

Importance of research in UG curriculum

What is the issue?

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There are growing demands that research should be made part of UG curriculum in India.

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What is the background?

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- India has made considerable strides in achieving a near-perfect enrolment rate in primary education.

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- But it has failed to give higher education as much attention.

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- As a consequence, Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is 25.8%, against China's 48.44% and the U.S.'s 88.84%.

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What is the importance of research in higher education?

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- In India, about 80% of the students enrolled in higher education are concentrated in undergraduate (UG) programmes.

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- Research and application-oriented education can substantially enhance the quality of UG education.

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- Several studies on such programmes have shown a positive impact on students such as -

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1. Enhanced learning through mentorship
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2. Increased retention
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3. Increased enrolment in graduate education
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4. More prowess in critical thinking
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5. Creativity and problem solving
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6. Intellectual independence
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7. Understanding of research methodologies
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- Research at the UG level increases the aptitude for research-oriented career options as well as the employability of students.
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- The faculty can also gain by sharing their research ideas with students, receive valuable feedback as well as help in the form of assistantship and apprenticeship.
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- Additionally, research also helps the faculty enhance their teaching abilities and content by upgrading knowledge.
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- It can also help solve the problem of shortage of faculty, as more students will likely opt for doctoral and post-doctoral studies and teach in their home country.
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- Thus, research and teaching should ideally go together in any sound higher education system.
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What are the measures taken by the government?

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- The government has also floated two ambitious projects towards internationalising higher education in India - 'Study in India' and 'Institutes of Eminence'.
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- The "Study in India" is an innovative initiative to attract students from our partner countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa to come and experience the very best of academic learning from the top institutions in India.
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- This will be achieved through systematic brand-building, identifying quality institutions for receiving the students, creating suitable infrastructure and facilitation structures.
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- Under the Institute of Eminence, 10 private and 10 public universities are to be selected.
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- The selected institutes shall be regulated differently from other deemed to be universities so as to evolve into institutions of world class in a reasonable time period.
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- Both these measures will need institutes to become world class and carry out high-quality research on campuses.
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- Only then will competent faculty as well as doctoral students from across the world come to India.
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- Internationalisation of campuses is important if India wants to be in the global university ranking lists.
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- But this will not happen without encouraging an ecosystem that promotes high-quality research.
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What should be done?

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- Research remains a significant weakness in India's higher education system.
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- It has been traditionally restricted to specialised institutes such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) etc.,
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- Also, there is hardly any interaction between these institutes and teaching universities.
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- Thus, Investment in education should be at least 6% of GDP to upgrade

infrastructure, labs and resources, which are essential to carry out high-quality research.

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- The University Grants Commission and other regulatory bodies will have to come out with a priority list of reputable journals.
- This will reduce the problem of bogus journals and publications.
- Research institutes such as TIFR and IISc should mentor some of the well-performing universities and colleges till they become aware of the nuances of conducting fair and high-quality research.
- Once capable, these trained institutes can then help the second rung of colleges and so on.
- Also, there should be planned ways to embed research in UG curriculum.
- The UGC should make it compulsory for students to submit at least a 5,000-word research paper that should be assessed in the same way as serious research journals.
- Also, students need to be made aware of the value of research from an early stage to recognise the true value of higher education.
- The status quo in education has resulted in education that is not only substandard but also fails to open inquiring minds to the world of research.
- Thus, India must be innovative in its approach if its wants to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend.

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Source: The Hindu

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