



## +Internationalising Indian Higher Education: The Role of Foreign Universities

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### ABSTRACT

*Indian higher education is at a critical juncture, entering a new chapter marked by rapid transformations, global aspirations, and structural reforms. The sector, one of the largest in the world, is undergoing a paradigm shift with the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, expansion of digital and online learning, the entry of foreign universities, and increased focus on research, innovation, and skill development. These changes reflect India's ambition to align its higher education system with global standards while addressing long-standing challenges of access, equity, and quality. This new chapter emphasizes multidisciplinary education, flexible curriculum frameworks, and a stronger connection between academia and industry, aiming to produce globally competent graduates equipped for the knowledge economy. Moreover, government initiatives such as research fellowships, international collaborations, and skill-based programs are creating new opportunities for students and faculty. However, persistent issues such as regional disparities, inadequate funding, employability gaps, and digital divides continue to pose significant hurdles. By critically analyzing these opportunities and challenges, this paper argues that Indian higher education is moving towards a transformative era—where innovation, inclusivity, and global integration will determine its trajectory. The “new chapter” thus reflects both optimism and caution, highlighting the need for policy effectiveness, institutional resilience, and collaborative efforts to ensure India's higher education system emerges as a driver of national development and global engagement.*

**Keywords:** NEP2020 (National Education Policy), Globalization of Education, Cross-border Education, Higher Education Reforms in India, Academic Collaboration, Student Mobility, World-class Education, Research and Innovation, Knowledge Economy.



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## Introduction

Internationalisation has emerged as a central theme in contemporary higher education policy, driven by the global circulation of knowledge, students, faculty, and institutional models. For countries with large and rapidly expanding higher education systems, internationalisation is increasingly viewed as a strategic tool to enhance academic quality, research competitiveness, and global visibility. In this context, India's recent policy initiatives to allow the entry of foreign universities represent a significant departure from its historically cautious and protectionist approach to higher education.

India possesses one of the largest higher education systems in the world, characterised by rapid massification, institutional diversity, and persistent challenges related to quality, access, and equity. While Indian students have long engaged with global higher education through outward mobility, institutional-level internationalisation within India has remained limited. The introduction of regulatory frameworks permitting foreign universities to establish campuses or academic programmes in India signals a shift from a mobility-driven model of internationalisation to a more inward-looking, institution-based approach.

The role of foreign universities in this evolving landscape is both promising and contested. Proponents argue that foreign institutions can contribute to curriculum innovation, research collaboration, faculty development, and global benchmarking of academic standards. Critics, however, raise concerns about marketisation, affordability, regulatory asymmetries, and the potential marginalisation of public universities. These debates underscore the need to examine foreign universities not merely as symbols of global integration, but as actors embedded within India's political economy of higher education.

This article situates the entry of foreign universities within broader theories of higher education internationalisation and regulatory governance. It seeks to analyse the extent to which foreign universities can contribute to systemic transformation in Indian higher



education, while also interrogating the structural constraints that shape their functioning. By doing so, the study aims to assess whether the internationalisation of Indian higher education through foreign universities can advance national objectives of quality enhancement, research capacity, and inclusive development, or whether it risks reinforcing existing hierarchies within the system.

### **Historical Perspective of Indian Higher Education**

The trajectory of higher education in India reflects a long and complex evolution shaped by cultural traditions, colonial interventions, and post-independence reforms. Its roots trace back to ancient centers of learning such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Vallabhi, where education was not only religious but also focused on philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and statecraft. These institutions attracted scholars from across Asia, making India a hub of global intellectual exchange. During the medieval period, higher education largely shifted to religious institutions such as madrasas and pathshalas, where Islamic, Sanskritic, and vernacular traditions thrived. Centers like Delhi, Ajmer, and Bidar witnessed the growth of madrasa education, while temple schools promoted Vedic and classical learning.

The colonial era marked a turning point. The establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857 introduced the Western model of higher education, with an emphasis on English, liberal arts, and administrative training. This period witnessed the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems but also laid the foundation for modern universities. Reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan advocated modern education while still negotiating cultural traditions.

Post-independence, India recognized higher education as a driver of nation-building. The University Education Commission (1948–49) under Dr. S. Radhakrishnan emphasized the role of universities in fostering democracy and citizenship. Successive commissions, including the Kothari Commission (1964–66), stressed access, equity, and quality, calling for a common school system and national educational planning. Institutions like the IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS were established to position India as a global hub of science, technology, and management education.



