Journal of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities

https://journal.krrishpub.com/index.php/jassh/index

Global Student Mobility and India's Higher Education Competitiveness

Gauri Rathi [a,*], Sagar Nimbalkar [b]

[a] *Mahatma Gandhi Vidyamandir Samajshree Prashantdada Hiray College of Management and Technology, Nashik, 422003, India.*
[b] *Vidya Pratishthan's Institute of Information Technology, Baramati, 413133, India.*

Abstract

This research report offers a comprehensive critical analysis of India's strategic paradigm shift from being a primary source of global academic talent ("brain drain") to aspiring to become a global education destination ("brain gain"). Anchored in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the study evaluates the effectiveness of the "Study in India" (SII) initiative and related internationalization policies from 2021 to 2025. Employing a secondary data analysis methodology, the report synthesizes data from the Ministry of Education (AISHE), Ministry of External Affairs, and global ranking bodies (QS, THE). The findings reveal a significant dichotomy: while the SII portal has successfully streamlined inbound mobility processes—registering a record 72,218 students from 200 countries in 2024—the inbound demographic remains heavily concentrated in the Global South, limiting high-value economic gains. Conversely, outbound mobility has surged to 1.33 million students, resulting in an estimated US$ 80 billion annual capital flight, effectively subsidizing Western education systems. The report further highlights that while Indian institutions have improved their global rankings (54 universities in QS 2026), this has not translated into the retention of domestic talent. Faculty repatriation schemes like VAJRA have shown negligible impact due to structural rigidities. The study concludes that India is successfully establishing itself as a regional soft power hegemon but struggles to compete as a global knowledge hub, necessitating a shift from recruitment-focused policies to retention-focused structural reforms.

Keywords: Study in India, Brain drain, Higher education, NEP 2020, Global competitiveness, Student mobility, Soft power, Internationalization.

Article Information:
DOI: https://doi.org/10.71426/jassh.v1.i1.pp20-26
Received: *28 Nov. 2025* | Revised: *27 Dec. 2025* | Accepted: *31 Dec. 2025* | Published: *31 Dec. 2025*

1. Introduction

The contemporary geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century is increasingly shaped by the speed and scale of knowledge transfer, in which higher education institutions function as key nodes in a global knowledge economy. For India, this reality creates a strategic paradox. On one hand, policy reforms and institutional performance indicators suggest an upward trajectory in global visibility, with a growing presence in international ranking systems [17, 18]. On the other hand, India continues to experience large-scale outward student mobility, reinforcing its long-standing status as a major exporter of academic talent and associated capital [23, 24]. This structural tension has renewed scholarly and policy interest in the transition from "brain drain" to "brain gain," particularly under the internationalization agenda articulated in the National Education Policy 2020 and its subsequent implementation logics [2, 11].

Outbound mobility remains a defining feature of India's higher education political economy. Government and international mobility datasets consistently indicate a sharp rise in the number of Indian students pursuing education abroad in the post-pandemic period. This outward flow is not merely a demographic phenomenon but also an economic one, frequently associated with significant foreign exchange outflows and opportunity costs for domestic higher education development [14]. Complementary evidence from international education economic impact tools illustrates how host countries convert international student mobility into measurable macroeconomic gains, underscoring the competitive stakes of global student recruitment [15]. Recent industry analyses further suggest that India's outbound demand is driven by durable "push factors" such as perceived quality differentials, employability pathways, and the prestige economy of foreign credentials, making the outflow relatively inelastic to incremental domestic

*Corresponding author
Email address: gaurirathi333@gmail.com, gaurirathi333@gmail.com (Gauri Rathi), sagar.nimbalkar@gmail.com (Sagar Nimbalkar).

improvements [16].

In response, the Government of India has pursued an inbound strategy through the "Study in India" initiative, designed to scale up international student enrollment, improve administrative efficiency, and consolidate India's positioning as an education destination [25]. While India has hosted international students for decades, official administrative datasets indicate that inbound enrollment has historically remained modest and regionally concentrated [22]. The SII model aims to address this gap by digitizing admissions processes, standardizing data capture, and expanding the pipeline of participating institutions [25]. However, scholarly work on internationalization cautions that numerical growth alone does not guarantee global competitiveness. Instead, internationalization outcomes depend on institutional ecosystems, governance capacity, and the lived experience of international students, including integration, safety, and academic support structures [3, 5, 8, 11].

