INDIA’S YOUTH
SPEAK OUT ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

A Report Prepared by UNESCO MGIEP
to Support the
Ministry of Human Resource Development's
Formulation of the National Education Policy

February 2016
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UNESCO MGIEP
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization | Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development

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Mahatma Gandhi, the esteemed father of our nation after whom our institute is named, once said, “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.” Had he met the students who participated in our research, Gandhiji would have been very pleased. India’s youth are hungry for knowledge. Nowadays, a tenth or twelfth class pass cannot satisfy this appetite. Students want more learning, more opportunities, and more knowledge, in short access to high quality, affordable higher education.

India has made great strides in higher education enrolment since the country’s founding: enrolment in 2015 is forty times higher than it was in 1950. In the past decade alone, college enrolment rates have nearly doubled. This trend is particularly impressive considering that at India’s founding, literacy rates were estimated to be only 18%. India’s new boom in higher education is testimony to a decades long commitment to improving access to the entire education pipeline, starting from early childhood education, and extending through graduate degrees.

Although access to higher education is increasing, when it comes to equity and quality – two mandates set forth in Education for All, the Dakar Framework, and, most recently, the Education 2030 Framework for Action - we still have a long way to go. For example, although the gross enrolment gap between the genders is narrowing, it is still not closed; when it comes to persons with disabilities, the gap remains both wide and improperly documented. Furthermore, as the data in this report shows, the quality of Indian universities varies widely, and attending an institute of higher education does not guarantee that students will be prepared for employment, or, perhaps more importantly, peaceful and happy lives.

The revision of the National Education Policy provides India with an opportunity to realize the promises inherent in the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goal #4. In order to truly Rethink Education – as urged by the co-authors of the UNESCO report on Education for the twenty-first century - including myself - we must first understand what gaps exist, and how best to fill them. By soliciting the opinions of young people across the country through a rigorous and robust data collection process, this report provides vital feedback from higher education’s most important stakeholders: the students themselves.

The UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), UNESCO’s first category one institute in the Asia-Pacific, has been established by UNESCO with the generous support of the Government of India with the express mandate of finding creative ways to address some of the most pressing issues in education, including inclusion, diversity, equity, quality, and access. It is, therefore, encouraging to see that these are the same issues that students continuously and spontaneously pointed out in this report. We hope that the findings herein will help the current government rethink education for the 21st century – an intellectual responsibility bestowed upon UNESCO MGIEP at its founding - and that the students who participated in this report will become the next generation of policymakers, conscious both of the huge mandate and the huge challenge that is the Indian educational system.

1 February, 2016.

DR. KARAN SINGH
CHAIRMAN, GOVERNING BOARD
UNESCO MGIEP
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between April and September 2015, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) conducted a mixed methods study designed to solicit the opinions of Indian nationals between the ages of 17 and 29 about revising the higher education portion of the National Education Policy (NEP). The exercise supported the Ministry of Human Resource Development’s (MhRD) bottom-up approach, which involved gathering input from stakeholders from diverse fields, regions, and backgrounds as a key element of the redrafting process. To this end, UNESCO MGIEP administered an online survey that reached 6017 young people from every state, and conducted 34 focus groups in 5 regions of India involving 331 young people from a range of rural, semi-urban, and urban centres.

The findings broadly fell into four areas aligned with the 20 themes identified by MhRD as focuses of the higher education consultations (see Appendix #3 for full list of themes): governance and regulation, infrastructure, teaching and learning, and inclusion. The data drew attention to two additional crosscutting issues that were not specifically identified by MhRD: the impact of K-12 policy on college quality and student success, and the influence of a variety of sectors – such as health, infrastructure, and safety – on higher education policy. A full list of recommendations specifically aligned with themes identified by MhRD can be found in Table 1 below.

GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

In focus groups, participants frequently discussed concerns about accreditation, admissions, financial aid, and student voice. Students recommended making the accreditation process and its results better known; asked for more holistic, uniform, and transparent admissions and scholarship application procedures; and wanted more opportunities for financial aid. Students claim that well-designed systems often exist at their institutions, but lack proper enforcement or utilization. Many felt problems with corruption, harassment, and teaching quality could be addressed by implementing robust and anonymous systems for student feedback.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Generally, students indicated that teaching quality was more important to them than campus infrastructure: 64% of survey respondents ranked quality of teaching very or extremely important in their choice of institutions, compared to only 47% who ranked infrastructure at the same level. The exception to this was engineering and sciences students who said that a lack of up-to-date facilities hampers their ability to gain the skills they need to succeed in their fields. Additionally, with the exception of participants from extremely remote areas who felt ill equipped to use technology, most students wanted more opportunities for online learning and better connectivity on campus.

Whether it was girls requesting more secure facilities, visually impaired students requesting accessible signboards, or orthopedically disabled students requesting ramps, focus group participants commonly discussed the need for infrastructure to support inclusion. Notably, these concerns were not always raised by students from the communities themselves: the idea of gender neutral bathrooms for transgender students, for example, was suggested by a non-transgendered participant, for example. In addition to suggesting specific infrastructure improvements, this trend reflects how much students value campus diversity as a key part of their education.
TEACHING AND LEARNING

Students felt that more than anything, their faculty and coursework defined their higher education experience. Throughout the focus groups, students said that they valued faculty members who took an interest in them personally and treated them like family, and – in answer to a question identified by MHRD – felt that teachers should also act as counsellors. Within this context, many focus group participants vividly recalled at least one faculty member who changed their lives. Participants said that coursework needs to be more practical and diverse and that faculty members should be held to higher research standards. Students felt that they should have a voice in hiring and firing teachers, that universities should solicit anonymous feedback on all professors, and that courses in pedagogy should be required for all faculty members. Students were very interested MHRD’s questions about including elements of community involvement into syllabi, saying that one of the main reasons they attended college was to give back to their communities and the wider world in general.

INCLUSION

Students brought up many concerns about access, inclusion, and persistence, often in the context of the desire to attend diverse institutions. In order to address the marginalized groups highlighted by MHRD, UNESCO MGIEP held special focus groups with gender and sexual minorities, students with disabilities, and students from rural areas and the northeast. However, it was not uncommon for students from privileged backgrounds expressed solidarity with their peers from these groups, even in focus groups that were not explicitly convened to address these issues.

Respondents recommended eliminating corruption in admissions and addressing inequitable attitudes among faculty and teachers starting in primary school. The second theme had to do with networks of public systems. For example, students with disabilities said they came to metros to study partly because they knew that the public services they received (such as access to transportation and health care) would be superior to those in rural areas; likewise, girls repeatedly said that having safer neighbourhoods, better transportation facilities, and more effective policing would increase their enrolment. This finding suggests that MHRD should institute reforms in partnership with other sectors, and should keep college policy in mind while redrafting the K-12 section of the NEP.

Although students had plenty of critical feedback, almost all spoke positively about their decision to enrol in higher education in India. Many spoke fondly of transformative experiences they had at the undergraduate or postgraduate level due to excellent faculty and courses, and many more expressed a strong desire to help improve the system.

Keeping this in mind, UNESCO MGIEP presents these recommendations in the spirit of building on the strengths of the existing system, and embracing new and creative approaches to ensuring that all of India’s youth – even those beyond the age of 14 – have the right to an education.
# TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME AND TOPIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>MHRD Themes</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance and Regulation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>I. Governance reforms for quality</td>
<td>• Make accreditations transparent to students during the admissions process.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>II. Ranking of institutions and accreditations</td>
<td>• Ensure regulation and equivalence of courses is predetermined, rather than imposed mid-session.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>III. Improving the quality of regulation</td>
<td>• Use NAAC as a tool for leveraging university support for more inclusive policies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhance the student support component of NAAC’s Assessment criteria to include the mandatory solicitation of student feedback on the quality of teaching, research, and infrastructure at regular intervals.</td>
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<td>Admissions</td>
<td>I. Governance reforms for equality</td>
<td>• Make admissions requirements more holistic, including consideration of items extra-curricular activities.</td>
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<td>• Improve quality of admissions tests.</td>
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<td>• Expand extra-curricular quota and other admissions procedures that recognize non-academic skills.</td>
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<td>• Eliminate corruption, particularly in rural and north-eastern areas.</td>
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<td>• Create a digital locker based application system that includes a clear and transparent list of admissions requirements, standardized across universities.</td>
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<td>• Offer counselling to students and parents about options regarding careers and degrees as early as tenth standard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>I. Governance reforms for equality</td>
<td>• Allow institutions of higher education autonomy in creating and administering scholarships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>XIII. Sustaining student support systems</td>
<td>• Within this autonomy, provide strong regulations and monitoring, as well as serious consequences for corruption.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IX. Addressing regional disparity</td>
<td>• Link scholarships with Digital India’s digital locker plan through creating uniform procedures for applying for scholarships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X. Bridging gender and social gaps</td>
<td>• Hold financial bodies responsible for administering scholarships wholly and on time by eliminating middle men and using direct transfers.</td>
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<td>• Advertise scholarships and financial aid through highly visible channels.</td>
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<td>Student Voice</td>
<td>I. Governance reforms for quality</td>
<td>• Fully implement existing student feedback mechanisms.</td>
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<td>XIII. Sustaining student support systems</td>
<td>• Include option of anonymity in all student feedback procedures.</td>
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<td>• Require all institutions to create student grievance cell, with adequate student representation and set response time from faculty and administration.</td>
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<td>• Focus feedback mechanisms not only on quality of teaching but also how other non-academic issues were tackled and settled.</td>
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<td>• Include components of student satisfaction and an evaluation of feedback and governance structures in accreditation process.</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
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<td><strong>INFRASTRUCTURE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Services</td>
<td>V  Improving state public</td>
<td>• When improving infrastructure, include the surrounding area and the provision of public services, particularly those identified by students with disabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Buildings</td>
<td>universities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology and</td>
<td>VII Promoting open and</td>
<td>• Allow students interested in remediation or in taking classes outside of their degree requirements to take MOOCs for credit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>distance learning and online</td>
<td>• Regulate online courses in a standardized way and publicize which are credit bearing and which are not.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>courses</td>
<td>• Clearly inform students how to apply for credit for online courses.</td>
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<td>VIII Opportunities for</td>
<td>• Improve cable connections and hardware at all institutions so students can access online courses, perhaps by prioritizing campuses and communities as part of Digital India.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>technology enabled learning</td>
<td>• Allow students to use new equipment.</td>
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<td>• Train and encourage professors to use new technologies, rather than making them fearful of repercussions if damage occurs.</td>
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<td>Infrastructure and</td>
<td>V  Improving State Public</td>
<td>• Ensure that existing policies regarding infrastructure for students with disabilities are enforced, perhaps through accreditation procedures or other forms of regulation.</td>
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<td>Access</td>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>• Make reading material more accessible in multiple languages.</td>
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<td>VII Opportunities for</td>
<td>• Set up an accessible book trust in India that can be accessed virtually.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>technology enabled learning</td>
<td>• Improve and increase hostel facilities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X  Bridging Gender and Social</td>
<td>• Create more mechanisms for students with disabilities to share challenges they face.</td>
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<td>Gaps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>I  Governance reforms for</td>
<td>• Create easy entry and exit systems for industry professionals to take up teaching for short intervals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>equality</td>
<td>• Create systems to protect students from partiality based on marks/merit.</td>
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<td>XII Developing the best</td>
<td>• Increase weightage of classroom teaching experience in NET applications.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>• Encourage faculty to lecture in multiple mediums.</td>
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<td>XIII Sustaining student</td>
<td>• Create institutional cultures where teachers have the freedom to counsel and develop strong relationships with students.</td>
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<td>support systems</td>
<td>• Allow colleges and universities flexibility and autonomy in developing coursework.</td>
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<td>XIV Promote cultural integration</td>
<td>• Include students in the process of developing and revising syllabi.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>through language</td>
<td>• Periodically revise and update syllabi to match current theories and practices.</td>
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<td>• Allow professors and teachers to review syllabus timing so that content can be covered in depth in a reasonable time period.</td>
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<td>• Make realistic timelines for syllabus completion such that there is enough scope for discussion and debate.</td>
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<td>Coursework</td>
<td>VI Integrating skill development</td>
<td>• Allow colleges and universities flexibility and autonomy in developing coursework.</td>
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<td>into higher education</td>
<td>• Include students in the process of developing and revising syllabi.</td>
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<td>XI</td>
<td>Linking higher education to society</td>
<td>• Strike a balance between practical and theoretical components of a subject.</td>
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<td>XI</td>
<td>Developing the best teachers</td>
<td>• Coach teachers to encourage students to ask questions and be critical.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Create opportunities for students studying sciences to do papers on the humanities and social sciences.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**INCLUSION**

<p>| Girls and Women | IX      | Addressing regional disparity                  | • Improve the quality of local colleges, particularly those catering to women. |
|                 | X       | Bridging gender and social gaps                | • Intentionally recruit female and gender-sensitive faculty.                  |
|                 |         |                                              | • Improve and expand distance learning opportunities.                         |
|                 |         |                                              | • Set timings that allow women to attend to balance family work with college.  |
|                 |         |                                              | • Provide public spaces where women can do homework on campus, and provide extensions and flexibility in timings when necessary and reasonable. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Work with parents and boys to change mind sets about female education throughout the educational pipeline. |
| Disability      | IX      | Addressing regional disparity                  | • Create an enabling environment where students, professors and administrators better understand the needs of students with disabilities. |
|                 | X       | Bridging gender and social gaps                | • Provide orientation sessions that inform students and administrators of the rights of students with disabilities. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Create equal opportunity cells that can support students with disabilities. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Increase the use of technology for making study materials accessible and computer training. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Simply regulations for writers for students who are visually impaired.      |
|                 |         |                                              | • Offer sign language courses to pre-service and in-service professors.       |
|                 |         |                                              | Incentivize these classes in some way.                                      |
| Transgender     | X       | Bridging gender and social gaps                | • Introduce mandatory course modules on gender and sexuality across disciplines. |
| Students        |         |                                              | • Intentionally connect students from gender minority groups with support services. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Ensure that every university has counsellors that are approachable and non-discriminatory. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Include the third gender and sexual minorities under the purview of anti-sexual harassment laws and committees. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Create orientation and sensitization drives to combat gender and sexual identity harassment based bullying on campus. |
|                 |         |                                              | • Make architectural changes such as building gender neutral toilets on all campuses. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling and Student</td>
<td>X Bridging gender and social gaps</td>
<td>• Ensure that counselling centers are available, staffed, and operated professionally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>XIII Sustaining Student Support Systems</td>
<td>• Make students aware of counselling centers and enable them to feel comfortable in these spaces.</td>
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<td>• Include courses in orientations that sensitize students to differences.</td>
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<td>• Include know-your-rights modules in syllabi so students are aware of their recourse if their</td>
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<td></td>
<td>rights are violated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-12 Policy</td>
<td>IX Addressing Regional Disparity</td>
<td>• Equip K-12 schools with proper technology infrastructure and accompanying coursework.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X Bridging Gender and Social Gaps</td>
<td>• Improve the quality of teaching in English classes and access to English medium sections.</td>
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<td>• Develop special initiatives and programs to ensure that students in conflict zones are able</td>
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<td>to continue their K-12 education even during unstable times.</td>
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<td>• Ensure that qualifying coursework is available to all students in all areas so that they can</td>
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<td>apply to the subjects of their choice.</td>
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<td>• Begin counselling about college as early as eighth standard, and help students explore various</td>
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<td>subjects and options for courses.</td>
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When the research team at UNESCO MGIEP chose to focus on the higher education portion of the NEP, many of our colleagues questioned us. After all, early educational interventions tend to have a profound and lasting impact, creating the foundation necessary for future success.

