7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)
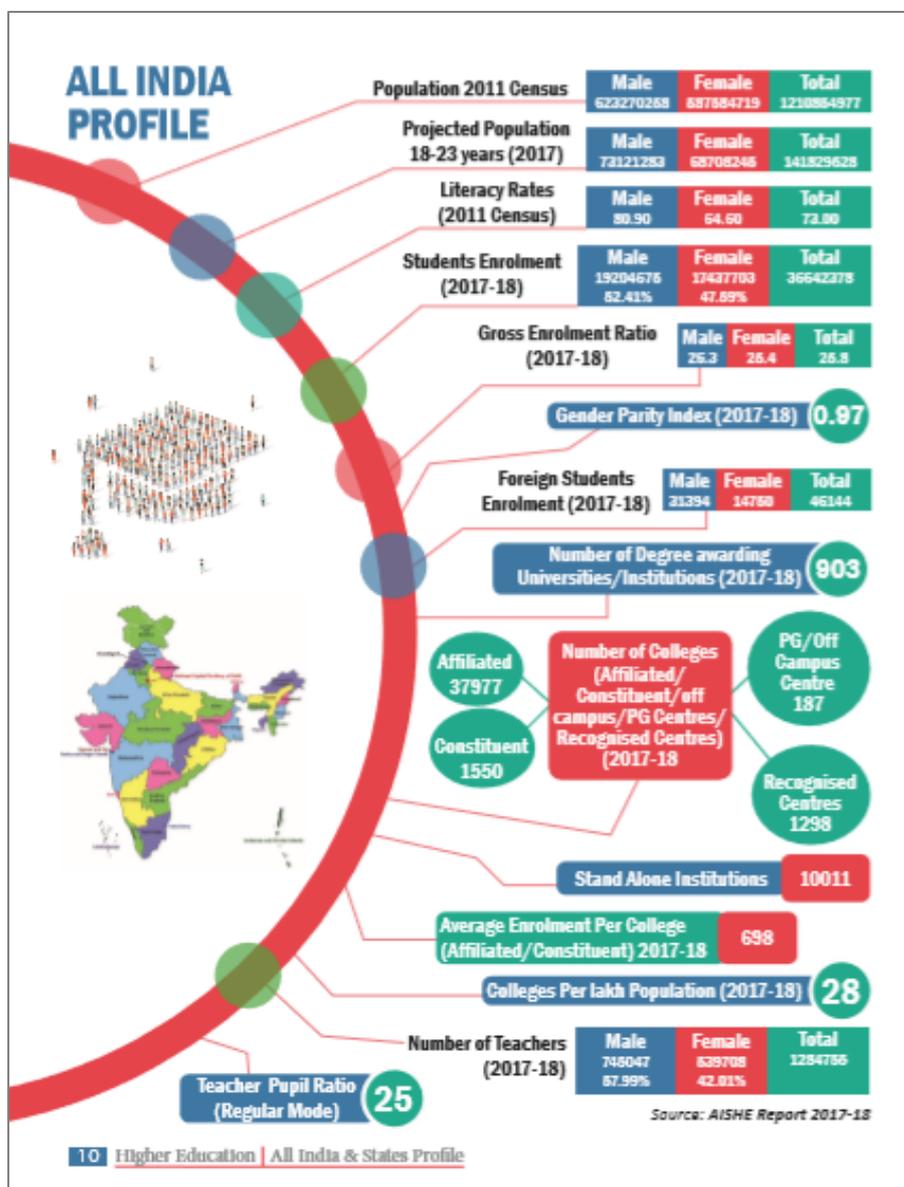Students' Forum: 11–14 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019
Bucharest, Romania

**Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
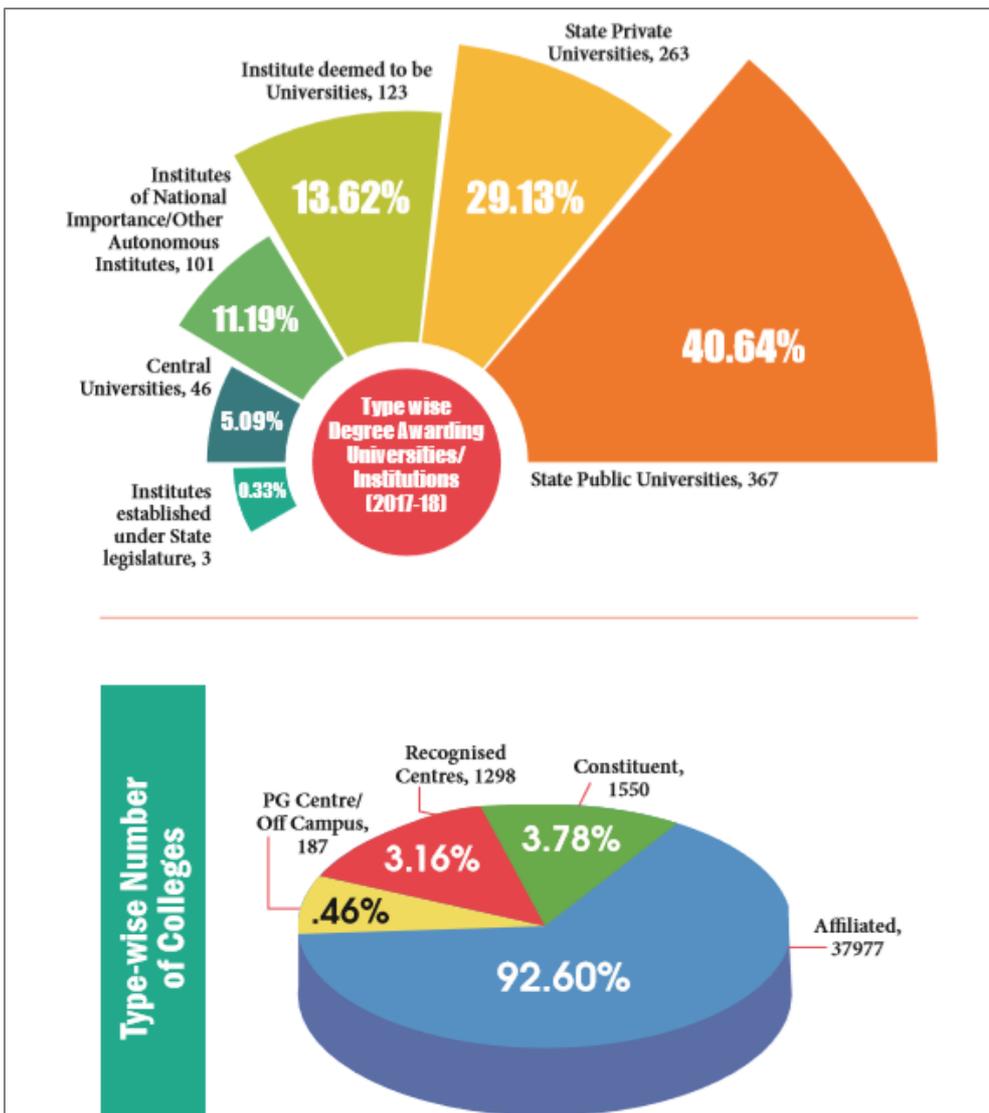Perspectives from Asia and Europe**

Opinion | Ketan MOR
Higher Education- Bringing Inclusivity for Sustainable Development Goals

