculum of current higher education in India?	2.47
In India, currently there is a "brain drain" phenomenon, where there is an outflow of Intellectuals to the West. How much is the higher education system in India responsible for this?	3.98

The average response on a five-point rating scale where 1 indicates “strong disagreement” and 5 indicates “strong agreement” to the concept was used. The mean score for each of the questions indicates the extent of the agreeableness of 57 participants on the concept. The mean scores follow a pattern where the higher the score, the higher the extent of agreeableness to the concept.

In the question to indicate the influence of colonial impact on higher education in India, the average response indicates agreement over the issue. The mean score on this question is 4.07.

The question concerning whether the higher education system in India is shaped by the current socio-political scenario also received a fairly agreeable opinion. The mean score on this question is 3.75.

There is a fair level of agreeableness to the concept of whether religious orientation shapes higher education in India, where the mean score is 3.67. The opinion is average to the concept of whether there is any visible gender difference in higher education in India. The mean score for this question is 3.59.

Participants have fairly agreed to the fact that higher education is connected to the occupational engagement of a person, as the mean score is 3.65. There is also moderate agreement on the fact that none of the Indian Universities find a global ranking among the top 200 educational institutes. The mean score for this question is 3.60.

In the context of how qualified the academicians involved in higher education in India are, strong disapproval is observed. The mean score is 2.85, which suggests that the participants

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feel that most academicians are not qualified enough. With regard to academicians being empathetic the mean score is 2.59, which indicates that participants regard most faculties to be low on empathy.

The mean score of the question, whether the curriculum is intellectually stimulating, is 2.47. This indicates that the participants consider the curriculum to be quite low in intellectual stimulation. With regard to the “brain drain” currently observed in India, the mean score of the participants is 3.98. This shows fair agreeableness to the concept.

### DISCUSSION

India is known to be the seat of learning from a very ancient age. Some of the oldest and most important names of educational institutes like Takhashila, Nalanda and Vikramshila are associated with the Indian subcontinent. (Aayush, n.d) India has known to be the home of some of the pioneers in the field of research and education. Chanakya, who was an Indian philosopher, was known to flourish in 300 B.C. He is noted for his famous work “Arthashastra” which explored the then economic policies and concept of material gains. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019) Aryabhatta was the renowned Indian mathematician and astronomer, whose most noted work was to invent the ‘concept of zero’. (Sherrif, 2018) India has nine Nobel prize winners from Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 to Abhijit Banerjee in 2019. (“Nobel Prize Winners from India”, n.d) However, the top Indian Universities, currently don’t find a suitable global ranking among the top 100 institutes. Institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay have a global ranking of 513 and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore has a global ranking of 530. (“Best Global Universities in India”, n.d.)

In the present study, there is high agreeableness to the concept that the Indian higher education system is influenced largely by the colonial reign. The Indian education system was influenced by societal and cultural aspects in the past. In the Vedic age, Brahmacharya was the student phase of individuals. During this phase, the student was taught to become ready to be an independent living individual in the world. (Mondal, n.d) Currently, the Indian education system has made a shift from the age-old traditions of academics. Sanskrit scripts have become replaced with English and an obsession to know the English language is a preoccupation seen among most Indians. Replacement of regional languages as the third language to international languages like French, German and Mandarin for better prospects is proof of the influence of globalization, whose roots lie in the effect of the colonial reign. (Duttagupta, 2014) The shift from open-air classrooms which made the students remain close to nature has been replaced with education behind closed doors using PowerPoint presentations and smart classrooms to show the artificial version of the natural elements.

The present study suggests that Indian education is shaped by the socio-political scenario. This phenomenon can probably be discussed in the light of the authority enjoyed by politically connected people in academic situations. Political corruption can influence the education system in terms of mishandling of academic quota, educational funds and quality of faculties getting posted into the education system through political influence. (Borah, 2012)

In the study religious orientation does seem to take the limelight in governing higher education. India is a secular country by the constitution and no state religion is endorsed under this. However, the majority of civilians follow Hinduism in terms of religion. The statistics show that students from the religious minority are also rising. In the last decade

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Muslim students pursuing higher education have increased from 5.2% to 13.8%, although among all other religious minorities they are the least represented group in higher education. (Bahri, 2016) In recent research conducted on individuals pursuing higher education in Bangalore, India, it was seen that religion does play a significant role in shaping the fate of students pursuing higher education. The factors that have been in focus in the study were communal politics, religious stereotypes and gender differences among religions. (Sahu, Jeffery & Nakkeeran, 2016)

The study depicts a neutral opinion towards gender equality and representation in higher education. With the changing times, female representation in Indian higher education statistics has improved. With the increased national-level programs and scholarships for the female child in education the sex ratio seems to change. (Government Schemes and Policies for Girl Child Empowerment, 2019)

India academically has failed to gain global attention and to secure a top-ranking position internationally. The participants in the study have also affirmed it. The top-ranking institutes in the nation, like the IITs have also not been able to secure a position in the first 100 universities in the world. (Altbach & Matthews, 2019) The study also shows the participants' opinions on the quality of academics in India are rather poor. Many faculties in Indian Universities may not engage in research which eventually brings down the academic rigor of the attached institutes. The National Institute of Ranking Framework (NIRF) for many colleges dropped down due to a lack of substantial research. (Altbach & Matthews, 2019) The present study also affirms their opinion on the empathy shown by the Indian academicians. The participants have rated the empathy and understanding level of Indian professors towards their students as pretty poor. A study by Devi & Babu, (2015) shows that stress management and emotional management play an important role in emotional intelligence among Indian engineering college faculty members. In a country like India, where social stressors often prevent faculty from teaching up to their full potential, the expectation of empathy towards students can be a far-fetched expectation.

The higher education curriculum in India is often outdated and doesn't meet the needs of the industry. (Kaushika, 2007) The present study represents that the participants have affirmed the fact that the curriculum is lacking intellectual stimulation. In this context, it is also important to focus on the fact that educational quality and curriculum are often linked to the resources available, which might be a constraint in the Indian scenario. ("A Brief Account of Higher Education in India", n.d.)

The phenomenon of "brain drain" from India has become a serious and alarming issue. Research shows that skilled individuals, 79% from India and 88% from China are currently in the USA. (Dodani & LaPorte, 2005) In the year 2018, the percentage of Indians migrating to Canada for a Permanent Residency has increased to 50%. ("Number of Indians acquiring permanent residency in Canada jumps 50% in 2018", 2019)

## CONCLUSION

The concept of the declining nature of the Indian higher education system has been prevalent for a long time. The study aimed to assess the factors which contribute to the decline. The idea of this study was to bring about a change in thought about higher education engagement in India. The issues addressed in this study are serious and need attention. Higher education determines a country's future and the academicians are the builders of the future. The study

hopes to shed light on these issues and bring about a holistic change in the way the country's academics function.

### ***Ethics Approval Declaration***

We hereby confirm that the present study was approved by the institutional research ethics committee. The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The methods of data collection used in the study were completely non-invasive and the participants were informed in detail about the risks and benefits of being involved in the study. Informed consent was taken from all participants.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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