

### THE CORE REASONS

The study in focus here has found that since the late 1960s, HEI management in India has substantially reduced the autonomy of college teachers. Their role has, over time, been reduced to mere employees of large hierarchical organizations. This, along with the lack of rigorous teacher training, results in less effective teaching, especially at the undergraduate level. At the master's level, teachers use different methods, but there is limited follow-up assessment on whether these methods result in effective learning. Students are rarely consulted for detailed feedback and open discussion of challenges. The lack of training in and exposure to modern interactive teaching pedagogies, as well as continued traditional practices, have also resulted in a culture of information-oriented teaching, which has gained passive acceptance. The large-scale recruitment of meagerly paid contractual teachers without proper training has further worsened the situation.

### SIX PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Managing information-oriented teaching:** A major challenge for teachers and teacher trainers is to manage information-oriented, theory-based teaching with an instrumental approach. It is important to build strategic plans to redesign teachers' role as mentors, facilitators, and collaborative professionals. Mechanisms and administrative setups at the national and state levels should be (re)developed.
- **Promoting interactive teaching:** Reversing the long-haul culture of unidirectional teaching with interactivity is extremely difficult. This challenge can be addressed by taking small, progressive steps connecting all levels of education. Instructors must upgrade their teaching practices by bringing in more interactive components. Needless to say, teacher training focusing on analytical and dialogic-teaching pedagogies will help.
- **Integrated use of ICTs in regular classroom teaching:** Improving the digital content repository for students and teachers with authentic online resources is necessary to help students prepare for classes in advance. Classroom teaching time can thus be used more effectively for discussion and critical reflection. Online inter- and intrainstitutional forums would be helpful in identifying challenges as well as innovative solutions.
- **Inclusive measures:** In the context of massified higher education, a teacher needs to manage diversified classrooms. Practical solutions such as the combined use of English and regional languages initially help students to understand the lecture; but for sustainable gains, it is imperative to improve their English language proficiency. Establishing language laboratories will prove

beneficial. Special training and support are welcome steps to equip students with diverse levels of competence.

- **Constructive feedback from the students:** Another step toward inclusivity is feedback from students. It will not only help teachers to improve, but also enable them to understand the students' difficulties. While open discussions and anonymous feedback may help identify the challenges students face, cordial meetings between teachers, students, and administration at regular intervals are essential to bridge disconnects. Noticeably, students open up more and provide critical feedback when there is trust.
- **Overall improvement of infrastructure, administrative awareness, and sensitivity:** At some institutions, basic infrastructure requires a complete overhaul; others need to upgrade laboratories, supply commonly used materials, and improve their ICT infrastructure. All need modern language laboratories. Critically, institutional administrations need to understand the crux of the teaching process in order to fully and effectively support it.

### CONCLUSION

India needs to improve the quality of its higher education teaching without delay. The above six principles are only relevant if implemented with dedication and robust planning. There is hope, considering recent accelerated initiatives to reform teaching in India: a multilayered and progressive implementation will ensure success and sustenance. ■

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## Employability of Graduates in India—Hard Realities

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*This article is based on an ongoing study at the CPRHE.*

While a number of academics argue for the importance of a humanistic education, those who propagate the importance of a market-responsive, skill-based education

are rapidly gaining ground. The concept of “employability skills” has become the focus of both employers and employees in developed as well as in developing countries. Over the last 20 years, definitions of employability have shifted from demand-led skills sets toward a more holistic view of “graduate attributes” including “softer” transferable skills and person-centered qualities, to be developed in conjunction with subject-specific knowledge, skills, and competencies. In the context of a dynamic labor market and fast changing technology, constant “reskilling” and “upskilling” are also required. Such demands—of shaping holistic individuals with humanistic education and professional training, to increase their chances to obtain sustainable employment—pose severe challenges to higher education systems around the globe. The problem is more acute in countries like India, not just because of the sheer size of its population, but on account of its demographic bulge of young people, leading to an ever growing student population and deficient higher education sector.

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#### **POOR GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

The job market in India is beset with imbalances in terms of the graduate labor force, on the side of both demand and supply. Such imbalances, matched with a low job growth, lead to a precarious situation, with college and university graduates consistently lying below required standards. It is estimated that hardly a quarter of engineering graduates and only 10 percent of other graduates are employable. A large body of highly educated graduates are forced to take up jobs much below their educational qualifications or enter into unsuccessful entrepreneurial pursuits. This has created a new kind of demand–supply imbalance—higher education graduates being at the same time over- and underskilled. Graduates are also forced to further supplement and complement their formal university education with other forms of skills-based education, resulting in the creation of new forms of postsecondary degree provision by underregulated private institutions charging high fees—posing additional challenges of equity and quality. Some of the basic distortions explaining the demand–supply imbalances are highlighted below.