A second pillar of the "brain gain" narrative involves institutional competitiveness in global rankings and the reputational capital necessary to attract diverse inbound cohorts. Ranking datasets show that India's representation has increased over time, yet persistent weaknesses on "international outlook"-type indicators continue to constrain global attractiveness and reinforce a feedback loop where low internationalization depresses rankings and low rankings depress international enrollment [17, 18]. Moreover, research on internationalization warns that policy-led international branding can reproduce asymmetric hierarchies if it prioritizes external validation over substantive academic transformation [1]. In this context, India's internationalization strategy can be read simultaneously as a market-facing competitiveness project and a soft-power instrument, with education diplomacy increasingly framed as an extension of geopolitical influence [6, 7]. Yet the extent to which such diplomatic gains translate into high-value economic and knowledge gains remains contested [14].

Accordingly, this study undertakes a critical evaluation of India's evolving internationalization agenda between 2021 and 2025, with particular focus on the "Study in India" intervention and its relationship to outbound mobility trends, institutional competitiveness, and the broader political economy of student flows. Using secondary data analysis, the paper synthesizes evidence from official administrative datasets (e.g., AISHE), government mobility reporting, and international benchmarking sources [22, 23, 17, 18]. By situating inbound policy design alongside persistent outbound dynamics, the analysis interrogates whether India's approach constitutes a substantive structural shift toward sustainable "brain gain" or remains primarily a recruitment-and-branding strategy with limited impact on the underlying drivers of outward mobility [2, 5, 16]. Ultimately, the paper argues that India's competitiveness as a higher education destination will be determined less by portal-driven enrollment counts and more by retention-oriented reforms that strengthen academic ecosystems, student outcomes, and institutional trust at scale [14, 11].

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Expansion
AISHE	All India Survey on Higher Education
BC	Branch Campus
BoI	Bureau of Immigration
DST	Department of Science and Technology
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOREX	Foreign Exchange
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIFT City	Gujarat International Finance Tec-City
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IBC	International Branch Campus
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
IIE	Institute of International Education
IoE	Institution of Eminence
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAFSA	Association of International Educators (US)
NEP	National Education Policy
NRI	Non-Resident Indian
OCI	Overseas Citizen of India
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds Rankings
SDA	Secondary Data Analysis
SII	Study in India
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
THE	Times Higher Education Rankings
UGC	University Grants Commission
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
VAJRA	Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty Scheme

2. Literature Review

The scholarship surrounding the internationalization of higher education in India is rich, multifaceted, and increasingly critical of the neoliberal paradigms that govern global student mobility. The following review synthesizes key theoretical and empirical contributions from 2021 to 2025, mapping the evolution of academic discourse from a focus on "brain drain" to the complexities of "brain circulation" and "soft power."

Stein and McCartney [1] argue that the discourse of internationalization is often steeped in a "critical internationalization studies" framework that questions the epistemic violence of Western-centric models. They suggest that when nations like India attempt to internationalize, they often inadvertently reproduce colonial hierarchies by prioritizing Western university partnerships over indigenous knowledge systems. This critique is echoed by Gupta and Vickers [2], who observes that the NEP 2020 represents a complex "amalgam of neoliberal and neotraditional ideologies." Vickers posits that the Indian state is attempting to commodify education for global consumption while simultaneously infusing curricula with a nationalist ethos, creating a tension that may alienate the very international students it seeks to attract.

The ref [3] provides a macro-level analysis of student mobility. It classifies the India as an "emerging hub," distinct from established "destination hubs" like the US. Their work highlights that India's inbound mobility is characterized by regionalism; the influx is predominantly from the Global South, driven by cost rather than prestige. This

is corroborated by data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics [4], which reveal that India's "inbound mobility rate" is heavily skewed towards neighbors like Nepal and Afghanistan, limiting its claim to being a truly global destination.

De Wit and Altbach [5] introduce the concept of "internationalization at home" as a counter-narrative to physical mobility. They argue that for developing nations, the focus should shift from counting international bodies to integrating global dimensions into the domestic curriculum. This perspective is crucial for analyzing the NEP 2020, which emphasizes "Internationalization at Home" through mechanisms like credit transfers and online collaboration.