India is the world's largest youth population country with 60 percent of its population as youths. So, it is very important for universities to train these young minds according to the new challenges and needs. To achieve this, imparting quality education becomes an important task in institutions of Higher Education. In this article, I will share about difficulties Indian universities are facing in imparting the quality education. The data below shows the current situation of Higher Education in India.
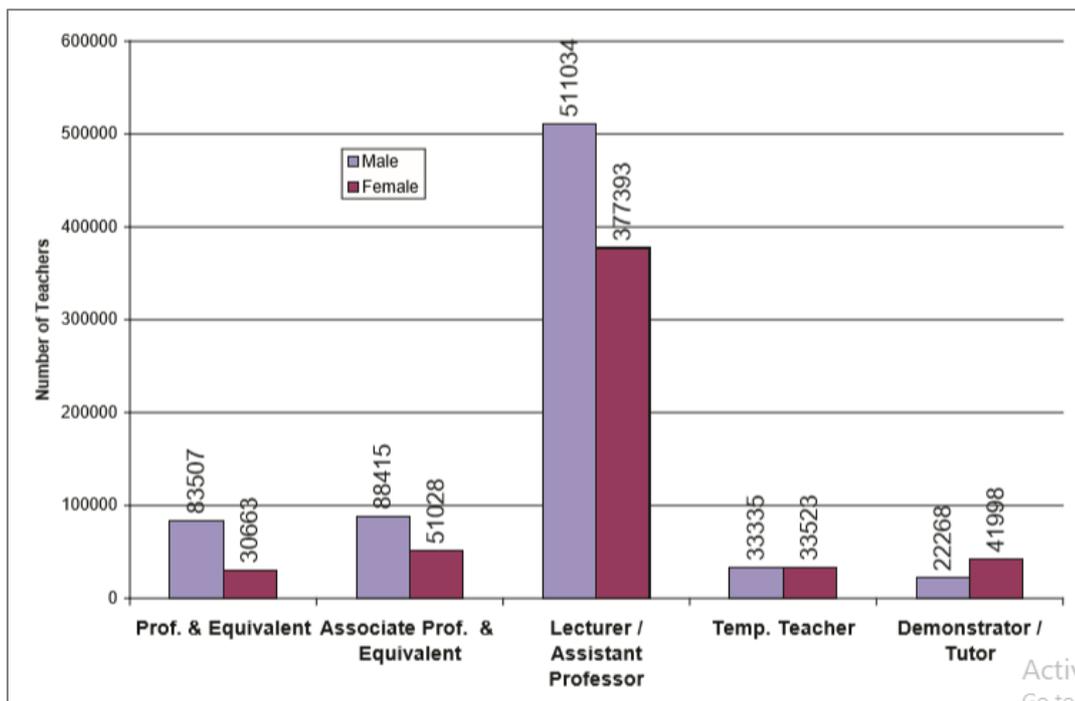
Source:
https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf

ALL INDIA PROFILE

	Male	Female	Total
Population 2011 Census	623270258	587584719	1210854977
Projected Population 18-23 years (2017)	73121253	68708246	141829628
Literacy Rates (2011 Census)	80.90	64.60	73.00
Students Enrolment (2017-18)	19204676 52.41%	17437703 47.59%	36642378
Gross Enrolment Ratio (2017-18)	26.3	26.4	25.8

Gender Parity Index (2017-18) **0.97**

	Male	Female	Total
Foreign Students Enrolment (2017-18)	31394	14750	46144

Number of Degree awarding Universities/Institutions (2017-18) **903**

Number of Colleges (Affiliated/Constituent/off campus/PG Centres/Recognised Centres) (2017-18
- Affiliated 37977
- Constituent 1550
- PG/Off Campus Centre 187
- Recognised Centres 1298

Stand Alone Institutions **10011**

Average Enrolment Per College (Affiliated/Constituent) 2017-18 **698**

Colleges Per lakh Population (2017-18) **28**

	Male	Female	Total
Number of Teachers (2017-18)	748047 57.99%	539708 42.01%	1284755

Teacher Pupil Ratio (Regular Mode) **25**

Source: AISHE Report 2017-18

10 Higher Education | All India & States Profile

The first challenge for the universities is expanding their limited infrastructure and resources. Admissions of students in universities are increasing every year but the infrastructure and resources to impart quality education to them are not expanding at the required rate. There is a significant increase in the number of universities with currently around 903 Central and State Universities imparting Higher Education according to the 2017-2018 report of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) on Higher Education. The University Grants Commission (UGC) which regulates the Higher Education provides grants to those colleges and universities which fulfill its criteria of providing quality education. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), UGC's body is responsible for ranking the colleges in India according to the parameters set by UGC. The main flaw in this system is that most of the universities and colleges that are situated in rural parts of India are not able to satisfy the criteria laid down by UGC. This thereby excludes such universities and colleges from receiving the grants from the Government. Every single educational institution has an important role in imparting quality education across the country. Unfortunately, these Educational Institutions are left behind many times due to lack of infrastructure and other requirements necessary for quality education.

