

Teaching-Research Tensions in Indian Higher Education: Rethinking Academic Roles through a Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract Faculty in Indian Universities face dual expectations to excel in both teaching and research, yet institutional incentives increasingly prioritize research metrics over pedagogical effectiveness. This misalignment creates systemic tensions that compromise both domains.

Index Terms higher education reform, faculty roles, teaching-research balance, India, qualitative case study, academic policy, career differentiation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional academic model in universities worldwide assumes that faculty members should simultaneously advance knowledge through research and transmit it through teaching. This dual expectation resets on the premise that research informs teaching and teaching questions stimulate research, creating a virtuous cycle of knowledge creation and dissemination [1]. However, the practical implementations of this role ideal has become increasingly problematic, particularly in rapidly expanding higher education systems such as India's. In India, however, institutional incentives prioritize publication counts over classroom impact (Altbach, 2015). This imbalance undermines both pedagogical effectiveness and research innovation. The purpose of this study is to examine the systemic challenges of the dual-role expectation and propose reforms that align with the true goals of higher education. The tension between teaching and research responsibilities is not unique to India, but the specific manifestation reflect India's distinctive higher education landscape: rapid expansion of institutions, diverse institutional types (public, private, deemed universities), implementation of national promotion schemes such as the Career

Advancement Scheme (CAS), and pressures to improve international ranking[3]. These contextual factors create a complex environment in which faculty navigate conflicting priorities with limited institutional support.

Despite widespread recognition of these challenges, systematic empirical investigation of how faculty experience and response to teaching-research tension in Indian institutions remains limited. Furthermore, while various reforms proposals have been advanced, evidence based analysis of viable structural pathways remains underdeveloped. This study addresses these gaps through qualitative case study research that examines faculty experiences, institutional practices, and reform opportunities.

Research Questions:

1. How do faculty members in Indian higher education manage the expectations of both teaching and research?
2. What impact do current reward and incentive systems have on teaching quality and research work?
3. What changes or reforms can improve the way higher education institutions support teaching and research goals?

This paper contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from Indian institutional contexts, documenting the lived experiences of faculty navigation dual-role expectations, and proposing evidence-based reform pathways grounded in case study analysis.

II. PROCEDURE FOR PAPER SUBMISSION

A. Review Stage

1. Connection between Teaching and Research in Higher Education

The relationship between teaching and research in higher education has been extensively debated in the literature. The traditional assumption holds that research activity enhances teaching quality by keeping faculty current with disciplinary developments, modelling scholarly inquiry for students, and bringing cutting-edge knowledge into the classroom [4]. However, empirical evidence for this positive relationship is mixed at best [1]. The assumption that all the faculty can and should be equally proficient in teaching and research may itself be problematic, as these activities require distinct skill sets, temperaments, and time commitments.

2. Institutional Rewards and Faculty Work Behaviour

Institutional incentives structure powerfully shape faculty behaviour and practices. Muller (2014) documents how the “publish or perish” culture in academia creates pressure for rapid publication that can compromise research quality and innovations [5]. When promotion and tenure decisions rely heavily on publication counts, faculty rationally respond by prioritizing quality over depth, incremental studies over risky innovations, and publishable topics over socially relevant questions.

The impact of metric-driven evaluation extends beyond research to teaching. When teaching contributions receive minimal weight in promotion decisions, faculty have limited incentive to invest time in pedagogical innovation, curriculum development, or student mentorship [6]. Ramsden (2003) emphasizes that excellent teaching requires substantial preparation, reflection, and continuous improvement-investment that are difficult to sustain when institutional rewards flow primarily to research productivity [7].

3. Higher Education System in India

India's higher education system has undergone rapid expansion over the past two decades, with significant growth in both public and private institutions. This expansion has occurred alongside increasing emphasis

on research metrics, international rankings and global competitiveness [8]. However, the system faces persistent challenges including capacities. The Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) and subsequent Academic Performance Indicator (API) system introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) have formalized research expectations for promotion across Indian universities [3]. While intending to enhance accountability and research productivity, these schemes have been criticized for emphasizing quantitative metrics over qualitative contributions and for creating perverse incentives that prioritize publication counts over teaching excellence or societal impact [9].

4. Different Career Path Models for Faculty Members

The Higher education systems have experimented with differentiated career tracks that allow faculty to specialize in teaching or research without penalty. In the United States, teaching-focused positions (lecturer, teaching professor) and research-focused positions (research professor, research scientist) exist alongside traditional tenure-track roles that require both [10]. This gap highlights the need for empirical investigation of how such reforms might be designed and implemented in the Indian context. Submit your manuscript electronically for review. prepare it in two-column format, including figures and tables (until it doesn't fit properly and data is not visible).

B. Final Stage

After your paper has been accepted. The authors of the accepted manuscripts will be given a copyright form and the form should accompany your final submission.

C. Figures

As said, to insert images in Word, position the cursor at the insertion point and either use Insert | Picture | From File or copy the image to the Windows clipboard and then Edit | Paste Special | Picture (with —Float over text unchecked).

