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Higher education, high-impact research, and world university rankings: A case of India and comparison with China

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K.S. Reddy*, En Xie, Qingqing Tang

School of Management, Xi'an Jiaotong University, 28 West Xianning Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710049, China

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ABSTRACT

To date, this paper is probably the first to compare Indian and Chinese universities on educational performance metrics such as high-impact research and world university rankings. The study, therefore, examines the current state of higher education, high-impact research metrics, and world university rankings in an emerging market of India. First, we present an overview of the higher education system, government schemes for academic research, and related educational statistics. Second, we compare India and China on various academic-research metrics (citable documents, number of citations, cites per document, and H-index in three categories), and world university rankings. Special attention is devoted to revealing the progress of management research metrics, business school accreditations and rankings, and abstracting and indexing of publishing journals. Last, we discuss several challenges in university education and recommend policy guidelines pertaining to research funding, collaborative research projects, and research assessment council for imparting quality academic practices and standards in a higher education environment. Our exploratory analysis indicates that for citable documents in the 'all subjects' category, the United States is ranked first, followed by China in second, the United Kingdom in third, and India in ninth. Overall, world university rankings and research metrics of Indian universities are found to be far behind those of Chinese universities.

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1. Introduction

Higher education is the most fundamental constituent, and it requires careful attention and evaluation to foresee prospective outcomes in a given country. It is indeed a reward for citizens, gives knowledge and respect, makes an individual self-assured, and provides a career. For human capital theory, higher education is an effective tool to develop science and technological capabilities that are required for a standard of living in a global knowledge economy (e.g. [Ding and Zeng, 2015](#)). Drawing on institutional theory, higher education institutions are often referred to as professional organizations driven by values and norms associated with academia. Hence, the accomplishment of

strategic objectives by higher educational institutions depends on contextual factors such as the regulatory framework of the country, decision-making power, financial support, culture, communication, and assessment ([Stensaker et al., 2014](#)). For example, [Xie et al. \(2014\)](#) highlight four important factors that drive China in scientific research, namely, a large population and human capital base, a labour market favouring academic meritocracy, a large diaspora of Chinese-origin scientists, and a centralized government willing to invest in science.

In existing literature, several studies have examined the higher education stream for different reasons in different institutional settings. For instance, one group of scholars has mainly emphasized the performance of higher educational institutions, private higher education, the relationship between higher educational reforms and economic performance, curriculum development, student assessment and the job market, among others (e.g. [Jabnoun, 2015](#); [Kantola and Kettunen, 2012](#); [Moed et al., 2011](#); [Yaisawarng and Ng, 2014](#)). Another group of researchers has particularly examined the internationalization of the higher education sector, university

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: srinivasareddy@mail.xjtu.edu.cn, cssrinivasareddy@live.com (K.S. Reddy).

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rankings, building world-class universities, collaborative research centres, research funding, and so forth (e.g. Daraio et al., 2015; Frølich et al., 2010; Jöns and Hoyler, 2013; Li et al., 2014; Millot, 2015; Saisana et al., 2011; Usher and Savino, 2006). Specifically, some scholars have paid attention to assorted themes such as the impact of individual researcher productivity on university performance, journal rankings, bibliometrics of specific areas and journals, and related issues (e.g. Abramo et al., 2013; Berlemann and Haucap, 2015; Hall, 2011; Huang, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Neri and Rodgers, 2015). Importantly, there is a growing research interest in higher educational reforms, performance of higher educational institutions, university systems, research assessments, and university rankings in emerging markets like Latin American and the Asian continent, including the Russian Federation (e.g. Chinta et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Brambila et al., 2016; Halai, 2013; Jiao et al., 2015; Kang et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015; Menon, 2016; Mironos et al., 2015; Pouris and Pouris, 2010; Yu and Gao, 2010). Though a small number of studies have analysed the performance of the Indian higher education sector – research performance and national university rankings (e.g. Gupta, 2010; Padalkar and Gopinath, 2015; Prathap, 2014; Sahoo et al., 2016; Yeravdekar and Tiwari, 2014) – to our knowledge, no study has examined Indian and Chinese universities on educational performance metrics such as high-impact research publications and world university rankings. Therefore, we attempt to fill this knowledge gap and contribute to the literature on higher educational institutions in developing countries.