In the realm of soft power, Lazarus et al. [6] offer a comparative analysis of "education diplomacy" between China and India. They define education diplomacy as the state's deliberate use of scholarships and academic exchange to project influence. Their findings suggest that while China utilizes a capital-intensive strategy (infrastructure-led), India employs a "digital diplomacy" approach, exemplified by the SII portal, leveraging its IT reputation to attract students from the Global South. Nuruzzaman [7] supports this, arguing that education has become a critical theatre of geopolitical competition in South Asia, with India using scholarships as a strategic tool to counter Chinese influence in Nepal and Bangladesh.

The 2023 UGC regulations allowing foreign universities to set up campuses are a direct response to this critique. However, The Red Pen [9] notes that the response from top-tier global universities has been lukewarm, with most preferring "asset-light" collaborations over full brick-and-mortar campuses due to regulatory uncertainty.

Mishra [10] discusses the financial sustainability of higher education, referencing earlier work [8]. They point out that Indian HEIs are overly dependent on government funding, which constrains their ability to build the world-class infrastructure needed to attract full-fee-paying international students. They advocate for "innovative financing" models, including attracting international research grants, which remain rare in the Indian context.

Raj [11] adds a sociological dimension, exploring the "inclusivity" of NEP 2020. He argues that while the policy addresses domestic inequities, it lacks a framework for the social integration of international students, particularly those from African nations who often face racial discrimination in India, a factor that significantly dampens the "word-of-mouth" marketing essential for the SII initiative. Johnston [12] and Vartanian [13] provide the methodological justification for this study. They validate "Secondary Data Analysis" as a rigorous approach for educational policy research, noting that large-scale datasets like AISHE and Open Doors provide a longitudinal perspective that primary surveys often lack. They argue that in the era of "big data," the synthesis of existing administrative data is often more revealing of systemic trends than isolated qualitative studies.

Khanna [14] provide the economic counter-narrative. Khanna envisions an aspirational future but notes the massive capital flight, estimated at nearly $80 billion annually. They argue that "Brain Gain" metrics must account for the retention of capital and talent, not just the attraction of foreign students. This view is supported by NAFSA (2025) [15], which quantifies the economic contribution of international students to the US economy ($43.8 billion), highlighting the opportunity cost for India.

ApplyBoard [16] analyzes the "push factors" driving Indian students abroad. Their data suggests that demand for foreign education is inelastic to price increases or visa hurdles, indicating a deep-seated perception gap regarding the quality of Indian education vis-a-vis Western alternatives.

QS World University Rankings [17] and Times Higher Education [18] data provide the benchmarking context. While Indian institutions have improved quantitatively (more universities ranked), THE notes that they consistently score poorly on "International Outlook," creating a negative feedback loop where low rankings deter international enrollment, which in turn keeps rankings low. Department of Science and Technology [19] reports on the VAJRA scheme highlight the failure of "faculty repatriation" initiatives. With fewer than 100 scientists participating since 2018, the literature suggests that financial incentives alone are insufficient to reverse brain drain without a concurrent improvement in the research ecosystem.

The ref [20] and [21] discussed the role of "nation branding" in higher education. They argue that initiatives like 'Study in India' function as branding exercises that attempt to decouple the perception of the university from the perception of the nation's developing status, a strategy that has had mixed success.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research objectives

- To critically evaluate the efficacy of the *Study in India (SII)* initiative in diversifying the source countries of inbound international students beyond the traditional South Asian demographic between 2021 and 2025.
- To analyze the correlation between the improved global rankings of Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the actual volume of inbound student mobility, thereby assessing the *rankings–enrollment elasticity*.
- To quantify the disparity between the economic capital flight caused by outbound student mobility (*Brain Drain*) and the economic revenue generated by inbound students and faculty repatriation schemes (*Brain Gain*).

