Transformation of Indian higher education: Strategies to leapfrog

Best practices and challenges across four themes

November 2023

FICCI

EY Parthenon
Building a better working world

FICCI Foreword

India's higher education landscape is a vibrant tapestry that reflects the diversity and richness of our nation. Boasting over 55,000 higher education institutions, catering to 40 million students supported by 15 lakh teachers, India's higher education sector stands among the largest globally. The recent transformative reforms introduced through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aim to achieve a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and elevate Indian universities into the top 100 in global rankings.

As the nation stands on the brink of a new era, witnessing the ever-evolving dynamics of education, the landscape of Indian higher education has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades. Marked by over 60% enrolment in private higher education institutions, the evolution from traditional pedagogical methods to the seamless integration of cutting-edge technologies has rendered this journey both challenging and exhilarating.

The FICCI EY Parthenon Report 2023, titled 'Transformation of Indian Higher Education: Strategies to Leapfrog,' looks at a thorough evaluation of advancements and transformations made within the Indian Higher Education in the key themes of quality education, industry alignment, research and innovation, and inclusivity. By delving deeper into the intricacies of each area, the report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of Indian higher education. It acts as a lens through which we scrutinize the strides made, challenges encountered, and opportunities unveiled in the pursuit of educational excellence.

The knowledge report, while going beyond addressing key structural and implementation challenges, also actively explores opportunities and puts forth actionable recommendations which look at paving the way for an equitable, inclusive, and globally competitive higher education system in the country.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar

Chairperson, FICCI Higher-Ed Committee

Mr. Ravi Panchanadan
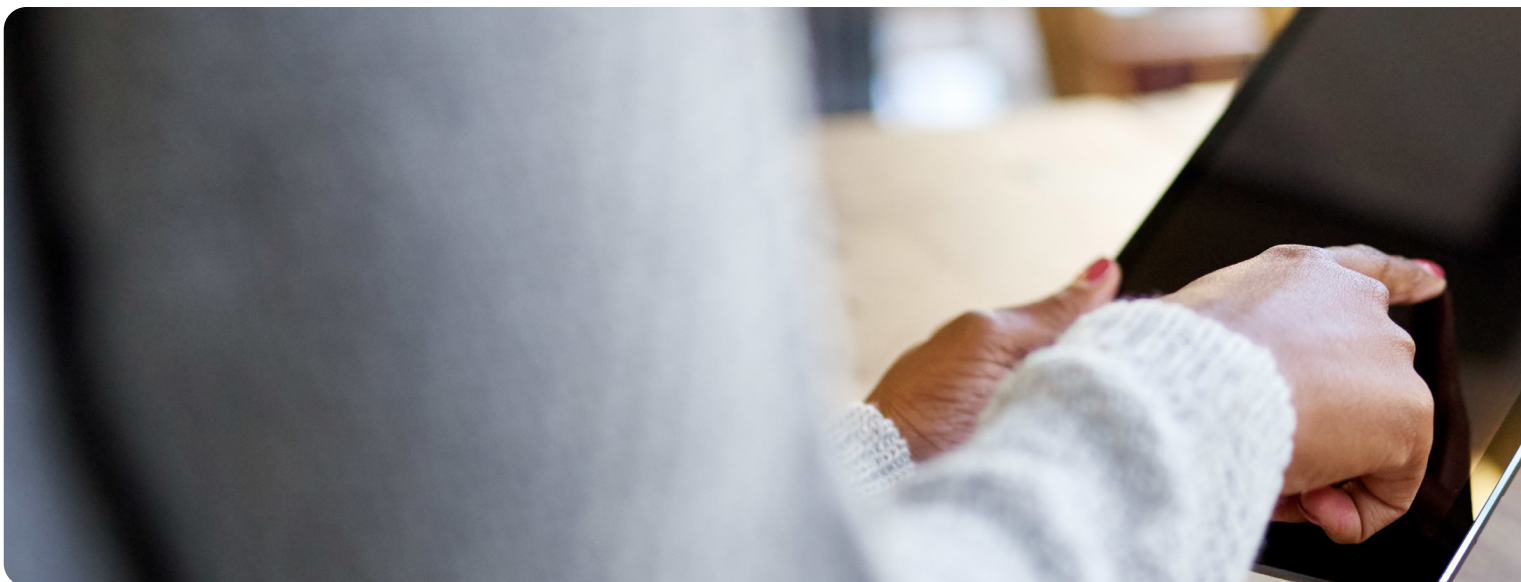
Co-Chairperson, FICCI Higher-Ed Committee

Prof. Souvik Bhattacharyya

Co-Chairperson, FICCI Higher-Ed Committee

Dr. Rajan Saxena

Advisor, FICCI Higher-Ed Committee

EY-Parthenon Foreword

India's higher education sector has expanded significantly over the past few decades. With over 56,000 institutes and more than 40 million enrolments, the Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. With the introduction of National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020, the sector has witnessed massive disruption across several areas such as multidisciplinary and holistic education, technology integration, skilling for graduate employability, research and innovation and internationalization.