Our reasons were two-fold: first, because there is a dearth of research about the experiences of youth in higher education, especially in the global south. Second, our institution has an active youth program, placing this phase of education squarely within our mandate. The combination of these factors convinced us that higher education is the area where we could make the most effective contribution.

However, as the focus group discussions continued, we started to realize that although educational researchers tend to position K-12 education as the best – if not only – window to influence children’s lives, young people frequently identify the years they spent in college or post-graduation as the ones that shaped them the most. The youth we interviewed described college as so much more than a pathway to employment: in fact, they described it as a transformative experience of personal development that built confidence, curiosity, inspiration, knowledge, hope, and – perhaps most importantly – imbued them with the motivation and skills to make their world a better place.

Take, for example, a young woman we spoke to from a village in the south, who had to fight hard to claim her right to attend college. Once she enrolled, she saw her mission during her educational years as much greater than herself:

“I want to change the system itself. Because as [fellow participant] said, it is a common opinion in the society that women should be a homemaker and should protect their husband, children...[Members of her village ask] Why should you study? You are a woman, you can be a homemaker, your husband will be earning. Why this? I want to change the system that’s why I want to educate myself.”

Or, take the case of a visually impaired student from a rural area in eastern India who, after overcoming great odds to gain admission to a well-regarded university, wants to use his privilege to change attitudes in his native community:

“In rural areas, there is a problem, like, ‘He is a blind man. He has done nothing’. So, I have challenged them. I have shown them that I can do something so I have undertaken higher education.”

Or, take the case of a young gay man from the northeast. After facing years of bias-based harassment, he finally felt comfortable with himself after completing a degree at an evening college in a major metropolis:

“I think despite all its flaws, I think this access you know it’s so important because...[my institution is] a place, it actually helped me explore myself... Here I have a voice to really speak...four years back I would have been extremely scared. I couldn’t talk at all, and I was very homophobic myself. I was - I was just really messed up.”

Throughout the country, no matter where we went, youth were highly motivated to speak. Our survey, for example, reached over 6000 students, and – we are told – was the subject of chatter on forums like Facebook and Whatsapp. Focus groups frequently ended with participants saying that they wanted more opportunities for such discussions. Respondents came prepared with handwritten notes that they had spent hours crafting beforehand, and flooded our inboxes with emails formulated after considering what they heard from their peers.

Clearly, higher education is something youth care about deeply; we, as a nation, owe it to our youth to improve our colleges and universities. Furthermore, we are convinced that the Indian higher education system, which already provides so many students with so much, has the potential to reach even more young people in even deeper and more meaningful ways. It is in this spirit that we offer the following report.
In 2015, India’s Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) launched a series of consultations designed to guide the revision of the National Education Policy (NEP), a document that has remained unchanged since 1992. MHRD held formal discussions with academic experts and policymakers, as well as grassroots contributors like teachers, administrators, and parents. This report is the result of a consultation process UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) conducted with another set of stakeholders: youth.

Specializing in research, capacity building, and innovation, UNESCO MGIEP is Asia’s first category 1 UNESCO institution. Created by UNESCO and funded by MHRD, the institute is dedicated to developing and promulgating pedagogies, policies, and practices to promote peace and sustainable development. Our expertise in policy, research, and youth development, combined with our commitment to increasing young people’s participation in policymaking, led us to undertake this project.

This report is a comprehensive summary of the opinions we collected from Indian nationals between the ages of 17 and 29 over the course of approximately six months in 2015. The findings are focused on the 20 themes identified by MHRD regarding higher education. While some themes are covered in more depth than others, almost every one of them emerged somewhere in the course of our research.

The report is divided into four sections: governance, infrastructure, teaching and learning, and inclusion. These are further divided into subthemes identified through the analysis of focus group data. (For an in depth description of how data was collected, see the methods section.) Each subsection begins with a cross referenced list of relevant themes. Each ends with a list of specific recommendations either explicitly stated by students, or identified after coding and analysis. See Table 1 for a consolidated list of these.

Our goal in this work is to help governments access the information they need to make informed decisions about education policies, and to provide a tool for young people and the organizations that support them to create programs that will ultimately help India’s youth grow and prosper.
METHODS

The data for this report was collected between April and September 2015 using a mixed methods approach, combining an online survey with a series of focus group discussions.

SURVEY

The survey was open from April to August 2015 and administered in English on Google forms. Pilot testing indicated that it took about 20 minutes to complete. The survey included questions covering many of the themes identified by MHRD, including governance, teaching quality, technology and infrastructure, classroom, campus climate and inclusion. The questions were developed by the research team and reviewed by external experts. Additionally, paper versions of the survey were piloted with students within Delhi, first at an elite university, then at an evening college with mostly Hindi-medium students, a choice we made to help gauge the clarity of the questions.

Survey respondents were recruited through a social media campaign on our UNESCO MGIEP Facebook page and twitter account. MHRD posted our survey on the page they created regarding the themes for the policy consultations. Additionally, the survey was posted on the logical Indian, a leading social media site with an active Facebook Page with several million followers. When possible, the research team administered the survey to focus group participants on tablets, laptops, or any other available devices.

In total, we received 6017 responses, of which 5003 were usable. We received responses from every state in India, as well as several union territories. About half of the sample attended private or private aided institutes, while the remainder attended public colleges. The sample lacked diversity in terms of gender and course of study: the majority were male, and were in a science or engineering related degree, mirroring the demographics of those following our social media partner, the Logical Indian. Furthermore, the nature of the survey itself presented barriers, including the fact that it was online, in English, and publicized through specific channels. We attempted to partially correct for these disparities while planning our focus groups.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The purposes of the focus group discussions (FGDs) were to elicit in-depth responses and recommendations to help us make sense of the quantitative data; and to ensure the inclusion of the voices of youth who might not have access to the survey because of linguistic, technological, or other barriers. To this end, in each of the five geographic areas we visited, we conducted 1-2 groups with students from marginalized backgrounds, focusing on populations specifically mentioned in the themes outlined by MHRD, including: women; students from rural areas; students with disabilities; students who identify as scheduled caste (SC) and/or scheduled tribe (ST); and students from the northeast. Although we had scheduled groups in Kashmir, we were unable to conduct these due to security concerns at the time of data collection. Where possible, FGDs were conducted in the local language, or students were given the opportunity to speak their mother tongue.

In total, we conducted 34 focus groups in five regions, 15 of which were in rural or semi-urban areas. We spoke to a total of 331 participants, 181 of whom identified as female, 155 identified as male, and 3 identified as transgender or other. Thirty-three participants self-identified as having some sort of disability; there may have been other participants with hidden disabilities in the group, but they did not choose to identify themselves.

1 We have used the term disability throughout at the recommendation of students and mentors who attended our focus groups and have visual, hearing, or orthopaedic impairments. Although the UN avoids the term, we decided to use it to honour the wishes of our informants, who have reclaimed the word in India as a term of empowerment.
Groups were planned and selected through a combination of intentional and convenience sampling. The research team created priority areas such as those mentioned above (vernacular language, SC/ST, gender, disability, etc.). In some cases, groups were planned and had to be cancelled at the last minute due to security issues, lack of time, or other unforeseen circumstances. This is reflected in the uneven distribution of groups across areas. It should be noted, though, that the geographic balance of the groups also compensates for some of the geographic disparity of the survey, in which the majority of the respondents were from urban areas in the north. In most cases, the staff travelled to the different areas of the country to interview students in their native places, except for two focus groups with north eastern students conducted in metros outside of their native places. We made this decision not only to expand the sample size, but also to capture the experiences of migrant students.

Since UNESCO MGIEP is not bound by an institutional review board, we created a consent process based on rigorous international research practices. All participants were asked to sign a consent form that was reviewed by a leading academic and a lawyer. Additionally, during each group, the facilitator went through the form in detail, and students were given the opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns. In every group possible, students were offered explanations in both English and their mother tongues. In the findings section of this report, participants’ names and identifying details have been anonymized in order to protect their confidentiality.

Staff administered focus groups according to an instrument prepared using the themes identified by MHRD. Facilitators adopted a semi-structured approach, allowing students to bring up themes that were not necessarily a part of the questions, but were relevant to the discussion. Focus groups were transcribed and, in some cases, translated by UNESCO MGIEP staff as well as a professional company that adheres to strict policies regarding confidentiality and anonymity.

**ANALYSIS**

For this paper, we have used the survey data to produce descriptive statistics and cross-tabs. Specifically, we have looked for the frequency of responses to questions both across the sample and within demographic groups of interest, including (but not limited to) specific geographies, genders, and castes. For questions designed along a Likert scale, we looked at the frequencies of answers in categories 1-2, 3, and 4-5 separately, so as to determine positive, neutral, and negative feelings. As we continue to work with the data beyond this report, we intend to do more in-depth analyses to assess the statistical significance of certain identified trends.

The focus group data was coded using deductive and inductive codes. Deductive codes were those that the research team identified ahead of time based on the interests of MHRD, including points related to infrastructure, teaching, coursework, and technology. Inductive codes were those that emerged from the data, but which we did not explicitly set out to measure, including aspects of safety, inclusion, placement, and student voice. Inductive codes were identified based on the frequency of their mention across geographical and demographic differences.

The final step in analysis was to triangulate data within and between the findings generated from these two instruments. For the survey, we triangulated within questions and across demographic groups to look for consistency of answers or surprising trends. For the focus groups, we looked at the frequency of answers among the groups, and noted silences as well. Finally, we compared the frequency of themes generated through focus group discussions with those we saw in the survey to generate the following findings.

**TABLE 2: BREAKDOWN OF FOCUS GROUPS BY GEOGRAPHY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of FGDs</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Groups were planned and selected through a combination of intentional and convenience sampling. The research team created priority areas such as those mentioned above (vernacular language, SC/ST, gender, disability, etc.). In some cases, groups were planned and had to be cancelled at the last minute due to security issues, lack of time, or other unforeseen circumstances. This is reflected in the uneven distribution of groups across areas. It should be noted, though, that the geographic balance of the groups also compensates for some of the geographic disparity of the survey, in which the majority of the respondents were from urban areas in the north. In most cases, the staff travelled to the different areas of the country to interview students in their native places, except for two focus groups with north eastern students conducted in metros outside of their native places. We made this decision not only to expand the sample size, but also to capture the experiences of migrant students.
TOPIC # 1
GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION
TOPIC #1:
GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

ACCREDITATION
Relevant Themes:
I Governance reforms for quality
II Ranking of institutions and accreditations
III Improving the quality of regulation

More than half (53.7%) of survey respondents identified accreditation as an extremely important or very important factor in their choice of institution, indicating that it at the forefront of students’ minds. Although students from government colleges and engineering programs were slightly more concerned about accreditation compared to their peers from other institutions or degree areas, the difference between these groups was fairly small (see tables 3 and 4 below).

In focus group discussions, accreditation tended to be brought up by students coming from specific institutions or degrees who felt that their courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Not Important/ slightly important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important/ Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
<td>14.54%</td>
<td>20.17%</td>
<td>60.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government aided colleges</td>
<td>4.18%</td>
<td>16.36%</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>53.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
<td>21.48%</td>
<td>59.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private-aided / Minority</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>8.55%</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>58.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open or distance learning</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>16.82%</td>
<td>21.50%</td>
<td>58.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know what type of institution I attend</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
<td>9.38%</td>
<td>30.21%</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Not important/ slightly important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important/ Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, humanities, social sciences</td>
<td>6.63%</td>
<td>14.96%</td>
<td>22.16%</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce/Business</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
<td>15.42%</td>
<td>20.32%</td>
<td>59.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Technology</td>
<td>4.37%</td>
<td>13.85%</td>
<td>22.38%</td>
<td>59.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
<td>15.85%</td>
<td>20.73%</td>
<td>57.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>6.51%</td>
<td>11.16%</td>
<td>19.07%</td>
<td>63.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4.69%</td>
<td>15.89%</td>
<td>23.96%</td>
<td>55.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
<td>9.01%</td>
<td>20.60%</td>
<td>68.24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ought to be recognized through a clear, consistent, and transparent process. Students at a leading institution in western India, for example, said that their rigorous, well-regarded economics course has recently had its accreditation status questioned because it is a year longer than most similar courses. They were unaware of this issue before applying, and, once learning about the situation, feared that the uncertain status might place them at an academic disadvantage that could translate into a lack of opportunities post-graduation. Students said that in the future, courses should be launched only after approvals have been taken and guidelines have been met. Similarly, courses that are in flux in terms of accreditation status should make this clear to students while they are making their admissions choice, instead of after.

Several participants felt that NAAC and the accompanying accreditation process did not go far enough. Said one recent graduate from a public university in the north,

“I mean if I had to sum it up in a single way their [NAAC’s] only grading criteria was that is the university value for money. You’re paying a hefty amount of money per semester, is it value for money? So that is NAAC. NAAC doesn’t care about whether you’re happy there or not, NAAC I think doesn’t really bother about it.”

Some students felt that accreditation guidelines posed an opportunity for holding universities accountable for enforcing policies regarding student safety that are, at times, overlooked or administered poorly. Said one student who attended a private university and identifies as gay, “NAAC which gives these rankings to each university - gender and sexuality needed to be made an issue there...so as universities for nothing else, save for their own rankings at least, make institution wide policies.” This student believes that university ranking systems are an ideal incentive for improving how institutions cope with safety issues that lead to a lack of persistence among populations that MHRD has specifically identified, including women and students from rural areas.