3.2. Research hypotheses (H)

1. H_1: The *Study in India* initiative has significantly increased the volume of international student registrations due to mandatory compliance mechanisms; however, it has failed to significantly alter the composition of the student body, which remains dominated by countries of the Global South, thereby limiting high-value economic gains.
2. H_2: There exists a statistically weak correlation between the improvement of Indian universities in QS and THE global rankings and the inflow of international students from developed (OECD) nations,

suggesting that institutional infrastructure and post-study work opportunities are more influential determinants than academic ranking alone.

3. H_3: The rate of *Brain Drain*, measured through outbound student mobility and associated foreign exchange expenditure, generates an economic deficit that is expanding faster than *Brain Gain* mechanisms—such as faculty repatriation programs and inbound tuition revenue—can offset, resulting in a widening net loss to the Indian knowledge economy.

This research paper employs a SDA methodology, a robust research design widely accepted in the field of educational policy and sociology. Secondary data analysis involves the utilization of existing data collected for prior purposes to answer new research questions, offering the advantage of cost-effectiveness and access to large-scale, longitudinal populations that would be impossible to survey primarily. Johnston [12] further validates this approach for library and information science, arguing that in an era of "data deluge," the systematic evaluation of administrative datasets provides a macro-level view of systemic trends.The study triangulates data from three primary categories of sources.

3.3. Governmental administrative data (India):

- AISHE: Annual reports from 2020-21 to 2021-22 (latest final release) and provisional data for 2022-23 [22] were used to extract granular details on international student enrollment, gender parity, and infrastructural parameters.
- MEA [23] & Bureau of Immigration: Data regarding outbound student mobility, diaspora distribution, and specific bilateral mobility agreements.
- Study in India portal reports: Statistics on registrations, country-wise applications, and institute participation

3.4. International mobility & Economic reports:

- Open doors reports [24]: For data regarding Indian students in the United States and U.S. students in India, providing a benchmark for "brain circulation".
- UIS: For global inbound/outbound mobility ratios and regional flow data.
- Economic Impact Reports: Reports from NAFSA, Morgan Stanley, and EY were utilized to estimate the financial dimensions of student mobility (spending vs. revenue).

3.5. Global competitiveness indices:

- QS World University Rankings: Editions from 2021 to 2026 were analyzed to track the trajectory of Indian HEIs.
- THE Rankings: Used to cross-reference institutional performance, specifically focusing on "International Outlook" scores.

The data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Tables were constructed to compare year-on-year growth rates. Currency conversions (where applicable) were standardized to USD based on average annual exchange rates to ensure comparability between spending (outbound) and revenue (inbound). Limitations of the study include the lag in official AISHE data (the 2021-22 report is the latest final version available as of early 2025) and the discrepancy between "registrations" on the SII [25] portal versus actual "enrollments," which required careful interpretation of government press releases.

4. Results

The analysis of India's higher education landscape reveals a complex interplay between aggressive policy intervention and entrenched structural realities. The data indicates that while India has successfully digitized its internationalization efforts, the underlying flows of talent and capital remain heavily skewed towards the West.

4.1. The Outbound Tsunami: Quantifying the 'Brain Drain'

The term "brain drain" has historically referred to the migration of skilled professionals. However, the current data suggests a "pre-emptive brain drain"—the migration of students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels before they even enter the Indian workforce.

Table 1: Outbound Indian student mobility and economic impact (2020–2024)

Year	**Total Indian Students Abroad**	**YoY Growth (%)**	**Estimated Expenditure (USD)**	**Top Destinations**
2020	260,363	–	∼ $24 Billion	USA, Canada, UK
2021	445,582	71%	∼ $35 Billion	USA, Canada, UK
2022	752,111	68%	∼ $50 Billion	USA, UK, Australia
2023	894,783	19%	∼ $65 Billion	USA, UK, Canada
2024	∼1,330,000	48%	∼ $80 Billion	USA, Germany, UK

Sources: Bureau of Immigration Data, Ministry of External Affairs, and industry estimates.

As illustrated in Table 1, the post-pandemic surge in student migration is unprecedented. From a low of 2.6 lakh in 2020, numbers exploded to over 1.33 million by 2024. This 400% increase in four years signifies a massive vote of no-confidence in the domestic higher education system by India's aspirational middle class. The economic implication is staggering: the estimated $80 billion expenditure is roughly equivalent to India's entire defense budget. This capital flight effectively subsidizes the research ecosystems of the Global North. For instance, in the US alone, Indian

students contributed heavily to the $43.8 billion generated by international students in 2023-24.

