

# Degrees sans Knowledge: A Look into the Present State of the Indian Higher Education

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## Abstract

Quality of Indian Graduates across streams has often been a subject of concern. More often than not it is discussed in a sarcastic manner that one of the largest educational set up in the world produces fewer graduates of substance. In this paper an objective effort has been made to look into the problem from diverse angles of academic importance. A light has been thrown on the main problems that ail the education in India like corruption and everything that it causes downstream. Some fundamental problems of our learning system like English medium school and colleges mostly have teachers studied and trained thoroughly in Hindi medium along with many others have been discussed in this paper. It comes about as a serious concern that our education system could not produce respect for the profession of teaching as hardly any student after doing his/her higher Secondary from an English medium Board seldom opts for a course of Teachers' Training. Similarly, how many IIT-ians are teaching in IITs or so termed premium engineering institutions! In this article an objective attempt has been made to analyse the root cause of present state of our education, Attempt has also been made to suggest possible feasible remedies.

**Keywords:** Indian Education, Graduates, University, Engineering, Management, Schools, Accreditation, Indian Education Policy

## Introduction

It is an open secret that Indian education system produces two extremes of merit. At one end are the graduates of few chosen institutes and rare gems from vernacular system at the top; on the other end are the graduates produced by thousands of other institutions every season like wild grass in the monsoon at the extreme bottom of the merit. If you imagine it in the form of a picture, it will look like a tall building with a lightning conductor at the top.

It is often a point of discussion at different forums of academicians, policy makers and employers as to what is the real job worthiness of our graduates? Employers across the board find our university product seriously deficient in quality. There have been surveys from time to time and the latest reports are eye opening in this regard. India Skills Report, a joint initiative of Wheebox (a global talent-assessment

company), PeopleStrong and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in association with UNDP, AICTE and AIU-2020 shows that 60% of engineering graduates are unemployable. National Employability Report Engineers, 2019 prepared by Aspiring Minds says: “The employability of Indian engineers continues to be painfully low with more than 80% engineers unemployable for any job in the knowledge economy.” This survey supposedly had a relatively large sample base of colleges, students, employers, mentions:

“Close to 90.92% of graduating engineers from India lack the programming and algorithm skills required to work in IT product companies. Only 16.25% are employable in IT services and 3.4% in IT product companies. Only 9.9% of engineering graduates in India can code correctly. Close to 37.7% of engineers in India cannot write code that can be compiled by software. The percentage of engineers employable in new age skills such as artificial intelligence (AI), mobile, and web development ranges from 1.2-5.3%. Only 40% engineering students do internships during their course, which is a problem given that engineering is an application-based field.”

According to Mr Dheeraj Sanghi eminent educationist and Ex-Director Punjab Engineering College, Chandigarh:

“The reason behind underemployment in this sector is not glut of engineers but poor quality education. Out of 10 Lakh engineering students, only 2 Lakh are getting real engineering jobs even though there are more job opportunities available.”

These studies have pointed out certain areas where a lot remains to be done in Indian education system like:

“The curricula must be dynamic as per the changing needs of industry. Faculty lacks the experience and skills in Applications. A very small number of students do the internship. Almost no faculty does any internship at all. Development of soft skills among students like communication skills (oral as well as written), Presentation skills, team work skills and spirit, organizing skills to independently organize their work and complete on time are ignored at the institutions. No focus on Humanities courses and inability to solve problems which go beyond one’s area of expertise.”

Agencies like NBA, AICTE, IUCCE have also emphasized on the above points.

Agencies responsible for the quality of education in India have from time to time prescribed certain attributes to be inculcated among the professional students including engineering and management. Indian professional education suffers from many a socio-economic divide and wise people categorise them into different tiers or classes. Tier one, two and three cities; tier one two and three educational institutions and so on. Tier one cities attract tier one institutions and tier one institutions attract students from top economic class and the class one faculty. They can charge high fees and pay high salaries to the faculty. By virtue of their location close to development and industry they are able to get top executives as special faculty from the related industry or profession easily. This quality of students, institutes and faculty goes down progressively with tier two and tier three cities. Incidentally, more professional educational institutes are located and mushrooming in semi-urban and rural areas.

A basic question often asked is, in spite of huge establishment of our education, why our graduates across the disciplines are not worthy of employment and why do they have to helplessly settle for

undignified jobs with humiliating salaries! Why is it that an IIM, IIT and few other institutes' graduates gets top companies with top salary packages while disturbingly large majority from other institutes have to work in insignificant concerns with insignificant responsibilities? This prevails in almost every professional field in our country.