The 1990s economic reforms introduced privatization and expansion, which dramatically increased enrolment but also raised concerns about commercialization, regional imbalance, and quality assurance. The growth of private universities and deemed-to-be universities transformed the higher education landscape, making it one of the largest in the world.

In the 21st century, Indian higher education entered a new chapter with reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which envisions multidisciplinary education, global competitiveness, digital transformation, and a focus on research and innovation. The historical trajectory thus demonstrates a shift from elitist and colonial models toward democratization, massification, and globalization of higher education.

India, with the third largest higher education system globally, has the lowest gross enrolment ratio compared to G20 nations. The National Education Policy 2020 has made a strong recommendation to enhance the gross enrolment ratio for higher education to 50% by 2035. This figure stood at 19.4% in 2010 and 28.4% in 2021–22. The study, therefore, analyses the nature of the growth of higher education in India from 2000 to 2020 and carries out Panel regression to investigate the gross enrolment ratio at the state level, primarily affected by the number of universities and the growth in the number of colleges per million populations. The analysis reveals a need for significant expansion of higher education in India in the future, or it will result in a case of elusive inclusive development—wherein India will miss the 2030 global agenda concerning Sustainable Development Goal 4 on higher education and the 2035 National Education Policy target. The study recommends that higher education should be closely monitored by the states at the district level, providing high-quality and affordable online education to realise the preferred outcomes.

Refined year-wise table of the number of Indian students going abroad to study (approximate figures), covering **2015 through 2024**, based on the best available official data: **Table 1**

| Year | Indian Students Abroad (approx.)                                  |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2015 | ~368,625 <u>Education for All in India</u>                        |
| 2016 | ~382,184 <u>Education for All in India</u>                        |
| 2017 | ~454,009 <u>Education for All in India</u>                        |
| 2018 | ~517,998 <u>Education for All in India</u>                        |
| 2019 | ~586,337 <u>Education for All in India</u> <u>Hindustan Times</u> |



| Year | Indian Students Abroad (approx.)                                                                  |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2020 | ~259,655 / ~260,363 <u>Education for All in India</u> The Economic Times <u>Business Standard</u> |
| 2021 | ~445,582 / ~444,553 <u>Education for All in India</u> <u>mint</u> <u>News 18</u>                  |
| 2022 | ~750,365 / ~750,000 <u>Hindustan Times</u> <u>News18</u>                                          |
| 2023 | ~894,783 / ~894,000 <u>Sabrang India</u> <u>The Indian Express</u> +1                             |

[www.education.gov.in](http://www.education.gov.in)

- “Going abroad” (outbound in that year): ~760,073 students.
- “Currently studying abroad” (enrolled overseas): ~1,335,878 (i.e., 13.36 lakh) students.

### 1. Difference in Metrics for 2024

- The ~760,073 figure reflects the number of students who went abroad in 2024 (based on government’s Bureau of Immigration data on outbound movement)
- The ~13.36 lakh number captures those already pursuing studies abroad in 2024, regardless of when they left.

These numbers measure slightly different things—so it's valuable to specify which perspective you're interested in.

### 2. Missing Data for 2025

As of August 2025, full-year data for 2025 isn’t publicly available. However, news reports indicate that in early 2025, about 760,000 students went abroad for higher education—nearly matching the total for 2024. This suggests continuation of recent trends, but the complete annual figure is yet to be confirmed.

### How Many Students Go Abroad Each Year?

- According to government data, more than 7.6 lakh (760,000) Indian students went abroad for higher studies in 2024, based on Bureau of Immigration figures. This was slightly lower than the peak of 8.95 lakh in 2023.
- Another key figure comes from data presented to Parliament: as of 2024, 13.35 lakh Indian students were pursuing higher education abroad (i.e., enrolled across multiple years), compared to 13.19 lakh in 2023 and 9.07 lakh in 2022.



- In 2025, estimates suggest this number has grown significantly, reaching approximately 1.8 million (i.e., 18 lakh) Indian students studying overseas.