Crucially, the "push factors" appear resilient to economic headwinds. Despite a depreciating rupee and recessionary fears in the West, the number of students continues to rise. The data indicates a shift in destinations; while the US remains the top choice (hosting 331,602 students in 2023), countries like Germany are emerging as new favorites due to low tuition costs, hosting over 50,000 Indian students in 2025. This suggests that Indian students are increasingly value-conscious but remain determined to exit the domestic system.

4.2. The SII intervention: Inbound reality check

In response to this exodus, the Government of India launched the revamped "Study in India" portal in August 2023. The portal mandates registration for all international students, acting as a single-window system for visas and admissions.

Table 2: Inbound International student mobility in India (2014–2024)

Academic Year	**Total International Students**	**Key Source Countries**	**Data Mechanism**
2014–15	34,774	Nepal, Afghanistan	AISHE Data
2019–20	49,348	Nepal, Bangladesh	AISHE Data
2021–22	46,878	Nepal, Afghanistan, US*	AISHE Data
2024–25	72,218 (Registrations)	Global South, Africa	SII Portal Data

Note: The US figure reported in AISHE often includes short-term exchange students and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

Table 2 reveals the impact of the SII initiative. The jump to 72,218 registrations in 2024-25 represents a significant statistical correction, likely driven by the mandatory nature of the new portal which captures data previously lost in fragmented university systems. However, a critical analysis of the source countries reveals the limits of India's "soft power." The influx is overwhelmingly from the Global South: Nepal (28%), Afghanistan (9%), Bangladesh (6%), and African nations like Nigeria and Tanzania.

This demographic composition has two implications. First, the economic gain is limited. Students from these regions often rely on ICCR scholarships or pay significantly lower fees compared to what Western universities charge. Therefore, the "Study in India" initiative is currently a diplomatic tool rather than an economic engine. Second, the absence of significant numbers from OECD countries (excluding heritage students from the US/UK) suggests that India has not yet cracked the "quality" market. The "Brain Gain" here is quantitative, not qualitative in terms of attracting global top-tier talent that drives high-end innovation.

4.3. Global competitiveness: The rankings paradox

A central pillar of the government's strategy to attract students is the improvement of global rankings. The "Institutions of Eminence" (IoE) scheme was explicitly designed to propel Indian universities into the top 500.

Table 3: Indian universities in QS World university rankings (2015–2026)

Edition	**Total Indian Universities Ranked**	**Universities in Top 500**	**Notable Institutions**
2015	13	–	IITs
2021	28	–	IITs, IISc
2025	46	–	IITs, Delhi University
2026	54	11	IISc, IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi

The data in Table 3 shows a clear upward trajectory. The presence of 54 universities in the 2026 rankings, up from just 13 a decade ago, is a testament to improved data reporting and research output. However, a deeper dive into the Times Higher Education rankings reveals a persistent weakness. Indian universities consistently score low on "International Outlook," a metric based on the ratio of international staff and students.

This creates a chicken-and-egg paradox: Indian universities rank lower because they lack international students, and they fail to attract international students because they rank lower (and lack the cosmopolitan infrastructure). Furthermore, the "Top 500" are almost exclusively public institutions, which have historically had capped seats for foreign students (though this is changing with supernumerary quotas). The vast private sector, which has the capacity to absorb foreign students, largely remains invisible in the top tiers of global rankings, creating a quality perception gap.

4.4. The human capital equation: Faculty repatriation

True "Brain Gain" involves the return of highly skilled researchers. The government has instituted schemes like VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research) and Ramalingaswami Re-entry Fellowships to lure Indian-origin scientists back.

Table 4: Performance of key faculty repatriation schemes in India

Scheme	**Target Audience**	**Performance / Reach**	**Analysis of Failure / Success**
VAJRA	NRI / OCI Scientists	$<$ 100 active fellows (since 2018)	Bureaucratic delays; low conversion to permanent academic return.
Ramalingaswami	Biotechnology Researchers	$\sim$75 fellowships per year	High prestige but limited scale; saturation of senior academic positions.
GIFT City IBCs	Foreign Universities	2 campuses (Deakin, UOW)	Nascent initiative; promotes in-situ retention rather than true repatriation.