A female student from a leading MBA college agreed that NAAC presents an opportunity for incentivizing improvement related to student satisfaction. She told us,

“I think global rankings are important. I think Indian colleges do not feature well in global rankings. Probably we can start working on what are the parameters on which these colleges should be rated. There are these various things like faculty to student ratio or how much research is being done by the college, how many patents and citations are there from the college or faculty. We could try and improve this in all the colleges across India, so someone sitting in Germany should be able to consider doing his MBA in India not just because it has an accreditation but because it features in the global rankings.”

This creative approach may be a point of leverage for improving the quality of institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
• Make accreditations transparent to students during the admissions process.
• Ensure regulation and equivalence of courses is predetermined, rather than imposed mid-session.
• Use NAAC as a tool for leveraging university support for more inclusive policies.
• Enhance the student support component of NAAC’s Assessment criteria to include the mandatory solicitation of student feedback on the quality of teaching, research, and infrastructure at regular intervals.
During focus group discussions, many students spontaneously brought up strong opinions about the admissions process. Often, comments revolved around the need to include more holistic measures than test scores. Many young people expressed scepticism about whether or not the current approach measures talent or rewards the wrong students. As one young woman attending a public evening college in a major metro said, “Students are able to secure 98% marks only by mugging up theory, but there are students who may have fewer marks but are able to make practical use of these concepts.”

Focus group participants displayed two prevalent attitudes: that college and secondary school marks do not truly measure a students’ capacity, and that students need to be assessed in multidimensional ways. In a focus group conducted in southern India at a semi-urban private college, a female student told us, “I think the entry needs to be only qualified entry…but the qualifying test needs to be in different aspects, not just of the marks.”

An academically successful female student from a leading university in south shared how a multi-dimensional approach to admissions helps students like herself who may not clear the desired cut-off, but possess skills that cannot be measured by test scores. She told us,

> “Here, the thing is that they don’t look at your percentages only, of course there are cut-offs as per the UGC norms but in addition they give you an opportunity to talk. Whereas in other universities I think that lacks, they don’t even know your name. Then how would you give me admission just on the basis of my marks?”

Another concern students expressed was whether they were being measured fairly compared to students who studied in other syllabi. It is unclear from our data whether these claims are founded, since we heard students from almost every syllabus criticize their peers studying under almost every other syllabus. However, it is notable that the issue came up persistently, without prompting from facilitators, and within the context of making campuses more accessible and equitable. For example, a student from southern India claimed that current admissions processes are designed with elite students in mind, thereby eliminating those from humbler backgrounds. He explained,

> “Entrance exams should be designed in a way that students from all backgrounds are able to give it so that they can have equal opportunities to get admitted into universities like this. Else we end up designing courses and exams in a way that only students from a particular type of institutions can pass them.”

Although they were critical about reservations and benefits offered in cut-offs based on identity category (such as gender and caste), students supported quotas based on special talents, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and financial need. Said one student who completed his graduation and post-graduation in the national capital region,

> “I think what came in handy to me was the extracurricular activities quota. I think that’s brilliant… then again after that even in my under - postgraduate institute, again I didn't get through the general, again I came through the ECA quota, thankfully there was one… People haven’t seen my marks at all – which are bad of course.”

This student explained that his marks were low because his family forced him into a degree that he did not want to do. He said that in graduate school, he was able to find an area that suited him well, achieved decent marks, and is now working in a job that he values and enjoys. Indeed, more than 80% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed
with the statement that institutions should encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities such as sports, music and arts, indicating that such criteria should perhaps not only be incorporated into the admission process, but should be extended onto campuses as well.

The lack of a holistic approach to admissions in India drove some talented students to look for options abroad. One young woman who attended prestigious undergraduate and graduate institutions in the United States told us,

“It was ridiculously easier for me to go abroad on a scholarship than it was for me to get into a college here. And it was because you know I had a resume of things that I had done, I had an essay to write, but if they had looked at the marks, what did I get. 90%? I wouldn’t have gotten in anywhere...I applied to the US only, because I knew that I was not going to get a 97 and walk into wherever I wanted. So I was like okay let’s not take any chances.”

This student’s decision to study in the US resulted in a loss for the Indian education system. This example perhaps makes the best case for re-examining the current assessment procedures associated with selection.

Many participants expressed concern about the effects of corruption on the application process, particularly in private institutions. Students felt that a lack of transparency made it difficult for students from middle class families to access even the most basic colleges and universities, a process that led to discouragement and, in some cases, dropping out. One female student studying in a rural institution in eastern India told us,

“My sister during her college admissions this year faced that while there were 46 seats available for a particular subject, the counselling was opened for only 15 seats. The remaining were under the control of a minister/political leader. So people would either have to contact him or pay him, and the amount was so exorbitant – my sister was lucky that she got through, but there was someone else along with her who couldn’t manage the money. Thus education is becoming a ballgame of the rich...if these corrupt practices could be stop, then it would benefit everyone.”

Uneven marking across boards is a huge problem. Universities have started keeping abnormally high cut-offs and students who are not from CBSE’s liberal marking system don’t get a fair chance in admissions to these universities. The new education policy must try to address this problem.

– Vineeta Chawla, 22, Delhi University

A student from the northeast had similar concerns about the open schooling system, saying “There is distance learning that is everywhere, in so many universities. [Examples of open programs] these are there, but we don’t trust these institutes because to get a pass certificate, we just have to pay money and buy a certificate.” Considering that open learning courses were established partially to support hard-to-reach students, the lack of faith in existing programs is particularly disheartening.

One way to standardize the application process might be to create a digital locker system for admissions similar to that currently being developed by GOI’s Digital India initiative. This locker could not only allow students to securely upload materials and mark sheets, but it could also help homogenize admissions so that corrupt individuals cannot attach arbitrary financial requirements to seats.

Finally, students agreed that social and familial pressure was a strong driver of admissions decisions. Survey data showed that about two-thirds (66%) of respondents felt that their decisions were affected by either family, or society or both. In focus groups,
students frequently mentioned that they needed better counselling both for themselves and their families. Almost every focus group contained at least one (if not many) students who said that they made their choices of colleges and courses almost entirely based on family pressure. This was particularly true of girls, and of students in the hard sciences. Said one student attending an engineering college in the south, “So it basically depends on our marks. Like if we get thousand hundred plus, we should either become a doctor or an engineer, that is forced upon us by our parents. It is like a multiple choice question with only two options. So I’m not really good in Medical, so I chose Engineering. That is the reason why most of us are here.”

While students used their personal or social media networks to learn about and emulate the career trajectories of successful, innovative professionals taking non-traditional paths, their parents’ and relatives’ hesitancy to allow them to pursue routes perceived as risky or less academically rigorous limited students’ ability to pursue these alternative options. Consequently, students suggested that parents should receive counselling alongside students during the admissions process to help them become more comfortable with young people’s choices to pursue degrees beyond engineering, science, and business that can both lead to successful career paths and enrich India’s innovation and creative professions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Make admissions requirements more holistic, including consideration of items extra-curricular activities.
- Improve quality of admissions tests.
- Expand extra-curricular quota and other admissions procedures that recognize non-academic skills.
- Eliminate corruption, particularly in rural and north-eastern areas.
- Create a digital locker based application system that includes a clear and transparent list of admissions requirements, standardized across universities.
- Offer counselling to students and parents about options regarding careers and degrees as early as tenth standard.

### FINANCIAL AID

**Relevant Themes:**

1. Governance reforms for equality
2. Sustaining student support systems
3. Addressing regional disparity
4. Bridging gender and social gaps

Survey data shows that 83% of respondents considered financial aid/scholarships while choosing their higher education institute, indicating that money plays a significant role in students’ enrolment decisions. This trend was confirmed in focus group discussions, where participants consistently expressed anxiety about tuition and expenses. The concern was especially evident among populations with low rates of registration and completion, including women, students from rural areas, and students from the northeast. Said one student from Mizoram,
“There are people out there, in the rural areas you know, in the far slum, remote areas who have no access and who cannot even dream about going to higher education. We are the privileged few. You know, that’s how we feel. So there’s still like talented, young, skilful people who if given opportunity can really go high. You know, go really far in their life, in their career. So we need those people. We need to reach out to those people. And then for those I think their practical use was a bit of a tackle. Like hostel accommodation, scholarship. So you know, colleges should offer more scholarships to young and able students.”

For some, financial anxieties were intimately tied to admissions. Said one engineering student from the south,

“Medical school is very costly, if you don’t get enough cut off marks. You must have 195 plus, 190 plus, then you get into a government college. Government Medical College is good compared to private college. Say you didn’t get. You have to go, spend 40-50 lakhs and some private medical schools have 80 lakhs just for donation… Ya, it goes to one crore, and MBBS doesn’t stop at under graduation. You go M.D. and that’s one crore, another one crore. And there are students who take engineering because they can’t afford that 40-50 lakhs.”

Students like these felt that their choice of degree was circumscribed by cost. Others said that many young people in their communities are not aware of the number of scholarships available to them, nor did they know how to apply. Said an ST student from western India,

“When we come for higher education, the tribal area that we come from, the schemes of the government, the policy of the government should reach them. Even today in the tribal areas people don’t know what policies the government has given them. These should reach them, which we can carry back through higher education.”

Many students said they hesitated to continue their studies because doing so posed a financial setback not only for themselves but also their families.

These respondents were deterred by the monetary implications of leaving full time work to pursue a post-graduate degree, and the loss of freedom that such a choice implied. This was particularly true of women pursuing degrees midcareer who faced both financial and mobility-related restrictions because of a lack of funding. Said a student from the north of India studying at a leading university in the south after working for some time,

“What happens is that you are used to an independent lifestyle, for instance staying in hostel is a little puzzling because we aren’t used to being policed and having these entry and exit timings. It gets a little bizarre because you are a responsible citizen and you have paid tax and then you come to a hostel and have a warden, who in some cases is almost of the same age as you, but she tells you what is wrong and that you shouldn’t do it. Not everybody can afford to say that I don’t need a hostel; hence, particularly for women it is important that you have a really open accommodation, which is not the case over here.”

In contrast, students were appreciative of opportunities to continue working and studying. Said one female student from a village in the south, “Our college said that they will change the timings of UG students also. But not now they will change soon, this will be very beneficial for the students who will go for part time jobs.” This type of flexibility can both increase students’ autonomy and lessen their anxiety about pursuing higher degrees.

Midcareer students who were working while they applied to higher education described the difficulties they faced getting scholarships because they had to report their salaries, income that they would lose as soon as they enrolled. A female student pursuing her MBA mentioned how her income from her last job misrepresented her financial situation, and resulted in the loss of a scholarship.
“There is a need based financial assistance that is provided here but it has some special rules like your family income should be below 6 lakh, and when they say family income, they add you previous years’ income also. Now that you have joined this college, you don’t work anymore and that income actually isn’t your income right now... So even if you have a requirement, it won’t be provided because of that extra rule that has been added. I think people are not actually getting the assistance they need.”

Still other students looked for financial aid to escape dependency on their families, who they knew would not accept them for their lifestyles and choices. One student said that he was afraid that his parents would not accept him after discovering his sexuality. Consequently, it was important to him to be financially independent. He is currently attending a Masters program abroad because of the lack of opportunity within India. He told us,

“I was also really keen on getting a scholarship and not taking money from my parents. So until now I’ve been dependent, but then that was a decision – and then after realizing that there’s not much to do here, I think – I could’ve thought of doing a masters here, but I very consciously started planning for a masters abroad.”

This student was accepted at a leading institution abroad, representing another loss for the Indian educational system.

On a positive note, students spoke highly of existing government scholarship schemes, saying that these opportunities should be expanded. When asked what he would say if he could speak directly to MHRD, one northeastern student studying at a premiere state university said,

“If I got the chance to talk to [the minister], then I will thank her for the Ishan Uday Scholarship that she had introduced last year. For the North East students. She had given to 10,000 North East students every year. So for the under graduates. It’s quite nice. But even though thanking her, then I would suggest that the scholarship, she should divide the scholarship so that everyone gets it. Not like some few selected people get 8000 per month, like that.”

Some students from the northeast also expressed their appreciation for research fellowships awarded to students from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, saying that this money had allowed them to pursue innovative activities in a variety of areas beyond traditional sciences and engineering, indicating that they placed a high value on research and innovation within their institutions.

Students who were lucky enough to be awarded scholarships or financial aid, however, were not always secure in their awards. Some said that they had trouble accessing the funding given to them, partially because of corruption. A young woman from Assam told us,

“Government is providing scholarship, but they are not providing them regularly. I have some friends in Assam, they are not getting their JRF scholarships on regular basis. They are getting it after 9 to 10 months. People are asking bribes to give those scholarships. These are our rights, but we are not getting it. Proper amount of money is not reaching the students.”

These findings suggest that colleges and universities should have the autonomy to expand scholarship opportunities while simultaneously being held to high standards of transparency and accountability. To this end, MHRD could link scholarships and their administration to existing automated systems such as Digital Lockers and/or Adhar cards, eliminating middle men – and, by extension, opportunities for corruption. The government should also make opportunities more visible to those students living in rural areas who may lack the connections or knowledge to understand what opportunities are available. Scholarships could be a more salient part of the counselling process, or could be advertised on central web sites or known resource centers for students. After all, even the most inclusive forms of financial aid are only useful if they reach their intended audiences.
Overwhelmingly, our results indicated that students wanted more of a say in governing their institutions, and that existing mechanisms for incorporating students' voices ought to be strengthened.

Focus group discussions indicated that students' ability to voice their opinions and institutions' openness to student feedback may influence admissions choices. Students particularly sought out faculty and coursework that allowed them to speak their minds. For example, when asked about how she chose her college, a student from eastern India told us,

“Each faculty member, including the HOD, gives us a lot of time and individual attention, beyond mere textbook lectures. Such discussion as we are having today is a common thing in our university. We have at least 4-5 of such interactions every year on different topics where we get a space to voice our opinions.”

Unfortunately, after students enrolled in universities and colleges, they did not always find the avenues they sought. When asked, “Do you think student voices and opinions influence the policies of your institution?” over half (52%) of respondents said no. Additionally, only 34% of students knew where to report corruption, and less than a quarter of students felt that addressing corruption would lead to any kind of change. Students were slightly more optimistic and well informed about systems for reporting harassment: about half of students knew where to report harassment, and about 40% felt that any complaints that they made regarding harassment would be addressed (See Table 5.)