There used to be a time when in professional institutions all required traits were instilled into a student such that they become responsible and knowledgeable professionals when they go out. It is still done in certain disciplines like Army officers training centres and Indian Civil Services training academies where it is made sure that trainees have learnt what they have been taught and will be able to put their knowledge into practice right away after being commissioned into service. In such services young people with various vernacular and economic backgrounds from all corners of the country are brought at a certain minimum required level of language proficiency, social interaction, communication, etiquettes through special programmes alongside their main stream training. But again, here too, they are taught these skills specially. Once upon a time, in many prestigious institutes, from day one the students were taught that they were the future leaders. Hopefully it still happens in some.

Now young students in colleges are not sensitised about their future role in the society and why and how they should feel proud of their trade and craft. It is as simple as that if our graduates of any vocation had to compete with the professionals and clients from around the country or around the world; they must be made to achieve a comfortable level of proficiency and communication skills in English, Hindi and their mother tongue; to function to their capacity.

Experts feel since long the quality of education in our country has been constantly ignored. Seemingly, governments want to put the label of 'educated' on every citizen in a hurry and every parent wants his ward to have a 'Degree' by any which way it may come. Seemingly again, governments have also been unclear about the aim of their education policies: quality or quantity? It looks government education policies are aimed at creating the large mass of literate population that can barely write (just sign their names in many cases) or read without understanding it.

Apparently Indian education has suffered from governments' 'promote all students' policy and the corruption in education system. There is almost no honesty in evaluating or accrediting educational institutions; a school or a university. Almost all private universities advertise and invite enrolment in hundreds of the courses but no one bothers to check whether a university has the right infrastructure to conduct a regular course in so many streams at UG, PG and Research level. Those who can hardly teach in a school are teaching in PG colleges and universities; diploma holders teaching the B. Tech. students is not rare. It is common to see a master of arts or science with or without any basic teacher training teaching in private universities, UG and PG colleges. As a result, the teaching and learning has become limited to the help-books. Definitely there must be some teachers in degree colleges who have tried to read Shakespeare, Chaucer, Vidyapati, Bhushan and other early literature of the languages they teach, in original! There must also be few teachers in universities who studied great science theories in original! New developments are happening in every field of knowledge on daily basis and we are stuck with our text books which are generally years behind in time. Our examination system too does not require referring to reference books to pass an exam even at the highest grade.

It will be interesting to note that policy makers have suddenly realised that to compete with the world the medium of teaching must be English and hence even government schools have adopted English

language and syllabus of the Boards like the CBSE without realising that most teachers in schools come from vernacular medium. A negligible percentage of CBSE or ICSE board students opt for teaching profession: a BTC or a B.Ed. is not a career option for them. The education in semi urban and rural English medium schools is dependent upon the teachers who do not understand even the basics of the language of the instruction medium. These days proper knowledge of reading and writing of the language of the instruction is no more necessary as nearly 60% of all school examination papers comprise of tick-mark multiple choice, one word and one sentence questions.

In our education system most stake holders including the Boards have lost sensitivity towards the grammar of both Hindi as well English. Few of the school teachers and students today can write a paragraph of Hindi or English free of errors. Letter writing in schools starts pretty early and topics of letters are nearly same from standard two to standard ten; yet hardly any student or teacher can write a proper application for any social purpose because they know only what they memorised. The Marks shown on mark-sheet do not necessarily reflect true knowledge and often the students who know next to nothing, get high marks. To top it all, every student has to be promoted to the next level till eighth. Even in 9<sup>th</sup> hardly any one is retained. In such scenario, who would like to study and who would like to teach beyond a formality! Passing a Board exam has is a child's play. In a lighter tone it may also be said that in CBSE/State Boards it is not difficult to pass but difficult to fail, yet students fail. Pass marks are only 33 out of one hundred. These one hundred marks are divided into two parts: external pen and paper exam of 80 marks and internal assessments of 20 marks. Out of these twenty, one is assured of at least 18-20. So to clear the exam one just needs to score about 13-15 marks in each subject. After that you can appear in supplementary exam in two subjects. The icing on the cake is, lately the CBSE board has introduced two types of Maths: standard and general to provide an easier way to the students to get through their 10<sup>th</sup> grade exam. Ninth wonder of the world has been created by our Boards by granting a score of 100 on 100 even in languages and social science subjects. Let's not forget these students are the foundation stones of the great edifice of our higher education. Many universities go even beyond this by having 40:60 ratio of internal and external examination marks.

Most important entrance exams for higher education comprise multiple choice questions. A combination of power of memory and luck can easily crack them. When memory of an examinee fails luck takes over. Law of probability says there is always a chance of getting it 50% right even if you tick an option blind-folded. Luck makes many get through such tests.