III. MATH

Methodology

This paper employs a policy-analysis approach, synthesizing existing literature on higher education practices, institutional incentive structures, and faculty

workload. Observations are drawn from documented trends in India's academic system, including promotion criteria, publication metrics, and classroom practices [2]. The study adopts an interpretivist epistemologies stance, recognizing that faculty experience and institutional practices are socially constructed and require interpretive understanding rather than purely objective measurement.

Case Selection Based on Context

The study examines faculty experiences across multiple institutional context within Indian higher education to capture variation in institutional types, and policy environments. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select cases that represent key dimensions of diversity in the Indian higher education landscape:

Institutional Types: Established public universities (founded pre-1990), new public universities (founded post-2000), private universities, Deemed universities.

Disciplinary Contexts: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields
Social science and humanities.

Geographical Distribution: Northern India (Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana), Southern India (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu), Western India (Maharashtra)

This multi-site case study design enables examination of common patterns across contexts while also identifying context-specific variations [11]

Case A: A large public university in Delhi with over 60 years of history, multiple affiliated colleges, and established research programs. This institution represents the traditional Indian university model with strong teaching emphasis but increasing research pressures.

Case B: A private university in northern India established in 2008, emphasizing both teaching quality and research output for accreditation and ranking purposes. This case represents the newer private sector facing dual pressures for revenue (teaching) and legitimacy (research).

Case C: A deemed university in southern India with professional programs in engineering and management, navigation tension between industry-oriented teaching and academic research expectations.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred for 5 months, by employing multiple methods to enable triangulation and comprehensive understanding.

Semi-Structure Interviews

The primary data source consisted of semi-structured interviews with 26 faculty members across the three institutional cases. Interview participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure representation across:

1. Career Stages (assistant professor, associate professor, professor)
2. Disciplinary fields
3. Gender
4. Teaching versus research orientation.
 - Interview protocols were developed based on literature review and pilot testing, covering:
 - Daily work patterns and time allocation
 - Experiences balancing teaching and research
 - Institutional expectations and evaluation criteria
 - Coping strategies and adaptations
 - Perceptions of current incentives structures

Interview lasted for 50-80 minute, were conducted in English or Hindi on participant preference, and were audio-recorded with consent.

IV. UNITS

Results:

The analysis identified in four major themes that characterize faculty experiences and institutional dynamics around teaching-research tensions:

1. Impact on teaching quality
 - Reduced preparation time.
 - Shift to Lecture-Heavy Formats
 - Reduced students interactions
 - Devaluation of Teaching Excellence.
2. Impact on research productivity quality

- Pressure for Incremental Publications
- Limited Time for Deep Engagement
- Distorted Research Priorities
- Compromise Research Ethics

3. Faculty coping strategies
 - Strategic Compliance
 - Specialization by Default
 - Overwork and Burnout
 - Collaborative Strategies
4. Institutional responses to teaching-research tensions varied across cases but generally remained limited.

Discussion:

1. Implication for Teaching Excellence
2. Implication for Research Innovation
3. Pathways for Structural Reform- differentiated career tracks.
4. Redefine Research Evaluations
5. Recognition and reward for Teaching.
6. Administrative Streamlining
7. Collaborative Teaching- Research Models

Implementation Challenges

By implementing these reforms faces significant challenges:

1. Regulatory Constraint – National policies such as UGC regulations and accreditation requirements may constrain institutional flexibility to implement differentiated tracks or alternative evaluation systems.
2. Cultural Resistance: Academic culture in India traditionally values the scholar-teacher ideal. Differentiated tracks may face resistance as creating a two-tier system or abandoning core academic values.
3. Resource Requirements: Reforms require investment in evaluation systems, administrative support, teaching development and research infrastructure- resources that may institutional lack.
4. Coordination Challenges: Higher education in India involves multiple stakeholders-UGC, state government, accreditation bodies, and institutions-requiring coordinated action for systemic reform.

Despite these challenges, the current system's unsustainability suggest that reform is necessary.

V.CONCLUSION

The interplay between teaching and research in Indian higher education remains pivotal to institutional excellence and national development. While faculty members face increasing pressure to balance pedagogical responsibilities with scholarly productivity, the challenge also presents an opportunity for systemic transformation. Effective integration of teaching and research demands structural support—through flexible workload policies, research incentives, and collaborative frameworks that link classroom innovation with inquiry-based learning. Institutions must cultivate a culture that values both dimensions equally, recognizing that quality teaching enriches research relevance and vice versa. Ultimately, sustainable progress in Indian academia depends on harmonizing these twin pillars to produce educators who are not only transmitters of knowledge but also creators of new understanding.

Ultimately, the goal is a higher education system that respects the distinct skills and contributions of teaching and research, provides faculty with sustainable career paths, delivers excellent education to students, and faculty with sustainable career paths. Achieving this goal requires moving beyond the one-size-fits-all model toward differentiated, collaborative structures that align institutional practices with higher education's fundamental purposes.

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