In focus group discussions, it became clear that colleges and universities across India varied considerably in their approaches to soliciting student voice. Some participants described well-run systems where students communicate with administration via elected representatives. One young woman from a private university in southern India, for example, explained:

“It’s a student committee meeting mam, we used to say that. We give suggestion for that...For each class they may call us representatives...the representative will communicate with us. They may ask the suggestions and the influence that we may want to commit in the future or in the present and will suggest to our principal or secretary mam. If it is acceptable they [administrators] will proceed.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Allow institutions of higher education autonomy in creating and administering scholarships.
- Within this autonomy, provide strong regulations and monitoring, as well as serious consequences for corruption.
- Link scholarships with Digital India’s digital locker plan through creating uniform procedures for applying for scholarships.
- Hold financial bodies responsible for administering scholarships wholly and on time by eliminating middlemen and using direct transfers.
- Advertise scholarships and financial aid through highly visible channels.

**STUDENT VOICE**

**Relevant Themes:**

I  Governance reforms for quality

XIII  Sustaining student support systems
On some campuses, students relied on youth-organized mechanisms. Although these were not always recognized by institutional authorities, and therefore not ideal, students still found them empowering. A student in eastern India, for example, said,

“There was a professor from our class itself who had verbally abused students. The students of the class had complained to the department and we had demanded that he should not be taking any of our classes anymore and the department should ensure that something like this should not happen in future. That our department had done. The professor does not take any class from our batch, and he had never done something like this with the girls of our batch. So the voice in [our institute] is much more than any other university... Whether the authority listens to or not, we definitely have the opportunity of keeping our voice.”

In contrast, another participant from a different eastern institution reported that students at her college felt frustrated because they were unable to advocate for even the simplest amenities. She recounts the ordeal students had to go through to ensure the provision of basic facilities:

“This building had no drinking water supply or water supply in the washrooms for three days. He [fellow participant] spoke about the VC? For three days, we couldn’t even approach the registrar. We made several rounds, knocked on doors. No one was willing to even see us, sending us to different rooms. It was amidst the hot season, there was no availability of drinking water, neither could we use the toilets as they were all dirty – for three days. It depends on their whims and fancies, whenever they feel like looking into it, only then will things be done – in this case, we really have no voice. If anyone falls sick, there’s no such facility for first aid, we all carry emergency medicines with us in our bags – these are the things which are majorly lacking here.”

Another concern students raised was that although sometimes authorities agree to their demands in principle, without adequate follow up pressure, implementation does not occur. Said one student from an eastern metropolis,

“We had put up sanitary napkins in various parts of the campus and we had said that we need sanitary napkin dispensers in our campus – it is very essential, otherwise the condition of campus students will be very bad. So that was a voice that

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**TABLE 5: STUDENT VIEWS ON INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CORRUPTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I experience or witness corruption, I know who to report it to.</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am confident that my institution will address any corruption that I report.</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I experience or witness harassment, I know who to report it to.</th>
<th>Agree/strongly agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am confident that my institution will address any harassment that I report.</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we could keep, authority did not agree with it. They had said they would rusticate us, then when other students had also supported us saying that a democratic [practice] cannot be discontinued by the authority - so then we went into negotiation with the authority and they agreed to install the dispensers, even though they have not put them yet.”

A female participant from a leading central university in Delhi gave the following example of how at times vesting power in the hands of students unions can benefit all students. Often, she pointed out, students have an understanding of what will benefit their peers, particularly those facing challenges. She said,

“Personally, I feel that all the political outfits in most colleges do not do a lot of work. However, I would like to point out that they are not adequately empowered to change things and we haven’t given them that kind of power. In my college, the student union took the initiative of starting buses to [town] and [town] as my college goes on till late evening, from 4 to 8:35. I think the situation matters from college to college and require more organised work on the political front. The bus service is for both boys and girls as mine is a co-ed college, but we get many girl students from [area] and it is helpful for them.”

In some cases, young people reacted to feelings of marginalization with violence. Said one student attending a public institution in the north reported,

“Even the students’ union at my college...So they basically, what they did recently was they shut the principal inside his room. And they said either you sign or we’ll kill you and he was almost about to have a heart attack. Yeah yeah. So that’s the kind of - so that can be the level of student action also to the level of just - I mean if they don’t want you to go to that level, they should form committees.”

As this examples shows, having clear and defined systems for student voice can contribute to a positive campus climate and, by extension, student and faculty safety and security.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Fully implement existing student feedback mechanisms.
- Include option of anonymity in all student feedback procedures.
- Require all institutions to create student grievance cell, with adequate student representation and set response time from faculty and administration.
- Focus feedback mechanisms not only on quality of teaching but also how other non-academic issues were tackled and settled.
- Include components of student satisfaction and an evaluation of feedback and governance structures in accreditation process.

When it comes to identifying discrimination, issues like sexual orientation and gender identity are not recognised by the university administration. LGBT people face a lot of harassment but there is no grievance redressal mechanism in place.

— Aapurv Jain, 21, University of Delhi
TOPIC # 2
INFRASTRUCTURE
When asked about the criteria they used to choose their educational institution, 83% of participants included infrastructure as a factor in their decision, but slightly less than half (47%) ranked it as either very or extremely important. In comparison, 64% ranked quality of research and teachers very or extremely important, suggesting that students are less concerned with physical facilities compared to teaching and learning on campuses, a trend that emerged across focus groups.

A few students reported serious neglect, particularly in state-run institutions. Said one female student from the national capital region, “When we look for a college, we see that the education system should be good. However, what matters is not just the education system, but even the buildings and the facilities we are provided. Things like canteen, washrooms, computer labs, whether the labs are functional or not are things that matter. It matters that the place you are studying has electricity; simply having fans and lights to show is not of any use.”

This student reported that her college was so under resourced that there was not even chalk. One of the reasons she may have brought it up is because the case was extreme compared to what we heard in other groups.

More commonly, participants brought up infrastructure in the context of teaching and learning, such as: the relevance and timeliness of coursework; the ability to go beyond classroom lectures; and the potential for updated facilities to address disparities pertaining to gender, disability, and region. Furthermore, respondents recommended that improvements should not be limited to campuses, but should be extended to the surroundings as well. In rural areas, for example, campuses receive inconsistent power, little or no potable water, or are surrounded by poor quality roads with few options for public transportation. Said one student from a rural university in the east:

“When I started here, I felt bad – no infrastructure, bad roads, it takes me 6 hours to commute from my home to and fro, hardly do I have any time left to study then. But now after being here for two years, and having developed a tie with the department... the distance or the road is no longer a factor for me. Now what matters to me are the teachers and the subject- this means a lot to me now.”

Like this respondent, the majority of students said they were willing to cope with sub-par infrastructure as long as they were satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning offered in their departments.

Students felt that attention should not only be paid to learning facilities, but also to public spaces, particularly those where students could gather and express their views and creativity. One student from a college in eastern India lamented, “When you are walking down, you see a lot of wall writing and graffiti. That’s an expression of free thinking, right? In our college most of the time, the wall graffiti gets white washed because the authorities do not want writings on the wall. They want the college to be in a certain light and that’s their idea of academics.”

It should be noted that this particular focus group was conducted in a non-air conditioned classroom where the desks were peeling and wobbling, the blackboard had no chalk, and the walls were cracked and weather beaten. For this student, however, the low quality of the furnishings was less important than having the physical space to express and explore academic concepts (literally) outside of the classroom.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- When improving infrastructure, include the surrounding area and the provision of public services, particularly those identified by students with disabilities.
About one third (32%) of participants in our total sample have taken at least one online course, and about three-fourths (75%) took courses within their interest areas that were not offered at their universities. This suggests that students are actively seeking out pathways for driving their own learning.

This trend was confirmed in focus groups, where students saw online portals as possibilities for expanding their curricular options. A student from a private university in the south, for example, mentioned how he wanted to study a course that wasn’t offered at his campus. He suggested that online modules provide a solution for students to be able to learn things they are passionate about. He said,

“We should be given a few credits that we decide about, i.e. if a University is not able to make arrangements for a course that may be one or ten students would be interested in then it should be taken in an online mode. It should be a combination of distance plus regular. I am not saying make it completely distance. There are a lot of websites like Coursera that give you an authorization that you have completed up to a certain level.”

Only about 14% of participants who took online courses reported that these courses were recognized by their universities. The survey did not ask why this was the case, but there are several possible explanations. Students could have taken commercial courses that were not of sufficient quality to be considered credit bearing. Alternatively, students could have taken high quality courses, but their institutions may not have established processes enabling them to apply for credit. Yet another possibility is that a credit process exists, but students are not aware of it.

Within the survey sample, the percentage of males (36%) that had taken online courses was slightly higher than the percentage of females (24%). Furthermore, only 6% of those who had taken online courses were from rural areas. This data suggests that MOOCs and other online portals may not be effective tools for increasing access and equity. However, it may imply that MOOCs can supplement existing resources, particularly among students interested in taking classes that are not offered in their institutions.

Regardless of demography, students appear to face barriers to accessing online courses on campus. Although 75% of respondents report having access to the internet at home, only about 46% had access at their educational institutions. Furthermore, 11% of

In the age of Globalisation, things are changing constantly. But why has our education system not adapted to this change yet? It’s not teaching us the skills we require to survive in this rapidly changing world.

– Kitdor W. Kharbuli, 23, University of Hyderabad
respondents reported that they did not have access to internet at their home, institution, or workplace. This was reinforced in focus groups, where students spoke about a lack of connectivity on their campuses, particularly in remote and / or rural areas. Said one student attending an institution in the northeast,

“We need technology now. So new innovations for installing white boards and wi-fi campus like them. In our college, now wi-fi is just available for Principal and other office members, not even the teachers. They do not get use the wi-fi and there should be digital class rooms. There should be equal status among all in the college premises between the teachers and students.”

Taken together, these findings suggest that many campuses and the surrounding areas need upgradation in terms of their internet related infrastructure, and therefore could be an area of focus for existing connectivity initiatives such as Digital India.

Although few students brought up a lack of access to technology beyond the internet, those that did tended to be from more technical degrees. These deficiencies were often brought up in the context of teaching and learning. A student from the west studying the physical sciences, for example, said,

“It’s like the teaching level is good, but the amount of equipment or the amount of research exposure required at the post-graduation or the Masters level is not good. You need a lot of standard equipment, you need a lot of scientifically approved instrumentation techniques which are not available on the campus, not just in our department but of course in other departments too that are placed in the university campus.”

Some students in focus groups reported that their colleges were well equipped and up-to-date technologically. However, this presented a different problem: during a focus group discussion at college in southern India, for example, engineering students reported that although the latest technology was available on their campus, they were not allowed to actually use it in their coursework. A student from the South of India, studying engineering shares,

“We labs just started and as I told, [the professor said] the instrument is 85 thousand. You do not touch it, you do not even turn it on. You can look at it, you will call me and then I will tell you what you have to do for this particular experiment. You will do it and that is all. So, I mean it’s a lab. I think it defeats the purpose.”

Similarly, at another institution in the south, computer science students said that they had lodged repeated complaints with their department because their course focused on outdated programming languages. Unfortunately, when asked to either provide more in-demand languages or to recommend off-campus courses for credit, their department refused. In this case, not only were students denied access to technology and content, but also student-led attempts to address the problem were systematically shut down. These examples illustrate how the provision of technology is not enough. Professors must be trained on how to use equipment as learning tools, and must be informed about the latest developments in the field. In other words, decisions about technology must be aligned with decisions about teaching and learning.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Allow students interested in remediation or in taking classes outside of their degree requirements to take MOOCs for credit.
- Regulate online courses in a standardized way and publicize which are credit bearing and which are not.
- Clearly inform students how to apply for credit for online courses.
- Improve cable connections and hardware at all institutions so students can access online courses, perhaps by prioritizing campuses and communities as part of Digital India.
- Allow students to use new equipment.
- Train and encourage professors to use new technologies, rather than making them fearful of repercussions if damage occurs.
In focus groups, students with disabilities in general—and students with orthopaedic and visual impairments in particular—were the most vocal proponents of infrastructure improvements. Although most agreed that the availability and quality of basic accessibility structures (such as ramps) have improved, glaring gaps remain. A female student attending a state college in a major metropolis, said,

“One of my friends had spina bifada or something like that. Her father used to lift her and bring her to class every day. She would not have water during class as she was aware that the toilet was not accessible. I am talking about [a well-known institution], which has got star accreditation from UGC and the name like a college with excellence.”

This college did not have even basic accommodations to allow a student with disabilities to attend classes without extensive support. In many cases, gaps in accessibility are a result of a lack of implementation, rather than a lack of an existing policy. Said one visually impaired student from rural west Bengal, “The rules exist but either the universities are not aware or they have a lackadaisical kind of attitude implementing these accessibility stuff.”

Students from certain disability groups also named more specific improvements that they felt would increase the enrolment rates of their peers. Hostels, for example, were a key requirement among students who were visually impaired: many had pursued their K-12 education in residential schools, so they had developed systems based on this experience to help them survive independently. Furthermore, transportation is a serious problem for any student with any kind of disability, not just because public facilities like buses are ill-equipped, but also because bus drivers often will not stop when they see someone disabled waiting by the side of the road. One visually impaired student who had migrated across the country to attend college in a major metropolis said,

“There is a big issue of buses. Buses are not there at all places and so many blind people are not aware. They leave their education in between. If someone helps us, then it is fine. Otherwise, 2-3 buses don’t stop when they see visually impaired people and we are unable to catch them.”

Several participants said that they had turned down admission into top state institutions across the country because of the lack of availability of hostels, thus depriving institutions of potentially talented students.

Visually impaired students cited technology as a tool for improving inclusion. Library books, for example, become accessible when they are converted into audiobooks, something that has happened to a limited extent in India, and so far has focused largely on English texts. Visually impaired students studying in vernacular mediums repeatedly pointed out the need to make books accessible in Hindi, Bangla, and Tamil, among other languages.

Making books accessible is particularly critical for students in the humanities, social sciences, and other research intensive programs. Said one visually impaired student from the north,

“As a history student, we have to deal with archaeological records, manuscripts, calligraphy, etc. It is not possible for us to hire an expert person to read these to us... Reading these needs expertise. My recommendation is expedite the process of making the state and national archives accessible. It is otherwise very challenging.”

Other participants brought up accessibility issues that required creative solutions on the part of the
administration and student body. For example, recently, at a large public university in the north, stray dogs on campus were attacking disabled students because they were threatened by students’ walking sticks and crutches. While students with disabilities wanted to make the university declare itself a dog-free zone - something that has been successfully done on some other campuses - their peers felt doing so was a violation of animal rights. Since there was no clear method to bring the problem to the administration, or for both sides to communicate with each other, the situation escalated into conflict. This could have been avoided with better systems supporting all students, and not just those without disabilities.

