



## Enhancing Student Quality at South India's First Private University: Initiatives to Improve Overall Student Engagement, Diversity, and Industry Readiness

Avinash Rao

University of Manchester, United Kingdom

### Abstract

*Alliance University is South India's First Private University established in Karnataka State in the Year 2010 and is recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, India. The University has been consistently ranked high both by national and international bodies, a pioneer in academic digitization during the pandemic, becoming a case study at Coursera in terms of adaptability to change, a founding member of PACT 2030, an SDG initiative by QS I-Gauge, promoting HEIs to come together to fulfil the UN's SDGs. In the year 2023, the University entered the league of QS World University Rankings – Asia, and the National Institutional Ranking Framework, a ranking methodology adopted by the Ministry of Education, Government of India ranked its constituent units, the School of Business as 87th Best Management Institution in the Country and the School of Law as the 25th Best Law Institution in the Country. QS I-Gauge rated Alliance University with an overall 'Diamond' rating in 2023, and the University has over 30,000+ global alumni, 300+ world-class faculty, 80+ international partner universities, and has 11+ schools and departments across 4 faculty groups. India, a growing liberal nation in all aspects, including educational reforms has more than 950 universities and approximately 40,000 higher education institutions, reflecting the high fragmented state of higher education in the country. The NEP 2020 proposed several reforms through policies and the salient aspects include a student centric model, competency based continuous evaluation system, enhanced focus to research and innovation, improved STEM model of higher education controlling, faculty productivity based on research output, autonomy at all levels, merit-based student enrolments, faculty selection and promotions, boost to online training, integrated controlling and monitoring systems, increase gross enrolment ratio (GER) in sync with the United Nations SDGs – Quality Education that promotes access and enhances overall academic quality. Improving the GER, providing better access to the marginalized, technology adoption, and preparing graduates for future jobs through industry-led curricula and experiential learning are imperative to strengthen graduate outcomes. The paper will encapsulate key initiatives undertaken by Alliance University to promote overall student engagement, diversity, and industry readiness, preparing graduates to be future ready.*

**Keywords:** Student Quality, Student Diversity, Graduate Outcomes, Industry Readiness

### Introduction

Since independence in 1947, the Indian Higher Education has experienced tremendous expansion. India has contributed immensely to the world by providing high quality resources including doctors, engineers, management professionals, scientists, researchers, and technologists. Today, it is one of the top 10 countries in terms of industrial and technological capacity owing to availability of manpower, technological development on account of higher education, specifically technical education. The higher education methods must be appropriate enough to focus on the four pillars namely learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to become, and this can be accomplished when the approaches to learning become student centric by employing novel and robust methods of teaching and learning thus promoting overall student engagement and industry readiness [1]. It remains unequivocally true that education remains the fundamental premise for harnessing human potential, working towards a just and an equitable society promoting overall national development. The National Education Policy (NEP) in line with this provides several well-reasoned and bold reformative steps, conveying a clear basis for disruptive change in the education ecosystem, ensuring the evolving needs of learners are met. The NEP 2020 proposed several reforms through policies and the salient aspects include a student centric model, competency based continuous evaluation system, enhanced focus to research and innovation, improved STEM model of higher education curriculum, faculty productivity based on research output, autonomy at all levels, merit-based student enrolments, faculty selection and promotions, boost to online training, integrated controlling and monitoring systems,



increase gross enrolment ratio (GER) in sync with the United Nations SDGs – Quality Education that promotes access and enhances overall academic quality [2]. With focus being on enhancing student experience and ensuring learners are supported by institutions across the higher education landscape in India. To fulfill this, there are some challenges that need to be addressed including enhancing the quality of teaching and research faculty, strengthening the curriculum, and making it more flexible, promoting international mobility, and enhancing the number of research-focused higher-education institutions (HEIs) in the country. The higher education ecosystem remains at the fulcrum of building the intellectual and social fabric for any nation; they develop the knowledge, capability, and expertise required to drive and nurture the facets necessary for a growing economy [3]. The FICCI-EYP knowledge report ‘Higher Education in India: Vision 2047’ highlights five strategic pillars in making the higher education landscape both futuristic and inclusive – Building a student centric and equitable ecosystem; Enhancing research and innovation in HEIs; Developing faculty; Developing international mobility; and Investing in digital learning. Improving the GER, providing better access to the marginalized, technology adoption, and preparing graduates for future jobs through industry-led curricula and experiential learning are imperative to strengthen graduate outcomes [4].