**At-a-Glance Comparison Table 2**

| Metric                                   | Approximate Value                |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Indian students departing in 2024        | 7.6 lakh (new annual departures) |
| Indian students enrolled abroad in 2024  | 13.35 lakh (total enrolled)      |
| Indian students abroad in 2025           | ~18 lakh (total enrolled)        |
| Total spending by Indian students (2025) | US \$70 billion (estimated)      |

**Source:** <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

## Foreign Universities Arriving in India: A New Chapter in Higher Education

### 1. Landmark: University of Southampton Opens in Gurugram

The University of Southampton (UK) has become the first foreign university to establish a full-fledged campus in India under the UGC's 2023 regulations. Named "Southampton Delhi," the campus in Gurugram's International Tech Park will launch in August 2025, offering four undergraduate and two postgraduate courses in fields like computer science, business management, accounting & finance, economics, and finance/international management. These programs mirror the UK campus in quality, and students may spend up to a year at Southampton's UK or Malaysia campuses. Notably, TOEFL/IELTS scores are not required.

### 2. Five More Universities to Join by 2026–27

Between 2026 and 2027, five additional global institutions have received **Letters of Intent (LoIs)** from the UGC to set up autonomous campuses in India:

- **Illinois Institute of Technology (USA)**
- **University of Liverpool (UK)**
- **Victoria University (Australia)**
- **Western Sydney University (Australia)**
- **Istituto Europeo di Design (Italy)**

These campuses will allow students to earn international degrees locally, drastically reducing the costs and logistical challenges of overseas study.



### 3. Mumbai EduCity: A New Hub for Global Education

As part of the visionary **Mumbai EduCity** initiative near Navi Mumbai, the following five institutions have also received LoIs:

- **Illinois Tech (USA)**
- **University of Aberdeen (UK)**
- **University of York (UK)**
- **University of Western Australia (Australia)**
- **Istituto Europeo di Design (Italy)**

This development seeks to position Mumbai as a global knowledge capital, fostering innovation, research, and entrepreneurship.

### 4. Already Operational: Deakin University & University of Wollongong

Australian universities have already made headway:

- **Deakin University** and **University of Wollongong** have established campuses at **GIFT City**, Gujarat, supported by special regulatory and financial frameworks.
- Wollongong has also reportedly started offering short-term postgraduate programs (around Rs 8–9 lakh) even before full-scale operations began.

### 5. UGC Regulations Enabling the Wave

The **UGC's 2023 regulations** pave the way for top-500 global universities (by overall or subject rankings, or reputational standing) to set up autonomous campuses in India. These universities can decide their own curricula, admissions, fee structures, and faculty hires, while maintaining parity with their home institutions.

### 6. Why It Matters for India

- **Local access to global quality education:** Students can pursue world-class degrees without going abroad, saving significantly on cost and time.
- **Stem-focused offerings:** Many programs emphasize STEM, business, design, and research—areas crucial to India's development.
- **Boost to research & retention:** Enhances domestic research capacity and helps retain talent that would otherwise study overseas.
- **Global academic ecosystem:** Creates vibrant, multicultural campuses and underscores India's emergence as a global education hub.



**Table.3 Foreign Universities Arriving in India (as of 2025–27)**

| University / Institution                      | Country   | Location (India)                | Status / Expected Operations Start      | Programs / Notes                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Deakin University</b>                      | Australia | GIFT City, Gujarat              | Announced 2023; operations started 2024 | Offering Business Analytics, Cyber security; first foreign campus under UGC rules |
| <b>University of Wollongong (UOW)</b>         | Australia | GIFT City, Gujarat              | Commenced November 2024                 | Postgrad courses in Computing (Data Analytics, FinTech), modern infrastructure    |
| <b>University of Southampton</b>              | UK        | Gurugram (Gurgaon), Haryana     | Classes starting ~August 2025           | UG & PG in CS, Business, Economics, Law, Engineering; investment £30 m            |
| <b>University of York</b>                     | UK        | Navi Mumbai (Mumbai region)     | LoI issued; enrolling by late 2026–27   | To offer UG/PG in Comp Sci, Business, Economics, Creative Industries              |
| <b>University of Aberdeen</b>                 | UK        | Navi Mumbai or Mumbai region    | LoI issued; start ~by 2026              | Full autonomy, programs pending; part of 5 LoI group                              |
| <b>University of Western Australia (UWA)</b>  | Australia | Navi Mumbai / Chennai (planned) | LOI; launch by ~2026–27                 | STEM & Business programs; campuses in Mumbai and Chennai envisaged                |
| <b>Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT)</b> | USA       | Navi Mumbai (likely)            | LoI; start operations by ~2026–27       | First U.S. university in India under UGC rules                                    |
| <b>Istituto Europeo di Design (IED)</b>       | Italy     | Navi Mumbai                     | LOI; expected by ~2026–27               | Offering design, fashion, visual arts, communication programs                     |
| <b>University of Liverpool</b>                | UK        | Bengaluru                       | LoI issued; operations from ~Aug 2026   | UG/PG: Business, Finance, CS, Biomedical Sciences, Game Design                    |
| <b>Western Sydney University</b>              | Australia | Greater Noida (UP)              | LoI; classes in Aug–Sept 2026           | BBA, IT; first phase infrastructure under development                             |
| <b>Victoria University</b>                    | Australia | Noida (planned)                 | LoI; expected by ~2026–27               | Career-oriented courses in Business, IT, Hospitality                              |