Many of the recommendations in this section reflect the general attitude that college is as much about interacting with diverse peers as it is about learning subject matter. To this end, students from various identity groups supported improving infrastructure as a way to increase diversity and inclusion on campus.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Ensure that existing policies regarding infrastructure for students with disabilities are enforced, perhaps through accreditation procedures or other forms of regulation.
- Make reading material more accessible in multiple languages.
- Set up an accessible book trust in India that can be accessed virtually.
- Improve and increase hostel facilities.
- Create more mechanisms for students with disabilities to share challenges they face.

These days, technology has become a basic need for everyone. One can always use this commonality between people to attain the universalization of education.

– S Visalini, 19, Lady Irwin College
TOPIC # 3
TEACHING
AND LEARNING
One of the twenty themes identified by MHRD is “developing the best teachers.” Keeping this in mind, the online survey asked respondents about the qualities they would like to see in an ideal teacher. Table 6 summarizes the qualities that the majority of students ranked as very important or extremely important.

These responses suggest that students appreciate teachers who excel at pedagogy and go beyond the curriculum and provide counselling and guidance. Furthermore, the majority of students value faculty that are willing to engage in discussion about practical issues, including social, cultural, ethical, and global values.

This trend was reinforced during focus group discussions, where we asked students how they define a “good” teacher. Generally, students felt that good teachers made content interesting and relevant, and went beyond textbooks to expose students to new ideas. A student from a leading university in the south describes how a syllabus can come alive in the hands of the right faculty member. She said,

I envision a system where the practical aspect of education is inculcated along with a reduced focus on the typical rote. We must move beyond the textbook and classrooms. We should be forced to think. This can only be done by shaking things up a little.

– Gurnaman Kaur, 20, Delhi University.

### TABLE 6: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER QUALITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Teaching</th>
<th>Not important/ Somewhat important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important/ Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates curriculum in an interesting and practical way</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes interest in issues students face and counsels them</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assesses students fairly</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates human, social, cultural, ethical and global values through her/his lessons</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I like a course because a professor delivers it in a certain way. In our first semester we had some fixed core courses and we heard that in one section there is a professor who simply blows your mind and we would wonder that why did that not happen to us. We had the exact same syllabus, exact same readings and the exact same time given to it. We wondered why we don’t come out of the class with a dazed expression that something amazing just happened in our lives which we won’t forget. I really think it is about the delivery. A great course will be as great as it can be if the delivery is good.”

Many students felt that pre-service professors should be required to undergo training in pedagogy. Students at a focus group at one of India’s leading MBA institutions, for example, suggested that doctoral students aspiring to be professors should be required to take courses in teaching similar to those offered in a B.Ed. In addition, students felt that the criteria for selecting teachers based on National Eligibility Test (NET) need major revamping. Specifically, they felt NET seems to concentrate more on rote knowledge than conceptual clarity. A student from a leading university in southern India said, “About 3 months ago, I gave my NET exam- that exam and what I am studying here are nowhere connected.” Additionally, students suggested that the NET should capture and reward teaching experience and professional development.

Students were interested in taking courses from industry professionals. Participants were excited about interacting with experts who could share practical experience as well as coach students looking for unconventional career paths. A student from south India said:

“We see that a teacher starts her/his journey as teacher and ends as a teacher, and the path is very straight. However in industry we see that after working for a while in one company they move on and grow. We are not making use of professionals in their 40’s or 50’s who want to enter, because we do not have any scope for them to enter and go out. If they want to teach for 2 years, it’s a huge experiment both for the student and the professionals themselves. But it is worth it, if it is done properly.”

One issue that repeatedly surfaced was the need for teachers to treat students equally. Table 7 shows the results of a question asking respondents to indicate how often they hear professors and administrators making negative comments about socio-economic status, marks/merit, religion, region, sexual orientation, disability, and other identity categories. While students generally perceived teachers to be open minded and unbiased, this perception ended when it came to marks: almost half of the students in the survey believe that they observed teachers expressing bias based on marks often or all the time.

### Table 7: Percentage of Students Witnessing Bias-Based Comments from Faculty Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Bias</th>
<th>Percentage of students reporting that they witnessed bias-based comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never / Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste (General/SC/ST/OBC etc.)</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation (heterosexual,</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesbian, gay, bisexual)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region (rural, urban, semi-urban)</td>
<td>62.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks/Merit</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This finding is corroborated by focus group data, in which many students narrated specific instances of bias. A student from the north claimed,

“Teachers are only concerned with their top rankers. Partiality in my class started when during our first test in our first semester, the first five or first seven rankers were considered to be essential participants of the class and the rest were considered as simple observers. My teacher, she is caring. If I am not feeling well then she would ask and take care. However, when it comes to marks that’s when I witness that she gets partial. I feel if there is student-teacher interaction then this would not happen, then each of the students in the class will be given equal status.”

Like many participants, this student was concerned with bias because of the impact it had on her ability to participate in class and get the most out of her education.

Sometimes, bias about marks was linked to biases about region, gender, or other identities. For instance, students from the northeast, particularly those studying outside the region, felt that teachers underestimated them because of their ethnic background. A student from the northeast shared her experience.

“Once last semester my professor, she asked me in the class - it was right after I think we came back from holidays, our result came out. And then, she was mockingly asking, because mostly we, North East people, the girls, we hardly participate in the class. Like asking questions, or raising arguments or something. So mockingly she was asking me, how much did you get in my paper? And luckily I did well in her paper, I told her, ma’am I got 70. And she was like, ‘Oh!’ She gives me that, I mean like that ‘Oh!’ So, I was so like pissed. And then I told her ma’am, you mostly underestimate us.”

While in this case, the participant scored high marks despite facing bias, other students had concerns about how bias directly affected their ability to succeed academically. A student from a leading central university in Delhi, for example, told us,

“Partiality comes in when marks are given, specifically in case of internals. My friend was preparing for medical entrances along with the regular course and there was another girl in our class, who was an average student. However, when marks were given, both of them got same marks even though both had different attendance. This was because the teacher gave preference to the girl who was the topper was preparing for her medical entrances alongside.”

Similar experiences were shared by students who believed that there is no transparency when it comes to marks that are allotted based on attendance. Furthermore, participants claimed that there are no mechanisms are in place where students can get speedy responses to bias-related grievances. One student, for example, recounted her friend’s experience, in the national capital region:

“My friend had passed the written exam but she had to reappear again so there is no reliability. She went to the [institution’s] office and they said go back to the college. She was running two ways and didn’t get any solution; students at the end have to give the exam again. When it comes to giving marks, you cannot challenge the power of the teachers and there is partiality which everyone has come across.”

Participants identified a need for anonymous feedback mechanisms linked to teacher appraisals. They believed that this would not only help the system become more transparent, but would also improve the quality of teaching. A female student from a leading institute in the east, for instance, said,

“Teachers should also have some sort of evaluation wherein if they do not pass that, as in there should be some way to ensure the quality of teaching doesn’t deteriorate. There is a supply problem there we agree, but if you are taking meritorious students then it should be your responsibility to give them meritorious faculty also.”

Participants also brought up the issue of witnessing bias aimed at their peers. Students who were not the direct victims of bias felt uncomfortable in classes where teachers were obvious about their preferences, even if those teachers were well versed in the course
content or otherwise prepared to teach. One female student remembered an incident that occurred in her college in the northeast:

“I didn’t like an honours teacher. She was brilliant. I would not say she was bad. But in her nature of teaching she segregated the poor and the rich. She would be like, OK, giving you an example. HRM [Human Resource Management] that was my subject. She would ask, OK, so what is the price of your jacket? And he [the student] would be like, he comes from a remote area and next thing you know, he never attended that class. Then I didn’t attend the class anymore because she was a disgrace to me. I felt I will rather not gain any knowledge from you.”

As this example illustrates, many students believe that a teacher’s responsibility goes beyond imparting the syllabus, and should include guiding students morally as well. In fact, a recurring theme among focus group participants was the desire for teachers to make themselves available for counselling and advice. When speaking of their favourite teachers and / or imagining their ideal faculty, students often described them as acting like family members. A low income female student from a semi-urban area in the south who lacks support from her family, for example, stated that her teachers are a primary motivation for her to excel at her studies. In a focus group, she told us,

“They’re [professors are] caring for us like their children. Even though they are all 5, 2, 3 years difference mam, they are our teachers for us. Even then they are caring like their sisters and children. They’re saying, often they’ll be repeating this, we are second parents for you now. So be with us how you will treat your parents, how you will feel free with your parents. This is how they will say. So when we enter into the department, we’ll feel very free.”

This student identified her teachers’ emotional support as a key element of her persistence and success.

Students felt that sometimes teachers who were motivated to go beyond their official duties were not able to form relationships with students because of barriers imposed by institutional culture. For example, some participants said that increasing pressures from administration and state bodies are changing the way teachers approach their jobs. A female undergraduate student at a private university in the east laments,

“We had a certain culture, faculty and students would interact like family, and that is going away. Now it is no more an organic relationship. It is a huge blow...if we actually get that back, a lot of things change automatically. You could walk into a class room, it’s not even your classroom and sit back and listen to your professor. Or not even attend a professors class for several months and yet have a wonderful relationship with that professor, sit with them right before your examination and that professor would make most effort to ensure that you get good grades.”

This data is particularly important given MHRD’s explicit question of whether teachers should also be counsellors and form part of student support systems. The students in our study would certainly answer yes.

Another issue that strongly emerged from conversations about teaching was that of medium of
A common observation that came out of our FGDs was that students felt that teachers could sustain diversity on campus if during their lectures they switched between English and local vernacular languages. A student from a leading private university in southern India said,

“We don’t have support for students who are not fluent in English. We always term them as students who are not fluent in English but we don’t look at them as students who are fluent in Hindi or Kannada. Then we learn about the ill-effects of the imposition of English [in class] but we talk about it in English. We had one teacher who happened to be fluent in three languages, so when he spoke, he consciously spoke in all those three languages and we were stunned because then we saw that the observers [students who had been quiet] were actually talking. It’s only when he switched from English to Hindi to Urdu - and we had a student and he spoke in Urdu because that student articulated so many ideas and so well, we felt that stark difference between his class and the rest of our four classes. I remember speaking to a professor, and I said that please break your narrative and speak in languages that you are comfortable with. It doesn’t have to be Hindi and could even be Tamil, it could be any language, but break that strong narrative.”

This student provides a concrete strategy for addressing language inclusion: allow and, in fact, encourage teachers to switch between languages during their lectures in order to create more comfortable spaces for student participation. Not only does this improve student learning, it leads to mixing between students, as young people get the opportunity to observe their classmates’ strengths which may be otherwise be masked by a lack of fluency in the medium of instruction.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Create easy entry and exit systems for industry professionals to take up teaching for short intervals.
- Create systems to protect students from partiality based on marks/merit.
- Increase weightage of classroom teaching experience in NET applications.
- Encourage faculty to lecture in multiple mediums.
- Create institutional cultures where teachers have the freedom to counsel and develop strong relationships with students.

**COURSEWORK**

*Relevant themes:*

- VI Integrating skill development into higher education
- VII Promoting open and distance learning and online courses
- VIII Opportunities for technology enabled learning
- XI Linking higher education to society
- XII Developing the best teachers

When asked to respond to the statement, “I am satisfied with the coursework offered at my institution / the institutions I have attended,” 39% of survey respondents chose disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that more than one third was dissatisfied with their coursework. Through focus group discussions, participants confirmed that coursework is an area that requires specific attention and reform.
In focus group discussions, students repeatedly brought up the need to revamp courses to be more relevant and up-to-date. Said one female student from an evening college in the national capital region, “Whatever theory we learn should not be confined to only exams. And we should, along with our teachers know how to apply it practically. Even teachers should go beyond teaching theory, for example they should know the roots and origin of Newton’s law and its applications which are extremely important. Lectures should be practical, an equal division of lectures which are theoretical and practical is important.”

Participants claimed that tying theories to real life experiences makes class interesting and interactive. In contrast, an approach that is syllabus - and, by extension, exam oriented – provides only a superficial understanding of required content.

Currently, students said that tightly enforced syllabi with unreasonable time constraints limit professors’ abilities to respond to student inputs and interests, or to discuss newer, more up-to-date material. As described above, computer science students attending a private college in the south said that they were being forced to learn an outdated programming language required by the outdated syllabus. As one of these students told us, “It basically depends on the syllabus. If we have a topic like C programming, basics of C programming, besides that they’ll give number of hours, 2 or 3 hours, that is the time limit for that particular portion to be taken. If we’re really interested, like if our class is really interested to know more about it, then we must make our own effort to know about it.”

The need to update coursework has implications not just for employability, but also for higher studies. Some students said they migrated from rural colleges to metros because felt that their local colleges had not adequately prepared them for the rigors of post graduate work. Said one female student from the northeast, “My elder sister who studied in [a local college in the northeast] who now studies in [elite institution in a metropolitan city] in International Studies. She felt that the course is very tough when she got chance there. Even after studying Political Science for 3 years she is finding it difficult to cope up with the new course as she did not read those things earlier.” As this quote shows, providing up-to-date coursework is not just a matter of employability, but also of access.

Students felt that teachers were under so much pressure to finish unreasonably packed syllabi that they automatically responded negatively when students brought questions or knowledge relating new theories to the classrooms. A student from western India, for instance, recounted his experience of asking a professor about an aspect of the assignment that was not explicitly on the syllabus: “So we were doing this experiment online, on the computer and he said ‘no, put temperature as o.’ I just raised my hand and asked is it in Kelvin or Celsius. And then he got so pissed at me and he called me separately and asked ‘Did you ask that on purpose? Did you know that before, why did you ask?’ So even if a person wants to ask a doubt, no, it’s suppressed.”

Different communities have different challenges and opportunities at the same time. Our education system must train people to address specific problems and avail opportunities that can create sustainable solutions. The same curriculum for everyone can’t be the right approach.

– Aisowanma Sangma, 24, Northeastern Hill University (Nehu) Shillong
Several other students narrated similar instances where their inquisitiveness was branded as a deliberate attempt to undermine teachers, rather than genuine curiosity. Students therefore asked for both teachers and courses to be more flexible and open to inquiry.

It should be noted that this sentiment was most pronounced among students studying the sciences, who claimed that humanities students were the only ones with access to free spaces for dialogue. A student from a university in the east, for example, shared, “There is this very strict science and engineering divide and there is also hierarchy and no dialogue between these departments. The arts students feel that they know more and they are more sensitized about these issues.”