### **Issues in Indian Higher Education**

With continuous change a glaring reality, Indian HEIs need to decide what the students would have to learn to be prepared for jobs of tomorrow, skills for which largely seem vague and all that societies can do is prepare for futuristic jobs, not knowing fully well whether the forthcoming changes will meet the educational and skills learnt. Students tend to be amazed that what they have learnt today may not meet the requirements for their lives and careers for the next five decades that they would have to sustain and grow within as a framework. Teaching through lectures will need to be supplemented with self-study, consulting with faculty and additional information sessions through seminars and workshops. At a macro level, higher education in India in general has been facing several issues including educated unemployment, financial crises, uneven growth, creativity versus conformity, divide of quantity versus quality in terms of student enrolments and student progression, equity versus excellence to name a few [1].

### **NEP and Its Impact on the Indian HEI Sector**

While there are several merits of higher education policies in NEP 2020, the salient ones are captured below in Table 1.0

**Table 1.0:** Merits of Higher Education Policies in NEP 2020

Increased student centricity
Competency-based credit system
Enhanced focus on research and innovation
Improved STEM model of HE curriculum (STEAM with experiential learning and research-based internships)
Increased autonomy at all levels
Control of quality through biennial accreditation process
Merit-based student and faculty selection and promotions
Boost to online training (Effective use of Information Communication and Computation Technologies (ICCT))

Improving the GER to include every citizen of the country as part of higher education remains a core responsibility of the government of India, in specific the department of education. NEP 2020 is moving towards accomplishing this goal through innovative policies to improve student and teaching quality, attractiveness, affordability, and increasing the supply through HEIs in the private sector and at the same time with strict controls to maintain rigorous quality benchmarks in line with accreditation and ranking norms. By encouraging merit-based admissions with wide array of scholarships, best-in-class faculty and researchers, value-based leaders in regulatory bodies, and strict monitoring of quality through biennial accreditation based on self-declaration of progress through technology-based monitoring, NEP-2020 is expected to fulfill its objectives by 2030 [5].



## Alliance University: An Overview

The salient features of the University are highlighted in Table 2.0 below.

**Table 2.0:** Salient Features – Alliance University

Karnataka's First Private University
Established in the Year 2010 and recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC)
Over 25 Years of Legacy in Higher Education
Flagship School – Alliance School of Business and MBA as the flagship program
300+ World-Class Faculty
30,000+ Alumni Spread Across the Globe
80+ International Partners Across Europe, Asia, and Americas
Consistently Ranked High – Both by National and International Ranking Agencies

The University reimagines the idea of an institution of learning and advancement by creating a community that leads the charge against the complex challenges of the 21st century. The university conceives research to be the essence of all teaching and learning practices. A unity between research and teaching is promoted to extend the frontiers of knowledge to solve real world problems at the local, national, and global scale. For this purpose, the university seeks to be the nerve center of interaction between industry, the government, civil society, and the community at large. A designed convergence of the business, engineering, law, and liberal arts units precipitates trans disciplinary as the core academic philosophy. Freely working across divergent streams of knowledge like psychology and data science, technology and law, physics and philosophy or businesses and rhetoric, trans disciplinary nurtures a dynamic foundation for the spirit of collaboration, inquiry, and enterprise [6].

Some of the salient awards, accolades, and rankings over the recent years is presented in Table 3.0 below.