One of the perceived biggest reasons of poor quality of education in our country is the rampant corruption in education system vertically and horizontally. No one can establish and run any educational institution without falling in line with the system. All formalities are completed, inspections are done accreditation is also granted but, it will be interesting to know how many educational institutions lose their accreditations due to poor facilities or their output quality! There is no such system in place to cancel one's accreditation or even basic license to run an educational institution. Private universities may run hundreds of courses without having proper teacher and infrastructure. To top it all there are colleges and universities making a contract with students (of course verbal) to get them any class of merit just by paying requisite additional charges for such facilitations. Also, just pay the extra fee and never come to the college before exams. There were times when school teachers needed just one year training after tenth class and university teachers just needed just a master's degree and yet education system could produce reasonably good quality product as nobody got promoted just by the virtue of

having enrolled. Nowadays school teachers' are minimum a graduate and have to undergo training of two years and 'eligibility' tests thereafter. A university teacher needs to have a Ph.D. followed by tests thereafter; and the result is what the national surveys show.

Does our education system have anything to do with the fact that after independence no Nobel Prize has been awarded to any indigenous Indian scientist or social scientist?

Our education system does not produce the enough power of thought among students so that they become inquisitive learners. Technical courses do not emphasize on enough hands on experience. Students just read and learn theoretical part; even the lab practical is based on lengthy theoretical descriptions. Surprisingly, no one looks to have ever failed in a practical exam. As a result a degree or diploma holder cannot carry out any activity related to his trade without working as an apprentice for years under experts. Engineers cannot repair any electronic gadgets, any automobile, whereas, person with hardly any education can. It is simply because practical side of instruction in our educational institutions is neglected. Counter argument could be that engineers are not mechanics they are designers and innovators. Agreed but, are our engineers able to design or innovate systems! Most employers feel that Indian fresh engineering graduates do not have the ability of designing. As a result of their poor knowledge of things they are forced to accept other jobs which are not consummate with their qualification. What can be more dismal than that; a student having studied all his life 16-20 years in English or any other language for that matter as a subject cannot read, speak or write it properly. It is largely due to the fact that most of the faculty members have the same attributes. Aim of study has become limited to securing a qualifying degree. That seems to be the reason also why most educated young Indians aspire to get a government job any which way may it come.

To be successful in life only academic scores are not enough. Leadership skills too have to be developed at equal footing. One's sense of dignity and esteem force a person to be competitive and learn to excel. Educational institutions need to take the grooming of their students seriously to inculcate the very purpose of them being there. Besides, educational institutions must work on the personality development of their students. Our future leaders must know how to present themselves publicly or conduct themselves in a conference. To achieve this dedicated a program has to be there in every educational institution. It is common to see students with shirts not tucked, shirt buttons open and loosely hanging ties around the neck. It happens because nobody makes these young students conscious of their dignity and self esteem. Young students who begin professional courses as a teenager need to be told the value of even small looking things like dressing nice and proper, speaking well, good social interaction because as an executive one needs to do all these things in the course of discharge of duty.

Governments generally has two sets of standards in educational matters; One for the governmental institutions and the other for the private institutions. Most of the government universities and colleges have limited number of permanent faculty. Education is mostly dependent on temporary teachers further insulted by calling them 'the guest faculty' that is employed effectively for about 9 to 10 months and paid a salary one-third of the permanent peon or a sweeper of that institution. Great edifice of our education stands on the crutches of mostly incompetent and rather uninterested teachers. Guest teachers are disinterested because of their shameful salaries and most of permanent teachers are disinterested because they secured their position of the regular faculty by paying a fortune (mostly). Teaching has been reduced to a ritual, a means to improve API to qualify for the vacant regular posts in government

aided or run institutions. Teachers at every level don't generally update their specialized subject knowledge. In such scenario it will be wrong to expect that our educational institutions can hand over a student anything other than a piece of decorated multicolour rectangular sheet of paper called Degree that fails you in exams of life.

The decay that has set into our education system has to be arrested before the system itself collapses. Institutions beat their chest hugely upon few of their students getting a respectable placement; but no institute wants to convert exception into a norm. All stakeholders: administrators, teachers and students, need to realise the purpose of being there as upon the education rests the future of the nation. More investments are needed to be put into education beyond increasing the salaries of the teachers and the employees every year and every ten years. For improvements in the education, following points may be worked around in the government education policies:

1. Education Policy must be aimed to produce sensitivity about true knowledge in educational institutions.
2. Up till fifth grade writing and reading of languages must be stressed upon.
3. Beyond fifth grade auto promotion must stop. Getting promoted to next grade should require reasonable effort by the student. To improve language skills, from fifth onwards students should be engaged into small dramas or skits. Certain marks should be reserved for creative writing in the form of illustrations, stories or poems.
4. Exam evaluation system needs reforms. Writing skills need to be encouraged by giving it more weight in exams. Scoring hundred upon hundred in subjects like languages and social sciences, indicates a dangerous trend in evaluation system of educational exams in our country. It's funny and painful at the same time to see that in board exams marks are given for anything and everything a student has written answering a question whether or not it makes any sense. One line, two lines too have to be given marks proportionately. Even if one is asked about oranges and answer is about a tourist place; some marks are expected to be given. System must encourage students to earn marks by working hard. Boards allowing too many grace marks in too many subjects must also be re-looked into.
5. Marks allocated and awarded in the form of internal evaluation, Sessional marks, practical exams marks or any other should be reduced if not abolished completely, to the extent where it does not affect the real merit adversely. In reality, marks allotted in internal evaluation contribute produce hollow merit like a drum-fat but all empty inside.
6. On the job training for teachers must be made more regular so that the gap between academics and the industry-needs can be reduced. Refresher courses must be made task oriented than just an exercise to enjoy a paid holiday and earn few credit points for next promotion. A teacher who has attended an expensive refresher course must train others on his/her return and put their new knowledge into practice in their respective classrooms.
7. Governments' interference in private schools should be limited to enforce basic infrastructure in the schools. Governments give nothing to private schools which enrol more students than government schools. So much so, even the teachers and officers of government education department send their children to a private school instead of the schools where they draw hefty salaries and perks from. In the name of Right to Education Act students are sent to only private schools and state governments often fail to pay the fees of such students for years. Admissions under RTE Act also cause a kind of discrimination as some parents having influence are able to secure admission in private expensive

schools whereas other really poor parents have to keep sending their children to the government school which have a proven record!

8. Private educational institutions should be allowed to hire a certain percentage of teachers who have good knowledge even if they do not have the required teaching degrees.
9. A myth has been created by vested interests that education is not a business whereas most educational institutions: government or private run only on the business line. Educational establishments in private sector must be allowed to run as a business entity. It is only imprudent to think that a person will create a Trust, a Society or a Not for Profit Company and donate millions and even few billion to establish an educational organisation. It contradicts itself that an institution is established as a charity organization and then allowed to charge as much as one can in the name of fee and facilities. A large number of politicians and business houses in the country own universities and professional colleges and these so registered charitable organizations earn crores as capitation fee. Officers and political leaders earn with every new private educational entity established and turn a blind eye to the quality of the institutions they sanction permission or grant financial aids in different forms. Government gets nothing. Hence, it will be better if private educational institutions are allowed to be established as a business entity so that government too earns in the form of taxes.
10. As per the report by Accountability Initiative various state governments spend a sum of from Rs. 9,573 to 59,499 annually on every pupil up to eighth standard. According a study by C.R.Y. and Centre for Budget: Governance and Accountability, says that in Kendriya Vidyalays and Navoday Vidyalayas per pupil expense is Rs. 27,150 and 85,000 respectively. Reports have shown that the largest chunk of government expenditure on school education is on the salaries of the teachers. Yet “there is no evidence of with increasing per pupil expenditure improves the learning outcome, such as literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills.” Not even one percent of the private schools probably charge a fee of Rs. 85,000. In semi urban and rural area private schools’ yearly fees of 10<sup>th</sup> grade are not even Rs. 25,000. In such scenario, it is difficult to justify imposing rules and regulations followed by government funded schools like salaries as per the latest pay commission, entire staff being qualified etc. How can a large majority of private schools afford it when even the government schools and colleges are either short staffed or depend on contract teachers with poor compensations?
11. There should be a policy in place to check and evaluate the proficiency of the teachers employed by the educational institutions government and private both.
12. Certain number of research papers and patents must be made mandatory for all universities in order to keep their ratings and recognition as most other considerations for accreditation can be manipulated.
13. Certain minimum number of Research Paper must be made mandatory to be published in top rated research journals by students and faculty members each year to keep their ratings.
14. Salary increments of teachers must be linked to their achievements under item 13 and 14 above.
15. Last but not the least; it must be made mandatory to all government workers and officers to send their wards to government educational institutions only. It will help improve the qualitative condition of government owned and aided educational institutions.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that, presently the quality of our graduates of all sorts is a cause of concern. Employers normally do not like to employ people whom they will have to train again spending their money and productive time. A concerted effort on the part of all the stake holders is required in this

direction. How things can be improved? Dheeraj Sanghi feels, “Our focus should be on how to improve the quality of education in our institutions. Institutions should be closed down due to lack of quality education.”

Presently actual quality of our graduates may not be comparable to the world standards generally yet; Indian talent is visible globally but, it is a very small fraction of the total. Like our new education policy has taken note of it and incorporated steps to improve the quality of instruction, teachers and the institutions. Let’s hope India soon will be an intellectual force to reckon with contributing to the world's scientific, technological and managerial skills and talent pool.

Education must be thought of as a matter of honour for the country. Our human resource product has to be free from manufacturing defects to be saleable.

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