Participants said one solution to this issue would be to introduce compulsory courses in subjects such as gender and sexuality. They felt that doing so would not only create space for dialogue but could also improve campus climates by raising students’ awareness on important social issues. A student from eastern India who identifies as a lesbian, for example, said:

“In my masters’ course, when I had the optional course on new gender studies, we felt that it should not be an optional course but should rather be included as a compulsory or main course so that people can interact freely. And these courses should be offered in the undergraduate course itself so that people can open up on such issues that they cannot talk freely about in the college campus. It can trigger more discussions on such issues.”

Interestingly, focus group facilitators never asked specific questions about including social issues in coursework, nor did they ask about integrating sciences and humanities. The organic emergence of this theme indicates that it might be something that students have on their minds.

Additionally, participant said that the pressure to complete the syllabus in an unreasonable time impacted their ability to engage in extracurricular pursuits that promoted their personal and professional development. Said one young woman studying at a semi-urban institution in the northeast, “We have no time to do any extra thing...A lot of home works are given and we have to complete the same within time and will have to be deposited on the next class. So we remain busy with that and we have no time to go elsewhere to participate any extra activities. Therefore it is very difficult for the students participate in any extra activities and gather knowledge.”

While some professors and universities treat clubs and societies as extras, many students described out of classroom activities as experiences that were just as – if not more – educational than their coursework. Said one young woman from a certificate course in the national capital region,

“When I came to college, I participated in every function that had ever taken place and then I realised there are many things. I wrote a script for Drama Society and got praise from my seniors, which is a big thing in [my university] and when they invited me to write more scripts then it boosted my morale. Gradually, my stage fright and the fear of public speaking went away.”

This student’s experience illustrates what many participants told us: that colleges are places to grow both inside and outside of the classroom.

Another unexpected finding came from focus groups on disabilities, where participants reported that they were sometimes restricted from courses based on unfounded perceptions about their capacity. A visually impaired student from southern India, for example, said,

“At some places, blind students are not even allowed to study economics, forget about science.... I shifted to Bangalore because [the universities in my state] said I cannot study economics. They said – no. So, even economics is not accepted everywhere.”

This particular student was successfully pursuing his PhD, indicating that his personal challenges were not hampering him academically. Barring students from coursework without understanding their potential is not only inequitable, but also potentially depriving India of the opportunity to develop precious human resources. Although further investigation of this issue was beyond the scope of this study, we strongly believe that this trend warrants substantial inquiry.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Allow colleges and universities flexibility and autonomy in developing coursework.
• Include students in the process of developing and revising syllabi.
• Periodically revise and update syllabi to match current theories and practices.
• Allow professors and teachers to review syllabus timing so that content can be covered in depth in a reasonable time period.
• Make realistic timelines for syllabus completion such that there is enough scope for discussion and debate.
• Strike a balance between practical and theoretical components of a subject.
• Coach teachers to encourage students to ask questions and be critical.
• Create opportunities for students studying sciences to do papers on the humanities and social sciences.
Approximately 43% of survey respondents who chose “I am not currently enrolled and have never been enrolled in an institution of higher education” were female. The top reasons why these young women gave for not being enrolled were a lack of finances and a lack of family support (see Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t have enough money to attend higher education</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I faced family constraints, marriage</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was offered a well-paying job</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not find studies interesting</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social unrest at my native place constrained me</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of choices in class 11th and 12th constrained me</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could not clear the desired cutoff/ entrance exam mandatory for the course of my choice</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were no institutions close to where I live</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note that respondents could select multiple answers.)

This data was corroborated in focus group discussions, where young women frequently discussed issues of family and finances. It also became clear that disparities are the result of the intersection of multiple identities. Young women from rural areas, for example, face very different barriers than those from urban centres. Likewise, girls from resource-poor communities, orthodox religious backgrounds, and lower castes face different barriers than their peers.

In several cases, girls said that their parents were supportive of their wish to study, but that extended family members pressured them to restrict their daughters. A young woman from rural southern India, for example, told us, the prevailing opinion in her community is that investing in young women’s education is a waste of money. She said, “Relations who are there, even the blood relations, they will always do that. [They say] she is a girl. Why you have to spend money on her? Deposit in the bank. You will get interest.” This opinion negatively influences her parents, who in turn question her choice to study even after she’s enrolled.

An ST student attending an institution in western India said that in her community, girls’ education is a key step towards improving local conditions. However, early marriage prevented many of her classmates from accessing college:
“In the village area, most people get their girls married off at an early age. After that wherever she settles, or her family – their improvement is dependent on her. She can bring changes there and another thing in the village is that there is a lot of superstition, so those changes can be made and she can also develop through her higher education. When our economic condition is not fine it is very important for us to be stable because we only want to bring improvement in our family. Till when will it keep going like this? We have been doing farming from the beginning – we should also be able to contribute.”

Another issue that repeatedly surfaced was safety. Both female students and their families hesitated to accept offers from colleges that were far from home, co-ed, or both. Said one young woman from a rural area in the south who attends a co-ed private institution in a neighbouring state,

“...In my home my parents are concerned about safety. In India it’s not safe for women to go out at night or even during the day. That’s the main problem they’re not allowing the girl children to go out. So if India can provide safety for girls on campus as well as in society maybe more parents will encourage girls to go out and study.”

This sentiment was repeated throughout the focus group discussions, and highlights the need for education policymakers to work together with other public service providers to create a strong system of cross-sectoral interventions to ensure the safety of women.

In response to safety concerns, some families sent daughters to all-girls colleges, particularly those that were close to home. One young woman studying in the northeast explained that she chose her local women’s only college because it was a place,

“Where I can share my view and not be afraid to say anything before the teacher and I have no tension to express opinion freely...without any fear of any insults from a boy in terms of saying anything and wearing clothes etc. Because all are girls here and we can have friendly relation with teachers as well as the students. We can also share our views and opinions without any fear of anybody.”

Numerous young women agreed that all female institutions were nurturing places, particularly during the undergraduate years.

Rather than start new institutions, though, girls recommended that MHRD strengthen existing ones. Said one young woman studying in Delhi,

“Opening more colleges is not the solution. If we could improve the quality, it would be better. Students now study only for semesters, they just have to pass but if we improve the quality, they would study for knowledge and much more like that not for passing the semester.”

For this student, improving local colleges is a matter of both access and quality.

The presence of sympathetic female faculty members was another key support system for girls who faced restrictions at home. Female professors were essential not only as informal counsellors, but also to counteract and challenge the patriarchal attitudes of male peers. Said a student from the rural south,

“Some of the boys are there they won’t allow us to talk. They will try to change the topic itself...it will feel very hurted (sic) to hear that and all...in our college the maximum female members are there as faculty. This is the advantage girls have in this college. We can say all the grievances from our side to their side...That is a thing which we are very secure on that...So that time if any conversation is going beyond [the topics the girls bring up related to gender] they will stop immediately and they will change the path. You’re changing the topic, you should be there in the path. If any point has to be cleared she will be clearing.”

Gender-sensitive faculty play an essential role not only in encouraging female students to persist, but also in changing the mind sets of young men who can choose to be allies for their female peers at home and on campus.

Another issue that this student’s college helped her with was her extensive obligations at home, where her responsibilities prevent her from studying. During a focus group discussion, she described her daily routine:
"Mam, as we’re the women, we have the major part in our home to help our mom… I will get up early morning 5, and I’ll cook for my family and I’ll make my tiffin and I’ll come to my college. After going home I will cook and while they’re coming back we’ll give and we’ll go to our bed… it’s a balancing thing mam. But I come through it all, so from school itself I’m doing this. Because my mom, she’s having a shop so she’ll go at six o’clock at that time. So I have my sister and father. I have to give food for them. She can’t do that. So I have to help him and I have to prepare myself and I have to come here and I’ll do my — I’ll never do the homeworks in my home… I’ll reach here half an hour early and I’ll come to the college and I’ll do. I’ll not do it in class hours… And if I didn’t do, I’ll go to my mam and I’ll say that, mam I didn’t do. Please excuse me. And I’ll ask the target within one o’clock or two o’clock I’ll submit it. And they’ll say okay, if you have enough time you can do that."

This student’s success was dependent not only on class timings that allowed her to fulfill her duties at home, but also on having the space to complete her assignments at campus. Her teachers’ willingness to grant extensions helped her to persevere despite her obligations.

Unfortunately, the presence of high quality local and/or girls-only colleges was not necessarily enough for students who faced family pressure regarding enrollment. However, the desire to attend college is so strong, that many find ways around these obstacles. For example, a Muslim female student that we met in an urban center in the south was not allowed to go to college because of a combination of her duties at home and her fathers’ hesitancy. She is currently undertaking a distance learning class in Montessori education through IGNOU, which she feels is preparing her for a career that is both acceptable to her family and has the potential to provide her with financial independence. Additionally, the course is affordable, which is appealing to families that remain sceptical about the efficacy of investing in girls’ education. This finding suggests that one route to addressing gender disparities is expanding high quality, distance learning opportunities.

Repeatedly, girls said the biggest challenge they face is changing mindsets. Therefore, to truly make a difference, all genders should be taught about the importance of women’s empowerment and equality. As this section shows, with just a few minor changes, colleges and universities can play a key role in addressing these types of disparities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Improve the quality of local colleges, particularly those catering to women.
• Intentionally recruit female and gender-sensitive faculty.
• Improve and expand distance learning opportunities.
• Set timings that allow women to attend to balance family work with college.
• Provide public spaces where women can do homework on campus, and provide extensions and flexibility in timings when necessary and reasonable.
• Work with parents and boys to change mindsets about female education throughout the educational pipeline.
Generally, students with disabilities spoke positively about their experiences with their peers on campus. A disabled female student from the north of India, for example, said, “When I came here...I realized people don’t see me with pity. Here the mindset is she can study and she is equal competition. I liked this.” Similarly, a visually impaired male student from West Bengal told us,

“The relationship between general students and disabled students is very cordial. General students are very helpful. They take us from the hostel to the class and then take us back to the hostel. They also help us with notes and audio recordings, take us from one building to another. So it is a very well established relationship.”

Unfortunately, students felt that administrators and professors were not as accepting, and were unwilling to enforce policies that are, in fact, mandated by law. These included maintaining a student teacher ratio of one to ten, assigning reasonable hostel accommodation and accessible classrooms, and providing adequate assistance in finding writers for examinations.

In some cases, participants were not aware of their rights: some even learnt about their entitlements as a result of our focus groups. Respondents felt that having a functional equal opportunity cell with funds dedicated to persons with disability could be a possible solution to enforcing existing laws and provisions and raising awareness among students and faculty. Our focus group discussions revealed that in many cases students and administrators alike were unaware and hence could not offer or access help.

Other students who were aware of their rights said they chose institutions in metros because they knew that most cities have NGOs that would support them in advocating for themselves. Said one visually impaired student who travelled from his village in western India to a metro to study,

The key question that haunts us is, whether our institutions of higher education are equally open to people from all strata of our society...For any profession to be called as democratic, requires the participation of students from different social backgrounds. As knowledge is power and has the ability to reinforce social structure, the necessity to include students from various social backgrounds and life-worlds becomes more important.

(This quotation originally appeared on Kafila.org on January 31, 2016)

– Tony Kurian, 26, Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
“I think there has been a guideline by Central Commission for Disabilities regarding what kind of examination process and other things and I can tell you that I receive at least 10-15 phone calls and they say my college does not know what kind of guidelines. Can you send it back to my college? So, we are depending on NGOs. So, it is not that the university is not taking initiative. Why should disability groups do it? It is something to do with education.”

Students with disabilities also left rural areas to take advantage of better public facilities, such as hostels that are close enough to campus to avoid the necessity of managing public transportation. Said one visually impaired young woman from northern India,

“For a student with disability and who comes from outside, the hostel is the priority. It is on this standard that the students choose university. [A public university] has an option with accommodation for girls with disabilities, so I didn’t have to hunt for PGs [paying guests]. I got psychology honours in [other reputed universities] I had to leave that and come and do international relations which was not my interest at all, but had it, just because of the hostels.”

This sentiment was repeated throughout focus groups, where students said that their choices of both degree and institutions were constrained by a lack of facilities.

Students with disabilities also suggested the need for a rapid digitization of materials, as well as access to a wider variety of courses. This was particularly true of technology classes, which often excluded students even if they expressed interest. Said a visually impaired student from the east,

“In the field of higher education – for us, if arrangements could be made for computer training, then we can do even better in the field of education. I would talk particularly in West Bengal, where most of the blind students do not know how to use the computer well enough. So accessing the computer is a barrier in many ways.”

Students with different types of disabilities had different needs. A group of students with hearing and listening impairments at a specialised institute in the west said that more teachers should learn sign language, and that sign language should be an option for all students, regardless of their disability status, as early as primary school.

Almost every student with visual impairments pointed out the paucity of writers, or peers who volunteer to accompany visually impaired students to exams and write down the answers dictated to them. Some regulations require the same writer to write all papers, which makes things difficult if a writer is sick or has to take his or her own exam and therefore cannot attend to the student with a disability. In these cases, institutions often do not provide alternatives, leaving students unable to take examinations for which they are prepared.

Evidence from our study suggests that ensuring that universities take steps to include students with disabilities on campus could have a larger effect on the general population. In our survey, 39.1% of respondents said that their attitudes about disability changed positively after attending a higher education institute. This implies that inclusive and accessible campuses may improve students’ perceptions of their differently abled peers and contribute to changing attitudes. Perhaps with the right exposure, today’s students will become tomorrow’s professors and administrators who are more understanding of students with special needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create an enabling environment where students, professors and administrators better understand the needs of students with disabilities.
- Provide orientation sessions that inform students and administrators of the rights of students with disabilities.
- Create equal opportunity cells that can support students with disabilities.
- Increase the use of technology for making study materials accessible and computer training.
- Simply regulations for writers for students who are visually impaired.
- Offer sign language courses to pre-service and in-service professors. Incentivize these classes in some way.
Forty-four survey respondents identified as transgender. The vast majority (85%) of these individuals said that they are not and have never been enrolled in an institution of higher education. Out of the remaining 15%, 5 out 7 reported being in a private/private aided institute. Some of the key reasons that transgender respondents gave for a lack of enrolment were family constraints, social unrest at native place, and not enough money. Additionally, a number of respondents used the comments section to report that a lack of acceptance led them enrol and then drop out.

In our focus group discussions, students of all genders agreed that on campus, students who were transgender and/or sexual minorities were bullied. One transgender student from the east told us that, like some of the survey respondents, he dropped out because the campus climate was so hostile. He said,

“I had to face a lot of harassment in college because of my gender identity. We had to wear uniform in our first year. The girls used to wear skirts. I obviously got two pairs of pants made. So because of that I had to hear a lot of things. Whenever they would see me, they identified themselves as ‘straight’. They would completely ignore me. They never spoke to me. In the three years of college, I went for the first one and a half years because of attendance. After that, I didn’t go. I didn’t have friends. I didn’t have anyone to share things with."