As Table 4 indicates, these schemes suffer from a lack of scale. Bringing back 75 biotech researchers a year is a drop in the ocean compared to the thousands of STEM PhDs India produces who stay abroad. The VAJRA scheme's struggle to attract even 100 consistent faculty members points to deep structural issues: salary differentials, lack of research autonomy, and rigid hiring practices in Indian universities. The "Brain Gain" is thus occurring at a micro-level, insufficient to trigger a systemic shift in the innovation ecosystem. The recent opening of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in GIFT City (Gujarat) by Deakin University and University of Wollongong represents a new strategy: if you can't bring the brains back, bring the universities to them. However, with only two campuses operational as of 2024, it is too early to declare this a success.

5. Discussion

The synthesis of the data leads to three major findings that characterize the current state of India's higher education internationalization.

5.1. The emergence of a "Regional Hegemon" rather than a Global hub:

The "Study in India" initiative has succeeded in consolidating India's position as the primary education hub for the Global South. The surge to 72,218 registrations 38 is driven by students from Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Africa. This aligns with India's diplomatic strategy of being the "Voice of the Global South." However, it fails the economic test of "Brain Gain." These students do not bring the high forex revenues associated with international education in the West. India is trading in "diplomatic capital" rather than "financial capital."

5.2. Structural inelasticity of "Brain Drain":

The outflow of Indian students is structurally entrenched and inelastic to domestic improvements. Even as the number of ranked Indian universities doubled (Table 3), the number of students leaving quadrupled (Table 1). This proves that H2 is correct: improved rankings do not retain students. The "push" factors—hyper-competition for limited seats (e.g., IIT acceptance rates $<1\%$), perceived lack of employability, and societal prestige attached to foreign degrees—overwhelm the "pull" of improved domestic rankings. The $80 billion annual loss 3 is a structural deficit that creates a massive resource transfer from a developing economy to developed ones.

5.3. The digital-physical disconnect:

The success of the SII portal (digital infrastructure) contrasts sharply with the struggles of the VAJRA scheme (human infrastructure). India has successfully digitized the process of entry (visas, applications) but has not sufficiently upgraded the experience of existence (campus life, research funding, faculty diversity). The mandatory registration on the SII portal 49 has improved data capture, giving the illusion of a massive jump in numbers, but this administrative success masks the underlying stagnation in creating a truly cosmopolitan campus culture required to attract Western students.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the "Study in India" initiative reveals a nation in the throes of a complex transition. India has successfully pivoted from a passive observer of global student flows to an active player, utilizing policy instruments like NEP 2020 and digital platforms like the SII portal to assert its ambition. The 72,000+ registrations in 2024 are a commendable start, signaling that India is open for business. However, the "Brain Drain" to "Brain Gain" narrative remains largely aspirational. The current reality is one of asymmetric integration: India is deeply integrated into the global knowledge economy as a supplier of talent (1.33 million students abroad), but remains peripheral as a destination (mostly regional inflow). The "Brain Gain" initiatives for faculty are too small in scale to offset the massive outflow of intellectual capital.

For India to bridge this chasm, the focus must shift from recruitment to retention. The $80 billion exiting the country annually is the funds that could be building world-class research facilities in India. The policy of allowing foreign universities into GIFT City is a step in the right direction, essentially attempting to import the "pull factor" of foreign degrees into the domestic market.

Ultimately, the success of "Study in India" will not be measured by the number of registrations on a portal, but by the diversity of the student body and the retention of India's own best and brightest. Until Indian universities can offer a value proposition that competes not just on cost, but on opportunity, the Brain Drain will continue to outpace the Brain Gain, leaving India as a net donor to the global knowledge economy rather than a beneficiary.