- **General vs technical/professional disciplines:** Although the number of higher education graduates seeking jobs has been rising rapidly in the past few years, a breakdown by streams of study reveals that a majority are from general academic disciplines, with arts graduates topping the list. Meanwhile, on the demand side, it is the professionally and technically qualified graduates that employers are seeking, even in nontechnical industries and professional functions. Data reveals that more than 70 percent of college degree holders are currently engaged in the service sector, with IT/IT-enabled services (ITeS) and financial services leading with a proportion of over 50 percent. There may be two explanations for this phenomenon. First, industries and occupations related to engineering and science have been among the top five on employment indexes across major regions of the world in recent times, and second, comparatively, this group of graduates is better equipped with critical twenty-first century skills because they come from better sociocultural, economic, and academic backgrounds in India. Thus, a considerable proportion of the graduate workforce finds it difficult to get jobs, as the labor market for liberal arts graduates is narrower than for professional graduates.

The challenge here is twofold. First, motivating and training youth for other, growing sectors of the economy and second, frequent upgrading and updating of skills delivery in the highly dynamic, volatile, tech savvy IT/ITeS and financial services industry, which employs the vast majority. It is also a matter of great concern that the largest pool of graduates in nontechnical, general, and social sciences programs are generalists with broad socioeconomic knowledge, but without any specific technical skills suited to a particular employment segment.

- **Quality:** Data reveals that a considerable number of people in India require skills training, as India’s labor force is characterized by its low knowledge base. Of the 500 million to be skilled by 2020, 25 percent are at the “college plus” level, which corresponds to 125 million individuals. Educating and training this large mass in new knowledge and skills domains is daunting. While industry needs are fast shifting—from basic to specialized ones—due to industrial transformation toward greater automation and sophistication, the majority of higher education institutions find themselves incapable of responding to these challenges, either by curricular modifications or through industry–academia collaborations, for a variety of reasons ranging from infrastructural to financial to human resource constraints. Barring a few quality institutions at the top, the system as

such is producing graduates equipped only with basic skills, often of poor quality.

- **Degree vs diploma imbalance:** There is a strong “degree vs diploma” taboo in India. The ratio of degree to diploma holders is around 2:1, while a ratio of 1:3 would make the most sense for the economy. On the one hand, there are very few diploma programs available at public institutions—the sector is dominated by private providers charging high fees—and on the other, societal perception on the usefulness of degrees for the job market is such that the prestige attached to diplomas is low. These are significant deterrents for youth when selecting their course programs.
- **Equity:** Finally, disparities in terms of employability skills have regional, socioeconomic, and gender connotations. Multiple factors such as family and cultural background, place of residence, quality and type of earlier education, and capability and ability to access additional learning all result in differential employability quotients across groups and individuals. The problem of skills is far more severe in rural and semiurban centres. Studies show that the gap between the employability of technical graduates between tier I and tier II cities is almost 50 percent, and is much higher for graduates from other streams. Girls and graduates from socially and economically underprivileged segments face heavier disadvantages.

#### CONCLUSION

The challenge to train employable higher education graduates while ensuring quality and equity is considerable. Higher education in India needs to make a leap from education for the sake of education to education for employment, by strategically correcting grave systemic distortions and focusing on “sustainable employability skills” programs, in order to facilitate the transition of graduates to the world of work. ■

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## Graduate Student Unionization: A Unique American Issue?

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Since the turn of the century, the unionization of graduate students has become a phenomenon sweeping private colleges and universities across the United States. Situated in the broader context of student activism, and governed by the laws of the respective states, graduate student unionization in public universities has a longer history and a wider spread. At private institutions—although the movement started back in the 1950s—successive rulings by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in the past 15 years or so has accelerated the demand for graduate unions. With the drive for unionization becoming wider and stronger, and the related pushback from university administrations, there are tensions and even disruptions on several campuses. While the issue continues to be contentious in the United States, this article seeks to identify comparable practices elsewhere.

#### GENERAL CATEGORIES

Broadly speaking, graduate student unions can be divided into two main categories. On the one hand, in the more traditional sense of “student unions”, we may identify the collective body that brings students together, often including both graduate and undergraduate students. Such unions, called by different names in different countries (such as association, union, guild, council, parliament, government, organization, etc.) voice the common interest and concerns of students not only on matters directly related to themselves, but also on a range of broader social, economic, and political issues. On the other hand, graduate student unions, sometimes also referred to as graduate employee unions—the type of unions that are currently a hot topic in private universities in the United States—represent the interests of a specific category of graduate students. They are particularly concerned with the benefits and labor rights of graduate students who provide services to their universities in exchange for compensation.

#### ORGANIZATION

In several countries across Europe, including Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Swe-