These comments are supported by additional data collected in the survey. Nearly one quarter (24%) of all respondents across gender categories observed students making negative remarks about gender and sexuality often or very often on campus, and one fifth (20%) of all respondents saw the same pattern among teachers. For some students, this bias led to negative academic outcomes. One student from the east, for example, remembered how perceptions about her sexuality affected her marks. She said,

“When I was studying in college, I was studying journalism and I used to really like this one teacher. When I was in the third year, I used to attend all her classes and then one day I saw an article on Section 377 and her photograph in [local paper.] She was called a lesbian and because I really liked her, I was also called a lesbian. So everyone would not talk to us… Our HOD used to tell my friends to stay away from me and to not share anything with me. Everyone would be silent the moment I would enter the class. So all this has happened with me. So when I went to give my practical exams I told my teacher that I have two exams on the same day so if the time could somehow be adjusted. My HOD said no. Please tell this to the one you like. I was isolated from everyone.”

Given that bias-based harassment tends to be underplayed in self-reporting, this data suggests that bias about gender and sexuality is, unfortunately, common in Indian higher education, and must be addressed.

Focus group participants noted that simple changes could make universities more welcoming places for transgender students. Several participants advocated for orientation sessions aimed at sensitizing students, faculty, and administration about gender and sexuality beginning at the primary school level and becoming progressively more complex in higher levels of education. Some participants felt that the sensitization should take the form of a mandatory course, arguing that such a course could improve both campus climate and individual empowerment. Said one student from the east who identifies as lesbian,
“In my Masters, we had a course on gender and sexuality. When we went through that, I felt more empowered and I thought that I can contest many arguments. I had to argue with people who judge me or whatever it is. I really felt empowered not in terms of ‘I have money in my hand or I have to earn or anything like that but I can think in a different way’ - which gave me that power to think in a different way. Or contest many ideas or many patriarchal ideas which kind of bound me. Or you know I felt really grounded.”

Others suggested infrastructure improvements that could ensure both physical safety and the symbolic value of making campuses more inclusive. For example, one male student attending a public college in the north, “I think what the university needs to do is take care of the architecture because right now our university doesn’t even have a gender neutral toilet.”

Interestingly, these suggestions were often proposed by students that identified as cis-gender and straight, not just by students with differing gender identities or sexualities. Indeed, focus group participants who did not identify as transgender were supportive and, at times, enthusiastic about the government’s efforts to recruit transgender students into universities. In some cases, students brought the issue up without prompting from facilitators, usually to express their support of the government’s decision to identify transgender youth as a specially recruited group. Although some had read about transgender students enrolling at their college, they were unclear as to who these enrollees were, making it difficult to reach out to them and offer support directly. Said one male evening college student from the national capital region, “Now the university is planning to open up - like last year they said that they had opened up admission, there were 9 students admitted, transgender students. And nobody knows who those 9 transgender students are. Even they, the [institution’s] media team they did not give out the names given privacy concerns. And none of us know. You know I asked some other transgender groups, even they were like not aware of who are these students.”

This sentiment was echoed by a student in the south who identified as gay, but was not necessarily out to friends and family. He remembered seeing a fellow student who was gender nonconforming getting bullied on campus. He informed this individual about the LGBT support group he himself attended, and the two have now become friends, allies, and active members of this support group. According to the participant, this encounter happened by chance, suggesting to the research team that there is a need to publicize existing resources so that students are able to access them even if they are not lucky enough to be approached by a supportive peer.

While anonymity and privacy must be protected, students who identify as transgender and sexual minorities should also be connected with the necessary support services to persevere throughout college. Furthermore, faculty members must be trained in how to connect students to these services effectively. At times, well-meaning teachers without the proper understanding of how to approach students
can exacerbate the problem with their concerns. One student from the west who identified as a lesbian and had faced bullying on campus said,

“One of my professors called me to talk to him because I had lost tremendous amount of weight and I was very depressed with these things and there was a lot of talk around whether I should be allowed to stay in the hostel. So my professor called me asked me what my problem was. I wanted to tell them but I did not say anything, especially as there was no school counselor there and also she asked me in a public space, in an open library in front of everyone.”

Had a counselling center existed, and had the professor known to speak to this student in private, she may have received the support she needed and had a much more positive experience on campus.

The next section specifically addresses participants’ suggestions about strengthening and implementing student support services.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Introduce mandatory course modules on gender and sexuality across disciplines.
- Intentionally connect students from gender minority groups with support services.
- Ensure that every university has counsellors that are approachable and non-discriminatory.
- Include the third gender and sexual minorities under the purview of anti-sexual harassment laws and committees.
- Create orientation and sensitization drives to combat gender and sexual identity harassment based bullying on campus.
- Make architectural changes such as building gender neutral toilets on all campuses.
Across focus groups, participants agreed that there is a need for better and more extensive counselling services on campus. This trend was particularly prevalent among students from minority backgrounds who struggled to remain enrolled in institutions that, at times, felt unsupportive. Said one male student from the west who identifies as gay, 

“At a certain point I felt that the support system that I should have got on campus, that was somehow missing. During that period I was very confused regarding my sexuality. I wanted to share a lot of things regarding my feelings, but there were no resource persons or counsellors with whom I could share my thoughts on sexuality and gender - because the kind of environment that was there we don’t talk about gender at all. So that was quite a negative experience I had in the campus.”

Very few students had access to quality counsellors on campus, but those who did spoke highly of their experiences. For example, a male participant from the north who identified as gay said counselling was essential to his personal and academic success. He says,

“My university has a counselling centre. I’ve been in therapy for three months now. I think that it has extremely queer friendly counsellors, so that’s a part within the university structure where you know one can go and just get some person to speak to, something that probably nobody else would understand. So that support structure becomes very important and I really think one gets comfortable. In the sense a comforting space like a counselling centre where you can just talk.”

In contrast, some participants said that their institutions have counsellors that lack training and professionalism. Students did not use these services because they were not confident about whether their information would be anonymous. Furthermore, students recommended that the University should make efforts to build rapport between the counsellors and students. A student from the east of India recounted the consequences of having ineffective counsellors for one of her classmates. She told us,

“We were introduced to a psychological counselor. The Sociology department professor came out and said that here is your counselor and she will be there on Tuesday and Saturday this time to that time and whatever problems you are facing you can come to her and discuss it. I never went for any counseling session but I kept a check on when students are going and I even enquired whether students were going for counseling sessions or not. Last 2 years, not a single student went for a counseling session. It is not that no students had any problem with their class or their teachers but they just introduced this is your counselor and there it ends. They never tried to disseminate the information further. Nor did they ever try to push the students that if you have a problem, you must go. Soon after this a student committed suicide. She might have committed suicide for many other reasons but despite a free counselor, she just couldn’t reach to the counselor that yes, I can go.”

As this story shows, for some students, access to counselling can be a matter of life and death.

In addition to counselling, students suggested that colleges and universities should have more streamlined and effective approaches for reporting and addressing harassment. While approximately 50% of survey respondents claimed that they knew where to report cases of harassment, only 40%
students were confident about their complaints being addressed after reporting. Said one student studying in an urban center in the west,

“In our college there was an anti-ragging group but that group was the biggest mockery because it was very clear that whoever complained to the ragging committee, they will make the life of that student a living hell, especially the seniors, and we have seen this happen in front of us itself. So no one would go to the anti-ragging group and I also remember the first day that we had come, our college dean had said that if there are instances of ragging, you can come and complain, but he also added, that in my opinion if someone asks you for an introduction, or asks you to sing, or asks you to do small things, I don’t think that is part of ragging. Thus one indirect message that had gone was that it’s a toothless body.”

Participants said they would be more confident about existing systems if they had a voice in the administration of consequences of harassment, as well as a clear mechanism for holding administrators accountable for enforcement of anti-bullying policies.

In one of our focus group discussions in north India, a student who identifies as gay specifically brought up the need to strengthen anti-sexual harassment policies. He said that a more democratic and transparent system should be put in place, and that anti-sexual harassment committees should meet on a more regular schedule and include student representation. This participant said:

“[In my institution] there was a gender sensitization committee, and students were supposed to take up cases from their classmates. And then there was a larger body called the where from all these students, three people would be selected to the main committee. So that was kind of a democratic structure. So if you say each class you have a representative on the committee they can take up cases from there and then represent it to the larger body. And then there are students inside that body also.”

In cases like this, students valued transparency, as well as their ability to include their voice in decision making. However, students repeatedly pointed out that such mechanisms work when paired with inbuilt sensitization mechanisms so as to avoid creating committees composed entirely of students from the majority who may not understand the issues of marginalized communities. To this end, students suggested including both sensitization sessions in orientation, and requiring classes on students’ rights in mainstream curricula. Participants felt this combination would make students more tolerant of each other, and would empower students to report issues of bias and harassment and to hold administrations accountable for addressing complaints.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Ensure that counselling centers are available, staffed, and operated professionally.
• Make students aware of counselling centers and enable them to feel comfortable in these spaces.
• Include courses in orientations that sensitize students to differences.
• Include know-your-rights modules in syllabi so students are aware of their recourse if their rights are violated.
In focus group discussions, it emerged that many students faced challenges entering and completing college because of their lack of preparation and support during primary school. In some areas, for example, there were few adults in the community who had attended college, and therefore students had no one to turn to during the application and preparation process. Said one ST student attending an institution in the west, 

“I think for a student from a particular category, or a backward student, for them education is important because their financial situation will become stable as a result – which is the first thing. The second thing is that usually in their family or relative no one is that educated who can provide some guidance or the correct way to the student. That is why when they take up higher education then they can guide at least more children from their family or relatives. So they know what to do going forward, what facilities they will get or how easy higher education is. The people from our villages think that education is something that only rich people can do.”

This student identified a number of barriers faced by marginalized populations, including inadequate funding, lack of comfort with English, and a perception that higher education is not meant for people from their walk of life.

A number of participants described the challenges they faced attempting to pursue education in the midst of conflict, a task that was particularly difficult at the K-12 level. Out of the total sample of survey respondents, approximately 12.4% chose “social unrest at their native place” as the reason for their lack of enrolment in higher education. This trend was particularly pronounced among students from the northeast, several of whom said that they had to miss substantial amounts of primary schooling because of the effects of the conflict. Said a northeastern female student who had left her native place to pursue college,

“The entire north east region is conflict prone area and due to these conflicts, students are dropping out day by day. There should be some policy in the Government which addresses the issue of education in emergency situations. There should be a facility to get back the students again to the school or higher education level once the conflict is over.”

Students from the northeast universally agreed that more should be done to help students re-enter K-12 after missing school because of conflict. However, student from Manipur who said that she missed part of her primary schooling because of conflict-related issues said that the time she actually spent in school did not prepare her for the rigours of higher education. She remembers that her lack of exposure made even the admissions process daunting. “I had no idea how to use internet even when I had passed with good marks in Class 12,”she says. “When people asked me to [do an] online application, I freaked out and did offline application.”

In addition to a lack of preparation, several students from the northeast mentioned that they were also limited by the courses offered to them in their K-12 education. Some, for example, wanted to pursue hard sciences, but were not able to because certain required subjects were not taught at their schools due to a lack of teaching staff, thus putting them at a disadvantage when they were taking their 12th class exams. In our survey, for example, approximately one in five students (19%) claimed that they could not clear the desired cut off for the course of their choice, forcing them to take up subjects that were not interested in studying, or leading them to avoid enrolment.
Another issue that repeatedly surfaced was the transition between mediums that occurred when students left under resourced, usually rural areas to pursue higher education in higher quality institutions, many of which were in cities or neighbouring states. Said one participant from a rural area in West Bengal,

“People who come from a primarily rural background, there main problem is that of language. Like all of us who are from West Bengal we are well versed and fluent in Bengali so if the studying can happen in Bengali, it will be easiest for us to understand. Like there are some courses like history or international relations, or comparative literature, these departments, here the major notes that are given are given in English. Because of which people from this rural belt, they have a very big problem. They get scared, they don’t understand how they will give their exams, what will they write in the exams. This time the question paper for IRD entrance question paper had come in English. But the education structure of West Bengal, that has Bengali medium as well as English medium.”

The problem is not limited to transitioning to English. A female student from the northeast described her experience enrolling in an institution in the national capital area, where she was told her classes would be in English. To her surprise, many were in Hindi, which hampered her ability to participate. She said,

“If you see in a class, there are these students, people from Bengal, Bihar, they are very much enthusiastic. They are so confident. They don’t worry to raise questions. But people from the north east will not speak a word because of the fear of medium. I feel they are good in English, but when you come to Hindi, they have problems in interactions.”

Students who had to change mediums felt unprepared and fell behind, or lost marks for participation. Those who persisted saw their peers who could not cope, drop out. A female student from the northeast who is now studying in a state university in a major city, said that she had hardly any exposure to English before coming to university. Although she suggested that there should be English remedial courses at the higher education level, she felt changes should happen as early as primary school. She told us, “Good teachers should be appointed. Our teachers are not good in English. The pronunciation is not good. So I faced that problem [of English in college].”

The same trend held true for students with disabilities, many of whom started their schooling later than others because of a lack of facilities available to them even at the primary school stage. Said one visually impaired male student from a rural area in eastern India, “To be honest, when I was young, my family and I did not know that education is possible for blind people. So, I missed a long time. I went to school only when I was 9 years old.” This student was able to access primary education and was so inspired by his educators that he is now attending a state university in a nearby city and has plans to become a school teacher. The student’s example points to the impact that exposure to primary education can have on the long term prospects of students from marginalized backgrounds.
Students from more privileged backgrounds also recommended changes to K-12 practices. In the south in particular, students said that they did not receive proper counselling in school, and were told to apply for only the sciences streams when really there were many other streams available. As a female student from the south put it, “If I know only four colours exist I can tell you what my favourite colour is. If I had known 256 colours are there, I will tell you a different colour.” Another undergraduate focus group participant from the south said, “Instead of having such a rigid system in 11th and 12th, they can have like a progressive system where they…it should be 11th, 12th and that extra year so that they can experiment, do what they have to do to find out what they are interested in and then you can go to college.”

While participants suggested different approaches, most felt that counselling about college placement should begin earlier, and that students should be encouraged to explore various streams and professions starting in primary school and class ten.