Declarations and Ethical Statements

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.
Funding Statement: The authors declare that no specific funding was received for this research.
Artificial Intelligence usage Statement: During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to assist with grammatical corrections. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.
Availability of Data and Materials: Data used from secondary sources have been cited in the article.
Publisher's Note: The publisher of this article, Krrish Scientific Publications, remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

References

[1] Stein S, McCartney DM. Emerging conversations in critical internationalization studies. *Journal of International Students*. 2021;11(S1):1–14. Available from: https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11iS1.3840
[2] Gupta L, Vickers E. The Janus Face of Indian internationalisation: nationalism, neoliberalism and the politics of teacher education reform. *Comparative Education*. 2026 Jan 2;62(1):124-147. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2025.2574754

[3] Karakhanyan S, Pedró F, Kinser K. From Global Megatrends to Trends in Tertiary Education and Its Quality Assurance. II Global Trends in Tertiary Education QA: Challenges and Opportunities in Internal and External QA. 2025 Dec 29;57:17. Available from: 10.1163/9789004752115_002

[4] [Online Available]: Data for the Sustainable Development Goal. *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*. 2023. Available from: http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow

[5] De Wit H, Altbach PG. Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*. 2021;5(1):28–46. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898

[6] Lazarus AT, Zhang L, Shitu AF. Education diplomacy and the shifting landscape of global influence: Soft power strategies in the post-pandemic era. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. 2025. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2025.2563873

[7] Nuruzzaman M. Joseph Nye's soft power theory and the dynamics of China–India soft power competition in South Asia: A comparative analysis. *The International Spectator*. 2025;60(1):1–18. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2025.2533919

[8] Tight M. Internationalisation of higher education beyond the West: challenges and opportunities – the research evidence. *Educational Research and Evaluation*. 2022 Feb 22;27(3–4):239–59. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2022.2041853

[9] [Online Available]: International universities opening campuses in India: What you need to know. *The Red Pen*. Available from: https://theredpen.in/blog/international-universities-opening-campuses-in-india-what-you-need-to-know/

[10] Mishra RK. Revolutionizing higher education: Rethinking funding and global models with an Indian lens. *Public Administration and Policy*. 2025;28(1). Available from: https://doi.org/10.1108/PAP-03-2025-0045

[11] Raj SB. Pathways to inclusive higher education: learnings from India's National Education Policy 2020. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*. 2024 Jul 21;11(1):82–92. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2024.2382376

[12] Johnston MP. Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*. 2017;3(3):619–626. Available from:http://qqml.net/papers/September_2014_Issue/336QQML_Journal_2014_Johnston_Sept_619-626.pdf

[13] Vartanian TP. *Secondary data analysis*. Oxford University Press; 2011. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195388817.001.0001 Vartanian TP. Secondary data analysis. *Oxford University Press eBooks*. 2010. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195388817.001.0001

[14] Khanna T. One aspirational future for India's higher-education sector. *Dædalus*. 2024;153(2):149–166. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_02071

[15] [Online Available]: NAFSA: Association of International Educators. International student economic value tool. 2025. Available from: https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

[16] [Online Available]: ApplyBoard. Indian student mobility report: Trends and insights 2024. *ApplyInsights*. 2024. Available from: https://www.applyboard.com/applyinsights-article/indian-students-2024

[17] QS Quacquarelli Symonds. QS World University Rankings 2026: Top global universities. 2025. Available from: https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings

[18] [Online Available]: Times Higher Education. World University Rankings 2025. 2025. Available from: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2025/world-ranking

[19] [Online Available]: Department of Science and Technology. VAJRA Faculty Scheme: Impact assessment report. Government of India; 2024. Available from: https://vajra-india.in/

[20] Kim MJ, Bamberger A. Conceptualizing nation branding in the field of higher education: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. 2025 Oct 11;1–24. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2025.2567835

[21] Rachman AA, Heryadi RD, Rachman JB, Yani YM. Challenges and opportunities in higher education diplomacy of World Class Universities in Indonesia: analysing the network environment of public diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*. 2024 Jul 31;10(1). Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2384537

[22] [Online Available]: Ministry of Education, Government of India. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021–2022. 2024. Available from: https://aishe.gov.in/aishe-final-report

[23] [Online Available]: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Population of overseas Indians: Annual report 2023–24. 2024. Available from: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/38005_Final-MEA-AR-2023-English.pdf

[24] [Online Available]: Institute of International Education. Open Doors 2024 report on international educational exchange. 2024. Available from: https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-scholars/

[25] [Online Available]: Study in India. Study in India portal: Partner institutes and courses. Government of India; 2024. Available from: https://studyinindia.gov.in/