State Private Universities, 263
Institute deemed to be Universities, 123
Institutes of National Importance/Other Autonomous Institutes, 101
Central Universities, 46
Institutes established under State legislature, 3
13.62%
29.13%
11.19%
5.09%
0.33%
40.64%
Type wise Degree Awarding Universities/ Institutions (2017-18)
State Public Universities, 367

Type-wise Number of Colleges
Recognised Centres, 1298
Constituent, 1550
PG Centre/ Off Campus, 187
3.16%
3.78%
.46%
92.60%
Affiliated, 37977

Source for the chart-
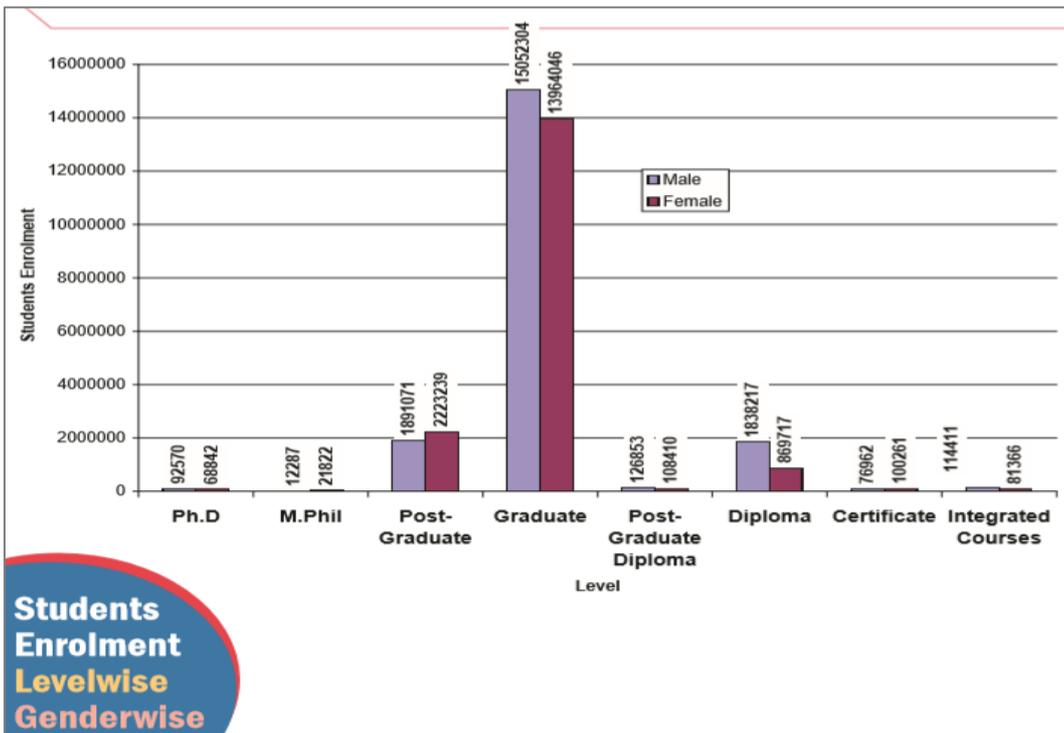https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf

Another challenge in Higher Education is the lack of well qualified teachers. Currently, in Higher Education 1,284,755 teachers are involved but this number becomes diminutive when compared to 36,642,378 enrolled students. The chart below shows the number of teachers in different category.