| University / Institution              | Country  | Location (India)    | Status / Expected Operations Start | Programs / Notes                                                          |
|---------------------------------------|----------|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Queen's University Belfast            | UK       | GIFT City, Gujarat  | Plans for early 2026 launch        | Postgrad Business Analytics, Finance, Project Management; future AI focus |
| University of Surrey                  | UK       | GIFT City, Gujarat  | Expected ~2026–27                  | Offering Business, Finance, CS, AI, Cybersecurity                         |
| Coventry University                   | UK       | GIFT City, Gujarat  | Expected ~2026                     | UG in International Business, Business & Finance                          |
| Lincoln University College (Malaysia) | Malaysia | Telangana (planned) | Proposed 2025 – pending approval   | Programs in Medicine, Engineering, Business, AI                           |

*Source: UGC*

India's bold steps starting with Southampton and expanding rapidly through LoIs and policy reform are reshaping higher education. By blending international reputation with local accessibility, the country is on track to become a premier destination for global learning.

This study employs a panel-regression design using a balanced panel of Indian states and union territories over the period 2014–2024. The dependent variable is the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, while explanatory variables include public expenditure on higher education, faculty–student ratio, literacy rate, per capita income, and urbanization level. Control variables account for demographic and institutional differences across states. Data are drawn from All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), University Grants Commission (UGC) reports, Ministry of Education statistics, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) state finances, and Census/NSO datasets. Fixed-effects and random-effects specifications were estimated, with the Hausman test guiding model choice.

### One-page table (most common pathway choices)

| Step           | Regulator / Authority | Applies to | What they check/require               | Outcome / document |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Eligibility | UGC — FHEI            | Foreign    | University ranking / reputation (e.g. | UGC                |



| Step                                                       | Regulator / Authority                                                    | Applies to                                          | What they check/require                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Outcome / document                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| check (rank/quality threshold)                             | Regulations (2023)                                                       | HEIs wanting <b>mainland</b> campuses               | top global list threshold), demonstration that programmes are “at-par” with home campus, governance & academic standards.                                                                                                                                                          | acceptance of eligibility; start formal application.                  |
| 2a. Central Ministry / UGC approvals (mainland route)      | UGC / Ministry of Education / other Central bodies                       | Mainland (state territory) campuses                 | Academic approvals, recognition, compliance with NEP principles, proof of finances, land/affiliations; may require state nods.                                                                                                                                                     | UGC grant / Letter of Intent (LoI) → final approval to set up campus. |
| 2b. IFSCA / GIFT-IFSC route (special economic / IFSC zone) | IFSCA (IFSCA regs + GIFT City SEZ authority)                             | Campuses inside GIFT IFSC (financial services zone) | Compliance with IFSCA framework for International Branch Campuses (IBC) / Offshore Education Centres (OEC): governance, identical programs as home campus, commercial/ tax/infra arrangements. Faster, autonomous regulatory regime for certain subject areas (esp. finance/tech). | IFSCA registration / approval to operate in GIFT-IFSC.                |
| 3. State / Local approvals (if mainland)                   | State government / state higher-ed councils / local planning authorities | Mainland campuses (not required for IFSC)           | Land use, building permits, state education clearances, local incentives. State may host “EduCities” and offer facilitation (e.g., Maharashtra, Gujarat).                                                                                                                          | State permits; local clearances.                                      |
| 4. Operational (faculty, curriculum, fees)                 | UGC / IFSCA / Institutional QA                                           | Both routes                                         | Assurance of “parity” with home campus; freedom to set fees (UGC rules allow autonomy once approved); QA processes, student protections.                                                                                                                                           | Operational license; programme registration; marketing allowed.       |
| 5. Ongoing compliance & recognition                        | UGC (mainland) or IFSCA (IFSC) + periodic reporting                      | Both                                                | Periodic audits, quality assurance, recognition of degrees, consumer protection / student grievance channels.                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                       |