**Table 3.0:** Awards, Accolades, and Rankings Over the Recent Years

Times B-School Rankings – 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranked 11<sup>th</sup> Among the Top 100 Business Schools in India</li> <li>Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> Among the Top 40 Private Universities in India</li> <li>Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> Among the Top 20 Business Schools in South India</li> <li>Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> Among the Top 50 Business Schools for Placements</li> </ul>
Digital Institutional Index Smart Campus Rankings by Global University Rankings, London – 2024	This ranking signifies the university's commitment to prioritizing digital transformation and implementing smart campus solutions.
National Sustainability Impact Institution's Ranking (NSIIR) by AIC-RAISE of the Atal Innovation Mission - 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranked No 1</li> </ul>
QS World University Rankings Asia – 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranked 751–800<sup>th</sup> in Overall Asia</li> <li>Ranked 238<sup>th</sup> in Southern Asia.</li> </ul>
NIRF Rankings – 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ranked 25<sup>th</sup> for Law</li> <li>Ranked 87<sup>th</sup> for Management</li> </ul>
QS I-Gauge Rating – 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secured an overall rating of DIAMOND</li> </ul>
The Economic Times Best Education Brands Award - 2022	The Economic Times – Best Education Brands highlight the significance that the education sector plays in building the leaders of tomorrow and making them ready for contributing to the nation.



### **Initiatives to Improve Student Engagement, Diversity, and Industry Readiness**

Alliance University has constantly worked towards strengthening stakeholder-based brand equity with special focus on the students, one of its primary stakeholders. Table 4.0 illustrates the various initiatives undertaken by the University to promote student engagement, diversity, and industry readiness.

**Table 4.0:** Initiatives undertaken by the University to Promote Student Engagement, Diversity, and Industry Readiness

Student Engagement	Diversity	Industry Readiness
Creation of several student clubs and societies to promote holistic development. Co-curricular clubs Extra-curricular clubs Sports clubs Community services clubs Hobby-based clubs	Students come from 10 different countries and across 27 states and 8 union territories of the country	Corporate Mentorship Program Over 200 corporate mentors have voluntarily worked with students to nurture, guide, and provide clarity in direction
Student Governing Council Students are also part of various academic and administrative committees	Education for All; Access to All – Alliance Vidya Spandana  Credo: Respect Others	Industry led Centers of Excellence
Emphasis on Experiential Learning – Internships including mandatory social internships and industry-based projects coupled with student led events such as Alliance ONE, AI and Society Confest, TEDx, Alliance Literary Festival and Asia Pacific Writers Translators – events that are either hosted by the University or remain flagship events curated by the institution through its student body, faculty, and staff	Students with learning disabilities and challenges are welcomed and provided assessments matching their prowess and needs.	Industry Integrated Degree Programs
Dedicated and exclusive Department as part of supporting students – Department of Student Support Services	Counselling and overall health and wellbeing are given great impetus. Necessary infrastructure is in place to cater to students with SEN. Collaboration with NGOs to integrate children with SEN into mainstream education and opportunities to pursue higher education, diplomas and vocational courses leading to gainful employments.	Coursera integration with curriculum with respect to enhancing communication effectiveness, etiquette, presentation skills, and other industry readiness modules including preparedness for aptitude tests.
Student led research – ASICON – A research-based conference organized by the students at the University; Student led magazines and blogs, Research-based internships across academic units.	Embracing students from different sexual orientations and promoting inclusivity and support through peer and faculty allies.	Learner Value Proposition Program; Placement Preparedness; Alumni Connect; and Center for Industry Interface – 4 unique pillars of campus to corporate transitioning.
Student exchange pathways through international collaborations – semester exchange, summer/winter schools, transfer programs, dual degree, etc.	Women only scholarships/research funding provided as part of encouraging more women in the field of STEM and other allied disciplines.	



## Conclusion

While the University is gearing up for a NAAC accreditation and has recently launched several new schools and centers of excellence including the one on Public Policy, Sustainability, and ESG Research, the focus remains on the strategic pillars of student centricity, trans disciplinarity, research and innovation, internationalization, and contemporary curricula delivered by top-notch intellectuals and subject matter experts across the globe, who see in the student community, the spark of igniting the change for a better tomorrow, as a means of further strengthening the University and its standing in the Indian HEI space. While the Indian HEI space is evolving, there are certainly areas that need greater attention and the University realizes this and works towards fulfilling one of its core principles 'People First; Strategy Next' with the aim of identifying the right set of resources, be it faculty, staff, administrators, or advisors, to augment the student learning and discovery as a key output to the society at large, as a service in building the nation into a remarkable land of people, resources, and capabilities that shall drive India towards becoming a developed economy with education as one of the principal drivers.

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