

THE MANY STRUCTURAL FLAWS IN INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

Cap, Hat, Internet, Mortarboard, Sign

The furore surrounding fee hikes at the Jawaharlal Nehru University has spurred deeper questions about the quality of university education. India's higher education system is structurally flawed and underfunded. This crisis will affect innovation and human capital, the two pillars of labour productivity and GDP growth, while cheating India's largest demographic of its potential.

The mammoth system deserves better than the superficial data that is being bandied about. For example, a surge in women's enrolment has been much-talked about but this does not necessarily imply better outcomes. The latest 'India Skills Report' suggests that only 47% of Indian graduates are employable — a problem exacerbated by startlingly low faculty figures.

Faculty vacancies at government institutions are at 50% on average. A Deloitte gathering of 63 Deans of top-tier institutions revealed that 80% of those listed lack of quality faculty as their biggest concern. The problem lies in increased demand, and stagnant supply. The number of institutions has surged in India since the 2000s, while the number of students doing PhD has remained constant. Meanwhile, there are over a 1,00,000 India-born PhDs in universities around the world, kept away by paltry salaries and poor funding. China solved this problem by attracting Chinese-origin PhDs back home with dollar salaries and monetary incentives for published research. Tsinghua University, for example, is designed on the Western model of teaching and research, and is even ahead of MIT in terms of published papers.

However, Indian universities persist in separating research and teaching activities, depriving students of exposure to cutting-edge ideas. Monetary incentives for academia are practically non-existent, and Indian R&D expenditure at 0.62% of GDP is one of the lowest in emerging economies. It is not surprising, then, that Indian universities rank low in both research and teaching. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, at rank 155, was our highest in the Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) for research while six Chinese institutes figured in the top 50.

Such flaws could affect macroeconomic indicators such as labour productivity, which is determined by innovation and human capital, among other things. The workers of tomorrow need to transition to the formal, non-agricultural sector, armed with higher education credentials. In addition, an increase in research could lead to more innovation in the economy, which might in turn drive up labour productivity. Higher education has a potential twofold effect on productivity. The government released a Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) in June 2019, which proposed ambitious reforms. The DNEP aims to double education spending to 6% of GDP, and close the research-teaching divide in higher education. This is coupled with an 'Institutions of Eminence' programme started in 2018 that gave increased funding to some research universities. Experts, however, are doubtful about whether the dramatic increases will be politically feasible, and whether the implementation of such reforms will go the path of previous NEPs — watered down and eventually shelved.

What lies ahead? The government needs to recognise the systemic anger at play, and ensure that higher education's role in innovation and human capital is not ignored. The DNEP is a great

first-step, but the reforms must be pushed through and must lead to legislation that will fund research-based universities. Only this can bring a culture of discovery and accountability to India's higher education institutions.

Mohini Bishnoi is pursuing a Masters in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Why you should pay for quality journalism - [Click to know more](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

How an idea for a 'perfect Mumbai feature story' failed to materialise

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Support The Hindu's new online experience.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com