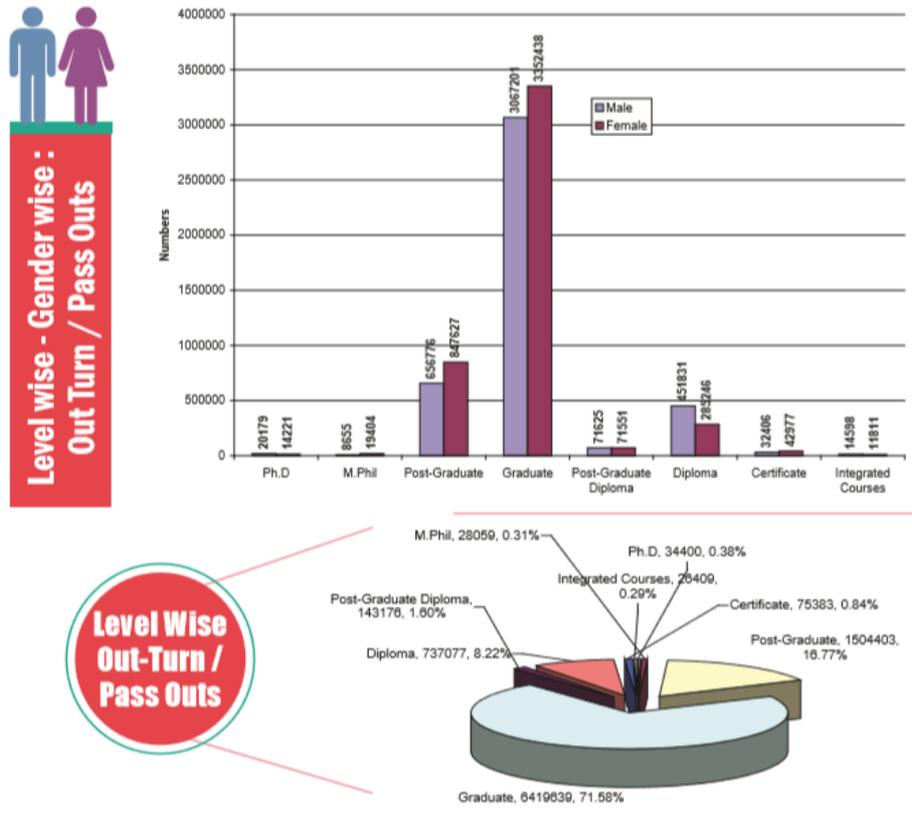(Source- https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf)

The issue of lack of well qualified teachers is haunting the universities. Teachers are appointed on contract basis and after years and they retire without given any permanent position in the universities or colleges. I believe that the main reason behind this is the absence of proper training to the teachers in Higher Educations. There is no course or mechanism in India to impart training to teachers as to how to teach in institutions of Higher Education. The result is that sensitization of teachers (i.e the ignorance of sustainable methods of teaching) is missing in the classroom. For many who join the academics field, teaching is not the first or second priority for profession, but they end up in this profession after exploring all other opportunities. This mind-set need to be changed. Teaching must become the profession by choice, only then quality and excellence will pervade in Higher Education.

The students are the most important stakeholders in educational institutions. As mentioned above, around 141,829,528 people fall under the age group of 18-23 years. Around 36,642,378 students are enrolled in Higher Education in India. The chart below shows the distribution of students in Higher Education

Students Enrolment Levelwise Genderwise

(Source- https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf)

This number is almost twice the total population of Romania, which is less than 20 million. But the important concern for us is dropout rate of students from universities. More than 40 per cent of students in India either drop out before graduation, are not able to complete the course in stipulated time or do not pursue further studies after completion of graduation. Another concern is that post the completion of their studies, millions of students are unable to find jobs in the country. Sometimes although these students have the theoretical understanding, they might lack the practical skills required in the market or there are not enough jobs being created for the students entering the market. The result of it is alarming for our country. In the first case, although they hold degrees in higher education, they are not suitable for the work. In the second case, they start applying for all such jobs which may not be related to what they studied in Higher Education. In India, we have seen that for the job vacancies or posts of grade C and grade D for which the eligibility criteria is a secondary or senior secondary education, millions of students who hold degrees like Master of Business Management (MBA), Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) and Higher Education courses apply due to shortage of jobs in the country. The below chart shows the level and gender wise turn out/ pass out rate. The turnout gender-wise is important because girls are usually not motivated or supported when pursuing higher education.