In order to achieve the vision laid down by NEP 2020, India will have to add 26 million more enrolments by 2035. This requires a corresponding increase in staff and infrastructure. There is potential for higher education institutions to capitalise on this opportunity by leveraging policy and technology as key enablers. We had identified the key unlocks required to transform India into a global higher education hub in the 2022 EY Parthenon-FICCI report titled "Higher Education in India Vision 2047". The report had defined five strategic 5-year plans from 2022 to 2047 to achieve the Vision 2047 for higher education.

This report builds on last year's report by diving deeper into the first five-year plan and outlining the key action points for various stakeholders for the next 12 to 36 months across the themes of quality education, industry alignment, research and innovation and inclusivity. We believe that these four themes will be critical to focus on in the short term to lay down strong fundamentals and catalyse future growth in the sector. We have analyzed India's performance across these themes and compared that with some of the global benchmarks to arrive at recommendations.

We thank everyone who has helped us in bringing out this report. We hope that stakeholders across the Indian higher education system find this report useful, thereby enabling them to structure their short-term action plans even more effectively.

Dr. Avantika Tomar

Partner, Education Practice
Ernst & Young LLP
Bengaluru, India

Amitabh Jhingan

Partner, Education Practice
Ernst & Young LLP
New Delhi, India

Contents

Executive summary

FICCI and EY Parthenon's 2022 report titled 'Higher Education in India Vision 2047' outlined several goals and objectives to transform India into a high-quality, industry-aligned, inclusive, and global education hub. The report focused on identifying the structural challenges in Indian higher education system and measures to be implemented to progress towards Indian higher education's goals by 2047. The report focused on 5 strategic pillars: (i) building a student-centric and equitable ecosystem, (ii) enhancing research and innovation in higher education institutes (HEIs), (iii) developing faculty across the HEI ecosystem, (iv) developing international mobility and (v) investing in digital learning. To achieve India @2047 vision, five strategic 5-year plans were outlined, with detailed recommendations provided for the industry, HEIs and government to boost the higher education landscape over the next 25 years.

Based on the goals set by the first 5-year plan, this year's report has identified the critical short-term areas of focus for Indian higher education in the form of 4 themes. These themes are (i) quality education, (ii) industry alignment, (iii) research and innovation, and (iv) inclusivity, with various sub-themes identified in each of these broader areas.

The report analyzes India's performance across all four themes, evaluating initiatives undertaken by HEIs and the government. These initiatives were then benchmarked with best practices across the globe, including countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia and South Korea. The report further goes on to identify challenges for Indian higher education, opportunities to capitalize on in the coming years, and provides recommendations on achieving global standards of higher education excellence.

Theme	Sub-theme	Current state in India
Quality education	▶ Faculty recruitment and development ▶ Digital/ online learning and technology in administration ▶ Internationalisation of education ▶ Academic flexibility and multi-disciplinarity	▶ Lack of quality PhD students leading to faculty shortage ▶ Limited clear-cut policies on technology use in education ▶ Slow adoption of online courses ▶ Slow global expansion of top tier Indian universities ▶ Increasing focus on flexibility and multi-disciplinarity among top tier institutes ▶ Both government and HEIs are focusing on localization of subjects, content and pedagogy
Industry alignment	▶ Skilling for graduate employability ▶ Industry-institute collaborations	▶ Insufficient industry investment in higher education ▶ Limited uptake of apprenticeship programs ▶ Low overall employability despite improvements over years
Research and Innovation	▶ Research ▶ Innovation/ entrepreneurship	▶ Low expenditure on R&D by government ▶ Focus on quantity over quality in published research work ▶ Limited R&D spending by higher education institutions ▶ Lower innovation outcomes at lower-ranked institutions ▶ Top ranked public universities showcase much better research and innovation outcomes compared to private ones
Inclusivity	▶ Gender diversity ▶ LGBTQIA+ ▶ Economically and socially challenged students (ESCS) ▶ Students with disabilities	▶ Limited female representation in higher education leadership ▶ High number of female STEM graduates, but low employability ▶ Limited inclusivity measures for the LGBTQIA+ community ▶ Adequate support for students with disabilities in terms of physical infrastructure, insufficient investment in assistive technologies

The quality of the Indian higher education system can be greatly improved by developing a strong faculty pool. This can be achieved by developing good quality PhD programs. These programs can even be targeted at working professionals from industry. Faculty also need to be supported to ensure that they embed employability in the curriculum through curriculum audits, industry secondments, etc. The industry needs to actively engage with higher education institutes by facilitating knowledge sharing with faculty, supporting curriculum development and delivery as well as offering work related learning opportunities for students.

A tripartite partnership between higher education institutions, government and the industry is critical to improve research and innovation outcomes, which result in societal impact. Industry-government co-funded programs are required to catalyse research and innovation efforts at higher education institutes. These efforts need to be streamlined so that even lower tiered institutions benefit from such opportunities through effective mentoring and capacity building.

Lastly, the higher education system in India needs to be more inclusive, especially to increase female participation in leadership roles through leadership tracks and training programs, institutionalising policies to create an inclusive atmosphere for LGBTQIA+ students and investing in assistive technology to support students with disabilities.