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Mind the Gap

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Nilanjan Banik, professor at Bennett University's* School of Management, on why the corporate sector is left with vacant seats





India featured in the last five among 73 countries that participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted annually by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This does come as a nasty surprise to those who believed in the prowess of India's scientific and technological manpower.

PISA is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. The most recently published results are from the assessment





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in 2012. Around 510,000 students in 65 economies took part in the PISA 2012 assessment of reading, mathematics and science representing around 28 million 15-year-olds globally.

From the demand side, quality education translates into graduates who are employable and have the skills to deliver to the needs of corporate India. India is the largest provider of engineers (close to 0.65 million annually) and English-speaking professionals in the world.

However, there is a dearth of quality professionals in India. This is precisely why every year corporates like Infosys (service), ITC (manufactured consumer items), Apollo (medical), and L&T (engineering),

to name a few, are left with vacant seats, or prefer to recruit people with foreign degrees, rather than employ graduates from India. In the private sector, approximately, 10 to 15 million jobs are created every year but not all could be filled because of lack of required skills. Without skills, the demographic dividend that India boasts will turn out to be a bane.

Yes, there are quality education institutes such as IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, etc, in India. However, the number of graduates from these institutes are either too few in number, or they decide to go abroad for higher studies, or even take up work overseas. The last one has become a fad, with India becoming home to many successful start-ups.

From the supply side, quality of education would be seen in terms of contribution to research and development. This means — education institutes serving as an incubator for developing new technologies that can be of use to entrepreneurs, to produce goods and services more efficiently. India faces a dearth of both quality teachers and quality education institutes. At a time when deans of Indian origin at Ivy league business schools in the US are making national headlines, in India, the newly-opened IIMs and IITs are scouting for professors. In fact, these newly-opened institutes survive by hiring visiting professors from other institutes and universities in India.

Government regulation in higher education hinders supply of quality education. It is all-pervading, whether in terms of determining fees to be charged, or foreign collaboration. When it requires around Rs 8 lakh per year to produce an engineer, and anything between Rs 12-15 lakh per year to produce a doctor, asking a private institute to charge state-determined fees is unreasonable. In this fashion, the privately funded universities cannot survive, leaving aside, hiring quality teachers.

The good news is that in recent times the government is in the process of relaxing rules in terms of foreign collaboration. There is also a paradigm shift taking place, with corporates such as Bennett Coleman, Tech Mahindra, Hero and Goenka, to name a few, foraying into the education sector. The corporate sector understands the importance of research and skill development better than small private players who have already ventured (and are losing out) in the education sector. Hopefully, this will add to the supply of quality education institutes, human capital, and help to sustain India's growth.



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