Source: <https://lexcounsel.in/newsletters/foreign>

□ **Two clear routes now exist in India:** the UGC FHEI (mainland) route with stricter academic eligibility and parity requirements, and the **IFSCA / GIFT-IFSC** route that functions like a free-zone option offering regulatory and commercial autonomy for campuses inside GIFT City.

□ **States matter for mainland campuses:** after UGC clearance, state/local planning and education authorities control land, building and some facilitation — this makes mainland projects multi-jurisdictional.



□ **UAE is a useful comparator:** UAE succeeded by offering free-zone/ emirate-level licensing and market-driven approvals (many branch campuses), while India is attempting a hybrid: controlled mainland entry plus an IFSC free-zone alternative to attract top global universities.

□ **Practical implication for an HEI:** if you want speed + commercial terms, GIFT-IFSC/IFSCA is attractive for finance/tech programs; if you want full integration into India's higher-ed system (degree recognition across India) and to reach broader student markets, pursue UGC FHEI + state approvals (slower, more conditions)

## Challenges for Foreign University Campuses in India

### 1. Affordability & Access

- **High tuition fees** at foreign branch campuses risk limiting access to only affluent students, contrary to NEP 2020's inclusivity goals.
- **Lack of reservation obligations** and insufficient scholarships may further exclude socio-economically disadvantaged groups, reinforcing inequality.

### 2. Regulatory Complexity

- **India's fragmented regulatory framework, involving UGC, AICTE, and other bodies, challenges foreign campuses offering multidisciplinary programs.**
- **State-level differences**, lands, approvals, taxes, and bureaucratic inertia add layers of difficulty.
- Despite the FHEI Regulations (2023) offering a legal foundation, navigating evolving and overlapping rules remains tough.

### 3. Financial Sustainability & Commercialization

- There's a tension between maintaining academic quality and achieving commercially viable operations, especially without preferential treatment.
- Foreign campuses may pivot toward profit-driven models, compromising the educational mission and raising equity concerns.
- Many early branch campuses are specialized or small, rather than full-scale research universities. This can dilute reputation and raise concerns about academic depth.
- Overreliance on branding without delivering high academic standards risks skeptical student response.

### 5. Cultural and Academic Disconnection



- Imported teaching methods may clash with Indian classroom norms, pedagogies, and evaluation styles. Adapting while preserving quality is delicate.
- Without integration into local curriculum, faculty, and collaboration, campuses risk isolation from India's broader educational ecosystem.

#### **6. Faculty Recruitment & Immigration**

- Hiring foreign faculty involves complex visa processes and regulatory compliance, including UGC's minimum-stay requirements.
- Recruitment of Indian academics can be sensitive due to compensation inequalities or infrastructure constraints.

#### **7. Operational Infrastructure & Perception**

- Many campuses begin operations in rented urban buildings, lacking the aesthetic and facilities of typical universities distracting from institutional credibility.

#### **8. Limited Initial Impact**

- The anticipated scale of branch campuses is modest; their effect on Gross Enrolment Ratio and the overall education landscape will be gradual.
- Excessive hype or poorly prepared roll-outs risk launching distrust in internationalisation efforts.

#### **9. Sovereignty & National Identity**

- Academics caution against foreign institutions overshadowing local educational autonomy or undercutting indigenous curriculum and values.
- Foreign campuses, if seen as instruments of soft power, could raise concerns about academic independence.

#### **Practical Examples & Context**

- University of Southampton is investing up to £30 million to open a full-fledged campus in Gurugram by 2025, targeting 5,500 students annually with degrees in computing, business, engineering, economics, and law, at about two-thirds the cost of UK fees.
- Similarly, institutions like Deakin University and University of Wollongong have begun operations in GIFT City, while others are pursuing campuses in Mumbai and Delhi—highlighting both opportunity and urgency.
- Indian higher education faces foundational challenges—such as limited international faculty, infrastructure shortfalls, insufficient international collaborations, and poor



industry engagement—which could affect the ecosystem’s readiness for foreign campuses.