Level wise - Gender wise : Out Turn / Pass Outs

Level Wise Out-Turn / Pass Outs

Source- https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf)

The fourth segment related to quality education is about academic governance in Universities and Colleges. India is a pluralistic country where each geographic region has its own way of imparting education related to its condition. This ultimately yield end results in shaping students according to the needs of market and society. Rather than teaching everything to everyone, we must identify the interest of one and train them in the same. I believe when we teach students with this mind-set then sensitivity which is missing in classrooms would automatically develop. We must redesign our course curriculum according to the need of the time. In this rapidly evolving society, we have to impart relevant education with skills related to the subjects. Similarly, cuts in funds in education budget or its stagnation in the annual financial year are also one of the main reasons for the state of the education system in India. We cannot expect excellence without investing in this very field. Higher Education must become the priority in allocation of funds with special focus on the educationally backward areas in India.

This requires a call for action at all levels; from local to national to international. First, there must be grant by UGC to all those institutions which are currently excluded from its lists in order to help them in developing the infrastructure to meet the parameters set by UGC for quality education. Excellence can flourish only when we are successful in providing quality education. Thus, these entire Higher Educational institutes must be supported at least one time by the Government.

Since UGC is responsible for making policy for the Higher Education sector, it must create a training programme for teachers. People should only be allowed to teach after

going through such trainings. We must not compromise with the quality of teachers as the future of our country lies is in the hands of teachers. The students, when they reach higher positions, make and implement policies related to Sustainable Development Goals. So, it is very important that their mind is shaped in such a way during their period of receiving Higher Education that they, in future, can make and implement policies that balance both development and sustainability.

Strong steps must be taken to bridge the gaps between drop-out students and passing students. Our course curriculum must be based on sustainability in society by imparting skills to the students which are related to their subjects of study onto students. Career counselling should be done on regular basis since secondary school level. This will help the students in deciding the field/area which they have their interest in, to pursue their studies in Higher Education. Skill development programmes must be given importance rather than degrees. I believe that the present mind set in India is about the importance of achieving a degree. This must be changed to the importance of development of skills. Degree by itself turns out to be important only after that.

Students are running after the jobs in government sector as they feel that government sector jobs would provide security to them for their lifetime. This attitude needs to be changed. Since the jobs in government sector are limited, not everyone can get a job there. Our education system must teach our students to become bold in their lives. Rather than running for security, they must be taught to try and invent new things. Students must be taught the skills of entrepreneurship so that they can think and become job creators instead of job seekers.

UGC must identify the educationally under-developed areas across India and develop policies for them to improve the status of education there. The Government should spend more on quality education; only then can we see excellence in Higher Education. Another important issue which I believe is affecting the Higher Education is the strict regulations of the government. Education must be left in the hands of academia, free from the control of government. Universities must have autonomy to decide the course curriculum according to the time and needs. I believe that if this step is taken, it will become the game changer in providing quality education.

At the International level, I urge my fellow peers, academicians, organisations, governments and all other authorities working in this field to come to India and help us in creating a better environment for Higher Education. The Indian Higher Education system is the third largest in the world with over 32 million enrolments of students and over 1.2 million teachers. There are European countries which have done excellently in Higher Education. Indian Universities can thus, learn from European Universities about how we can run sustainable campuses, reduce the drop-out rates from Universities, bring sensitivity to the classroom and others.

In conclusion, the Constitution of India guarantees quality education as a fundamental right of every citizen. Now, it must be put into practice in the Higher Education sector so that we can provide skilled workforce to our country.

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