In short, the data from this study suggest that K-12 education policy must be formulated with higher education policy in mind, particularly when it comes to issues related to diversity and inclusion. Persistence rates among minorities can be improved through the provision of better K-12 services that will create strong academic foundations in the early years that can serve students throughout the lifetime.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Equip K-12 schools with proper technology infrastructure and accompanying coursework.
- Improve the quality of teaching in English classes and access to English medium sections.
- Develop special initiatives and programs to ensure that students in conflict zones are able to continue their K-12 education even during unstable times.
- Ensure that qualifying coursework is available to all students in all areas so that they can apply to the subjects of their choice.
- Begin counselling about college as early as eighth standard, and help students explore various subjects and options for courses.
CONCLUSION

For the majority of students in our study, higher education represented a time of personal and academic transformation that gave them the opportunity to discover their passions and talents, and to gain skills to improve their families and communities. Almost every student was eager to participate in this exercise because they were invested in their institutions and the possibility of using what they learned to improve the chances of their peers. Generally, students want their institutions to be spaces to explore, engage in dialogue, and develop their values and personal ethics. They want better support systems, better mechanisms for obtaining their rights, and more opportunities to engage with faculty members on a personal level. Students have a vision of colleges and universities as places to grow as both academics and people. We hope that the suggestions they have given will make this possible throughout India.

AUTHORS

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Shivali Lawale  Dileep Ranjekar  Kranti Yardi
Pawan Makadia  Sappho for Equality

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APPENDIX #1
SURVEY TOOL

MGIEP YOUTH SURVEY

Youth Survey on the National Education Policy of India

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is being administered by UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (mgiep.unesco.org). The purpose of this survey is to collect young people's opinions on the higher education portion of the National Education Policy, which is currently under revision by the Government of India.

How old are you? (Choose one.)

☐ 17  ☐ 18  ☐ 19  ☐ 20  ☐ 21
☐ 22  ☐ 23  ☐ 24  ☐ 25

UNESCO MGIEP will share the results of the survey with the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in the form of a report and a set of recommendations. All the data from this survey is confidential. This means that your name will not be associated with your answers. Should you have any questions or concerns, you can contact us at mgiep@unesco.org

Do you consent to taking this survey?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

What state are you from? (Choose one)

☐ Andaman and Nicobar Island (UT)  ☐ Haryana  ☐ Nagaland
☐ Andhra Pradesh  ☐ Himachal Pradesh  ☐ Odisha
☐ Arunachal Pradesh  ☐ Jammu and Kashmir  ☐ Puducherry (UT)
☐ Assam  ☐ Jharkhand  ☐ Punjab
☐ Bihar  ☐ Karnataka  ☐ Rajasthan
☐ Chandigarh (UT)  ☐ Kerala  ☐ Sikkim
☐ Chhattisgarh  ☐ Lakshadweep (UT)  ☐ Tamil Nadu
☐ Dadra and Nagar Haveli (UT)  ☐ Madhya Pradesh  ☐ Telangana
☐ Daman and Diu (UT)  ☐ Maharashtra  ☐ Tripura
☐ Delhi (NCT)  ☐ Manipur  ☐ Uttarakhand
☐ Goa  ☐ Meghalaya  ☐ Uttar Pradesh
☐ Gujarat  ☐ Mizoram  ☐ West Bengal

SKIP PATTERN: Thank you for participating in this survey administered by MGIEP. This survey is aimed at Indian youth between the ages of 17 and 25. If you do not fall within this age range and / or you do not reside in India, you are not eligible to take this survey.
1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Transgender
   - Other

2. Are you from a rural or urban area?
   - Urban (population 10 lakh and above)
   - Rural (population less than 10,000)
   - Semiurban (population between 10,000 and 10 lakh)

3. What is your religion?
   - Hinduism
   - Islam
   - Christianity
   - Sikhism
   - Buddhism
   - Jain
   - Other (please specify): ___________________

4. What is your category?
   - General
   - SC
   - ST
   - OBC
   - Anglo-Indian
   - Other (please specify): ___________________

5. Which of the following describes your educational history?
   - I am currently enrolled in higher education.
   - I am not currently and have never been enrolled in an institution of higher education.
   - I am not currently enrolled but have been enrolled in an institution of higher education within the last 3 years.

6. If you have been enrolled in an institution of higher education within the last three years, but are no longer enrolled, please answer the following questions based on your experience at your most recent institution. Are you ready to continue?
   - Yes
   - No
7. What type of institution do you attend?
- Private
- Government
- Government aided colleges
- Private-aided / Minority
- Open or distance learning
- Not currently enrolled

8. (If not currently enrolled) Why are you not currently enrolled? (Choose all that apply):
- I didn’t have enough money to attend higher education.
- There were no institutions close to where I live
- I did not find studies interesting
- I was offered a well-paying job
- Social unrest at my native place constrained me
- I faced family constraints, marriage
- The lack of choices in class 11th and 12th constrained me
- I could not clear the desired cutoff / entrance exam mandatory for the course of my choice
- None of the above
- Other (please specify):___________________

9. (If currently enrolled) What is your current/ most recent stage of enrollment?
- Graduation
- Post-graduation
- PhD
- Diploma Course
- Vocational
- Graduated within the past 3 years
- Other (please specify)

10. What subject are / were you studying?
- Arts, humanities, social sciences
- Commerce / Business
- Engineering and Technology
- Medicine
- Science
- Law
- Other (please specify):
11. When you chose your institution, how important was each of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>0 = no opinion</th>
<th>1 = not important</th>
<th>2 = slightly important</th>
<th>3 = important</th>
<th>4 = very important</th>
<th>5 = extremely important</th>
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<tr>
<td>Your score / merit</td>
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<td>Reputation / rank of the institution</td>
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<td>Infrastructure</td>
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<td>Accreditation status</td>
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<td>Placement rate and opportunities for internships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coursework and curriculum</td>
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<td>Proximity to home</td>
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<td>Availability of financial aid</td>
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<td>Quality of research and teachers</td>
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<td>Societal/Family influence or pressure</td>
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13. Do you think student voices and opinions influence the policies of your institution?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

14. How much do you agree with the following statements? Please rate each on a scale of 1-5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>0 = no opinion</th>
<th>1 = strongly disagree</th>
<th>2 = disagree</th>
<th>3 = neutral</th>
<th>4 = agree</th>
<th>5 = strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After graduation, I am confident that I will find a job I want.</td>
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<td>I have access to counseling services to help me decide my courses and career.</td>
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<td>Everyone should be able to start degree programs at any age.</td>
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<td>Everyone should be able to temporarily exit a course and resume within a reasonable time.</td>
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<td>My education gives me practical skills that I can use in my job and my daily life.</td>
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<td>Community welfare is an essential part of my education.</td>
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<td>My education should include courses on ethics, peace, and sustainability.</td>
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</table>
16. **How important are each of these qualities in a teacher?**

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<th></th>
<th>0 = no opinion</th>
<th>1 = not necessary</th>
<th>2 = maybe important</th>
<th>3 = important</th>
<th>4 = very important</th>
<th>5 = extremely important</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communicates curriculum in an interesting and practical way</td>
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<td>Takes interest in issues students face and counsels them</td>
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<td>Assesses students fairly</td>
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<td>Communicates human, social, cultural, ethical and global values through his / her lessons</td>
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18. **How much do you agree with the following?**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = no opinion</th>
<th>1 = strongly disagree</th>
<th>2 = disagree</th>
<th>3 = neutral</th>
<th>4 = agree</th>
<th>5 = strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the coursework offered at my institution / the institutions I have attended.</td>
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<td>If my institution does not have a course that a student needs, the university should assist him / her in doing the course online or elsewhere.</td>
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<td>Institutions should encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities such as sports, music and arts, etc.</td>
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20. **Have you ever taken an online course?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

21. **Which of the following have you taken? Choose all that apply.**

- [ ] Online courses recognized by my University
- [ ] Online courses not recognized by university
- [ ] Online course for the preparation for an exam
- [ ] Online course for a subject of my interest which was not offered at my institute
- [ ] Other (please specify): ____________
- [ ] None of the above
22. Please indicate how often you hear students making negative comments about the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = never</th>
<th>2 = rarely</th>
<th>3 = occasionally</th>
<th>4 = often</th>
<th>5 = all the time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
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<td>Caste (SC, ST, OBC, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)</td>
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<td>Region (rural, urban, semi-urban)</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<td>Mother Tongue</td>
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<td>Disability</td>
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<td>Marks / Merit status</td>
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24. Please indicate how often you hear professors and administrators making negative comments about the following (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-occasionally, 4-very often, 5-frequently):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = never</th>
<th>2 = rarely</th>
<th>3 = occasionally</th>
<th>4 = often</th>
<th>5 = all the time</th>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
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<td>Caste (SC, ST, OBC, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, etc.)</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<td>Mother Tongue</td>
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<td>Disability</td>
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<td>Marks / Merit status</td>
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26. Have you ever witnessed or experienced discrimination at your institution?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

27. How much do you agree with the following statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = no opinion</th>
<th>1 = strongly disagree</th>
<th>2 = disagree</th>
<th>3 = neutral</th>
<th>4 = agree</th>
<th>5 = strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I experience or witness harassment, I know who to report it to.</td>
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<td>I am confident that my institution will address any harassment that I report.</td>
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<td>If I experience or witness corruption, I know who to report it to.</td>
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<td>I am confident that my institution will address any corruption that I report.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
29. Please indicate how your attitude has changed towards the following identities after attending your institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = Much more accepting</th>
<th>2 = Somewhat more accepting</th>
<th>3 = No change</th>
<th>4 = Less accepting</th>
<th>5 = Much less accepting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caste (SC, ST, OBC, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, etc.)</td>
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<td>Gender (male, female, other)</td>
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<td>Region</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
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</table>

Final Thoughts

Is there anything else you would like to add?

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Thank You

Thank you for taking this survey. The results will be used to produce a report and a set of recommendations for reforming the higher education section of the National Education Policy.

If you would like to provide us with further feedback, attend a focus group discussion, receive a copy of the report, or have other concerns, please contact us at mgiep@unesco.org

You can also follow the progress of the survey on our Facebook page ([https://www.facebook.com/mgiep](https://www.facebook.com/mgiep)) and our web site (mgiep.unesco.org).
## APPENDIX #2: FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MGIEP Themes</th>
<th>MHRD Themes</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Follow up / Guide for Conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Aspirations and Expectations | I Governance reforms for quality | 1. Why did you choose to pursue higher education? | Potential answers / guideposts:  
• Better job/internship/research opportunities  
• Learn more about the world / become more well-rounded/more informed and responsible towards the society  
• Family pressure to continue/  
• Education plays/played a key role in improving the status of me and my family  
• Because it’s routine; I didn’t think about it and was expected  
Follow up questions:  
• Whether higher education met the expectations students had  
• What skills students have acquired / will acquire through higher education that could increase your chances of being employed |
| | II Ranking of institutions and accreditations | | |
| | VI Integrating skill development in higher education | | |
| | XI Linking higher education to society | | |
| | XVIII Engagement with industry to link education to employability | 2. How did you choose your institution? | Potential answers / guideposts:  
• Societal/family pressure  
• Importance of reputation, infrastructure and faculty  
• Economic, social or academic obstacles  
• Familiarity with accreditation; also note who is familiar and who is not  
• Proximity(gender?class?)  
Follow up questions:  
• Do you think there are better ways of shortlisting students for courses other than aptitude tests, entrance exams and cut-offs?  
• Was accreditation a factor (general knowledge about accreditation)/Do you think there are some elements in the accreditation criteria that need to be improved? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MGIEP Themes</th>
<th>MHRD Themes</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Follow up / Guide for Conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Classroom Practice</td>
<td>XII Developing the best teachers</td>
<td>3. How many good teachers would you say you have? And how do you define good?</td>
<td>Potential answers / guideposts: • Counseling / building relationships with students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XVII Internationalization of higher education</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourages creativity / innovation through assignments, classwork and better communication of the curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XIX Promoting research and innovation</td>
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<td>• Command of subject matter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XX New Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fair, treating students equally</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Practicality</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What makes a good course?</td>
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<td>Potential answers / guideposts: • Practicality / relevance to the real world / Do you think your education is practical / gives you practical skills for the real world?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunities to talk about diversity and inclusion</td>
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<td>• Employment activities after the course/beyond jobs and career</td>
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<td>• Communicates, human and social values</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Peer group, culture, climate</td>
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<td>• Duration/semester/grading/assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. How is diversity and inclusion being talked about on campuses?</td>
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<td>Follow up questions: • How many courses do students consider “good”, how do they define this good?</td>
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<td>• What is missing from current courses</td>
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<td>• Online vs. offline (for credit or not, how do they find it, why do they take it, what gaps are they filling, are institutions aware / encouraging / assisting this?)</td>
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<td>Potential answers / guideposts: • Classes, seminars, formal discussions, other innovative ways?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Role of interacting with diverse people</td>
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<td>Follow up questions: • Do students think these types of sessions should be formalized in curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGIEP Themes</td>
<td>MHRD Themes</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Follow up / Guide for Conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics and Inclusion</td>
<td>III Improving the quality of regulation</td>
<td>6. Do you consider your institution diverse in terms of gender/class/race/caste? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Potential answers / guideposts: • Harassment (witnessing, experiencing) • Financial aid and other measures institutions take to promote diversity • If students feel included in the institution based on ideology Follow up questions: • Who is left out? (What does “left out” mean?) • Who has leadership positions • Who has the most voice (ideology)? • Should institutions have ideology?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V Improving State public universities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>VII Promoting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online courses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IX Addressing regional disparity</td>
<td>7. What kind of a voice do students have in institutional governance?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X Bridging gender and social gaps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>XIII Sustaining student support systems-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>XIV Promote cultural integration through language</td>
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<td>XVI Financing higher education</td>
<td>8. What are your top three recommendations about higher education policy?</td>
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APPENDIX #3
LIST OF THEMES FOR CONSULTATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The following themes were identified as priority areas for MHRD:

I  Governance reforms for quality
II  Ranking of institutions and accreditations
III  Improving the quality of regulation
IV  Pace setting roles of central institutions
V  Improving State public universities
VI  Integrating skill development in higher education
VII  Promoting open and distance learning and online courses
VIII  Opportunities for technology enabled learning
IX  Addressing regional disparity
X  Bridging gender and social gaps
XI  Linking higher education to society
XII  Developing the best teachers
XIII  Sustaining student support systems
XIV  Promote cultural integration through language
XV  Meaningful partnership with the private sector
XVI  Financing higher education
XVII  Internationalization of higher education
XVIII  Engagement with industry to link education to employability
XIX  Promoting research and innovation
XX  New knowledge

For more information on MHRD’s understanding of these themes, please see http://mhrd.gov.in/nep-new.