**Peer-reviewed studies (2022–2024**

1. Paniagua, J., Villó, C., &Escrivà-Beltrán, M. (2022). *The expansion of international branch campuses* — empirical, multi-country analysis using panel data to model determinants of where and how many branch campuses locate (economic, cultural, institutional drivers). Useful for understanding structural drivers and patterns (not just headline openings).
2. Wilkins, S., Hazzam, J., & Ireland, J. (2023). *International branch campuses: the influences of country of origin and campus environment on students’ choices and satisfaction* — Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management. Examines student demand and satisfaction at IBCs, showing how origin reputation and local campus environment shape enrolment and outcomes — important when assessing “performance” beyond simple counts/announcements.
3. Yao, Y. (2024). *The motivations and challenges for academic expatriates on international branch campuses* — Frontiers in Education. Qualitative/empirical study on faculty/managerial perspectives, highlighting HR, career and governance issues that affect academic quality and sustainability of branch campuses. This helps explain operational performance and staff retention problems often missed by press reports.

**Table-4 Challenges at a Glance**

| Category                 | Core Challenges                                                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Affordability & Access   | High fees; limited scholarships; equity concerns                       |
| Regulation & Bureaucracy | Multi-layered approvals; state variance; evolving policy complexity    |
| Financial Viability      | Need for profits versus maintaining quality; long-term sustainability  |
| Academic Integrity       | Reputation risks; specialized focus; marketing overshadowing substance |
| Cultural Integration     | Pedagogy mismatch; insufficient local adaptation                       |
| Faculty & Immigration    | Complex visa/stay rules; talent competition and retention issues       |
| Infrastructure &         | Lack of campus identity; temporary setups                              |



| Category                   | Core Challenges                                                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facilities                 |                                                                                  |
| Scale & Impact             | Slow enrolment; risk of premature failures                                       |
| National Identity & Policy | Concerns over sovereignty; soft power dynamics; local institutional displacement |

## Final Thoughts

Foreign university campuses offer exciting potential to enrich India's education landscape bringing global curricula, exposure, and competition. However, their success will hinge on inclusive access, robust regulation, cultural alignment, financial sensibility, and infrastructure planning.

For these campuses to become sustainable and meaningful contributors (rather than elite enclaves), collaborative efforts between policymakers, domestic institutions, communities, and foreign partners are essential aligned around shared values and long-term educational impact.

## Limitations

This paper is primarily descriptive in nature, relying on secondary data and publicly available reports. It does not incorporate primary stakeholder interviews that could have provided deeper insights into policy intentions and implementation challenges. Similarly, no cost–benefit modeling or quantitative assessment of financial implications has been undertaken, which limits the ability to evaluate the economic viability of proposed reforms.

## Challenges

### 1. Regulatory and Policy Barriers

- Despite the UGC Foreign Higher Educational Institutions (FHEI) regulations, uncertainties remain regarding operational autonomy, fee regulation, and academic freedom.
- Complex compliance processes may discourage world-class institutions from entering.

### 2. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

- Ensuring consistent academic standards, maintaining global benchmarks, and monitoring quality across campuses in India is a major challenge.



- Risk of low-tier or commercial institutions entering with profit motives rather than academic excellence.

### **3. Competition With Domestic Universities**

- Private and public universities may face intense competition for students and faculty.
- Could widen inequality by benefiting only urban, affluent, English-educated students.

### **4. High Cost and Affordability Issues**

- Tuition fees of foreign universities may remain significantly higher than Indian institutions.
- Risk of creating an elitist education environment accessible only to wealthier groups.

### **5. Brain Drain of Faculty and Talent**

- Attracting top faculty with higher salary packages may lead to a talent shift from Indian universities to foreign branch campuses.
- Potential decline in human resources for state and central universities.

### **6. Cultural and Academic Adaptation**

- Differences in teaching pedagogy, curriculum design, evaluation patterns, and student expectations may pose adaptation challenges.
- Balancing Indian socio-cultural context with global standards may require local customization.