At the outset, we wish to present some interesting observations about Indian higher education that were highlighted in the print and electronic media.

Too many of our higher education institutions are simply not up to the mark. Too many of them have simply not kept abreast with changes that have taken place in the world around us... still producing graduates in subjects that job market no longer requires... Not one Indian university today figures in top 200 universities of the world.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, Former Prime Minister of India (*India Today*, 2013).

By 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world with nearly 140 million people in the college-going age group, one in every four graduates in the world will be a product of the Indian education system (*Times of India*, 2014), fifty percent of youth would be in the higher education system, at least 23 Indian universities would be among the global top 200, six Indian intellectuals would have been awarded the Nobel Prize, the country would be among top five countries globally in cited research output, its research capabilities boosted by annual R&D spends totaling over US\$140 billion.

Businessline (2014).

According to Aspiring Minds National Employability Report, which is based on a study of more than 150,000 engineering students who graduated in 2015 from over 650 colleges, 80% of the engineering graduates are unemployable.

Times of India (2016).

19,000 people applied for 114 posts as sweepers in Uttar Pradesh ... of some 6000 applicants are graduates in arts and sciences, post-graduates, even engineering graduates and MBAs; likewise, 75,000 well trained people have applied for 30 peon jobs in Chattisgarh; according to Census 2011, over 20% of Indian youth (between the age of 15–24) or 47 million Indians are jobless.

Indiatimes (2016).

From the aforementioned comments, one would notice at least two opposing views associated with the higher education system in India. On the one hand, we react to but disagree with the progress of the higher education system, research output, and university rankings. At the same time, we are dejected upon knowing the present job market in the country. This suggests how we should establish well-structured, managed, and excellent higher educational systems while removing contaminated procedures, controlling malpractice, and lessening political abuse, thus placing a governance-based and an objective-oriented higher education structure on the world map. On the other hand, the second comment seems to offer unrealistic goals with some fancy numbers and audaciousness whilst focussing more on protecting the self-respect of the ruling political party. That being stated, one should aim high and work prudently for the development of the country. Then, the outcome will have a positive impact on economic progress, employment, foreign collaboration, capital mobilization, and entrepreneurship. In the context, institutional environment, economic resources, and human resources are important drivers of higher education and high-impact research (e.g. Xie et al., 2014; Zoogah et al., 2015).

Indian higher education has long been criticized for several reasons, including the poor quality in course content, shortage of skilled teaching faculty, lack of research interest, inadequate infrastructure facilities, scarce financial support, uneven industry-centric skills, poor international collaborations, lack of motivation to compete internationally, meagre research output and number of citations, reluctance to establish global universities, and so forth (e.g. Gupta, 2010; Prathap, 2014; Sheel and Vohra, 2014). This is because governments (central and state/province) have supreme power over administration, admissions, examinations, recruitment, and assessment, particularly in the public university system (central and state universities). Hence, a number of systems and practices in higher education have been redefined, redesigned, and transformed since the entry of the private university degree system and economic reforms in 1991 (e.g. Umashankar and Dutta, 2007; Yeravdekar and Tiwari, 2014). It can be inferred that economic deregulation and integration policies not only influence the economic performance of the country but also affect the human capital sector of higher education. Thus far, the government of India has mainly targeted some areas in higher education such as setting up Institutes of National Importance (e.g. Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), National Institute of Technology (NIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM)), financial assistance to public universities, teacher training institutes, quality measures in admissions, job market assistance, and producing PhDs for teaching requirements, among others. While economic reforms affect higher educational performance metrics, Indian institutes hardly focus on industry collaboration, high-impact research, and world university rankings. Yet they are assessed by autonomous organizations such as the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA).¹

In recent years, admissions and job market numbers are becoming increasingly complex due to structural problems in the governance system, self-benefitting advantages to bureaucrats, and politically influencing manners (*Times of India*, 2015, 2016). An unforeseen point is that local institutes often thrive from admissions, central government grants, pay scales and increments, and national accreditation. Further, government and private universities are not able to focus on global university rankings because of institutional problems, which include financial assistance, research

¹ The autonomous organizations such as 'NAAC' were established in 1994 (<http://www.naac.gov.in>) and NBA came into operations from 2010 (<http://nbaind.org>).

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