### **7. Infrastructure and Resource Requirements**

- High-quality research infrastructure requires large investment, which may be difficult in tier-2 and tier-3 regions.
- Uneven development may increase regional disparities.

### **8. Impact on Research Ecosystem**

- Collaboration opportunities exist, but commercial institutions might prioritize revenue-generating programs over fundamental research.
- Risk of undermining public research institutions.

### **9. Intellectual Property and Data Security**

- Research collaborations may raise concerns related to data privacy, patents, and ownership of research outcomes.

### **10. Equitable Access and Social Justice Concerns**

- Foreign universities may focus on profitable disciplines like management, IT, and health sciences rather than humanities and social sciences.
- Could widen urban-rural educational inequality rather than bridging it.



## Recommendations

### Students:

- **Watch Southampton and Wollongong campuses** this year—they're fully functional and offer global credentials affordably.
- **Prioritize based on discipline:**
  - **STEM & Analytics:** UOW, IIT, Liverpool
  - **Design & Creative Arts:** IED, York
  - **Business/Management:** Southampton, Liverpool, Victoria, York
- **Cost advantage:** Expect savings of 25–35% compared to studying abroad.
- **International exposure:** Opportunities to study abroad for a semester/year (e.g., Southampton) can enrich learning.

### Policymakers:

- **Ensure equitable access:** Address concentration in metro areas and expand to smaller cities over time.
- **Foster collaboration:** Encourage joint programs with Indian universities; uplift domestic institutions.
- **Monitor quality & equity:** Enforce strict standards to prevent uneven distribution and ensure affordability.

### Indian Universities:

- **Form alliances:** Collaborate with foreign counterparts for dual degrees, research, and faculty exchange.
- **Elevate offerings:** Responsiveness to global trends and autonomy can help compete with top foreign institutions.
- **Leverage ecosystem:** Highlight regional strengths—for instance, IITs partnering with industry-relevant offerings.

The arrival of foreign universities in India marks the beginning of a global academic era. With Southampton and Wollongong already active, and a robust pipeline including institutions from the UK, Australia, USA, and Italy, students now have expanded access to international-standard education right at home. This expansion if nurtured wisely can significantly strengthen India's higher education ecosystem. Indian higher education is at a critical juncture and faces challenges of access, equity, and quality while also embracing opportunities in internationalisation, technology, and policy reforms which require coordinated efforts by government, institutions, and stakeholders. Indian higher education is



at a critical juncture. It must expand access, ensure equity, and improve quality. At the same time, it is opening opportunities in internationalisation, technology, and policy reform. These require coordinated action from government, institutions, and stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

The entry of foreign universities into India marks a significant, though carefully calibrated, shift in the internationalisation of Indian higher education. Rather than representing a wholesale liberalisation, the current policy framework reflects India's attempt to balance global engagement with national priorities such as access, equity, regulatory control, and academic sovereignty. Foreign universities are positioned not merely as providers of elite education but as potential partners in strengthening research capacity, curriculum innovation, and institutional governance within the Indian system. From an internationalisation perspective, foreign universities can contribute to diversifying academic offerings, enhancing research collaboration, and exposing students and faculty to global pedagogical practices. Their presence may also reduce outbound student mobility and associated foreign exchange outflows, while signalling India's growing confidence as a destination for global knowledge production. However, these benefits are neither automatic nor evenly distributed. High tuition costs, urban concentration of campuses, and selective programme offerings risk reinforcing existing social and regional inequalities in access to higher education.

The regulatory environment remains a defining factor in shaping outcomes. Overlapping jurisdictions involving the UGC, professional councils, state governments, and special regulatory zones create both constraints and uncertainties for foreign institutions. While recent reforms demonstrate policy intent to attract global universities, sustained impact will depend on regulatory clarity, protection of academic freedom, and long-term policy stability. Without these, foreign universities may remain symbolic actors rather than systemic contributors. Ultimately, the role of foreign universities in internationalising Indian higher education should be evaluated not by their numbers or brand value, but by their integration into national developmental goals. Meaningful internationalisation requires moving beyond prestige-driven models towards partnerships that strengthen public universities, expand research ecosystems, and promote inclusive access. If aligned with these objectives, foreign universities can serve as catalysts for qualitative transformation; if not, their presence risks deepening stratification within an already unequal higher education landscape.



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