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Title: Comprehensive Internationalisation: Examining Inclusivity in the India-EU Strategic Partnership in Higher Education

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Comprehensive Internationalisation: Examining Inclusivity in the India-EU Strategic Partnership in Higher Education

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Abstract

In recent years, India and the European Union have maintained a growing strategic partnership in the internationalisation of higher education. A part of this relationship is facilitated through the people-to-people exchanges and student mobility. Although this has existed for many years, growth has been sluggish from both sides. To begin with, partnership agreements have usually overlooked the internationalisation of higher education as a potential compatibility element. This can be cultivated by developing global citizens. American models of higher education use the term ‘comprehensive internationalisation’, while European ones use ‘inclusive and sustainable internationalisation’ to recognise that there is much more to [Internationalisation of the Curriculum \(IoC\)](#) than placing focus solely on outbound mobility. This paper seeks to address the developing relationship between EU and India, and how their higher education framework functions. We examine this through novel avenues of internationalising higher education vis-à-vis capacity building. This includes looking inward by internationalising at home and decolonising the curricula to accommodate knowledge systems from the Global South. It further examines the steps taken in the further development of higher education by them, some of which are already at play: dual degree and twinning programmes to ensure that student mobility becomes more seamless, along with enhanced interaction in cooperation through a mutual recognition framework. However, the relationship will benefit from developing higher education in a way that creates an inclusive

knowledge economy and integrates both Eastern and Western EU nations. Efforts to establish higher education not solely as an academic goal, but as a pathway to creating a globalised diversity, needs to be made. The paper attempts to make the case for India's role to be pivotal in influencing the European knowledge economy to promote diversity in the flow of knowledge.

Keywords: internationalisation of higher education, knowledge transfer, inclusion, sustainability, India – EU partnership.

Summary of Key Issues

- India and the EU have cultivated a strategic partnership built on trade and economic relations. However, it has been slow to develop in the higher education spectrum.
- Indian student mobility to EU member states has increased dramatically in recent years, especially in France and Germany. Indian students form the [largest group of international students](#) enrolled at German universities.
- The Erasmus+ Programme recognises the opportunity that India, its biggest beneficiary, presents, in delivering a large group of students who are curious, willing to participate in cultural exchanges and develop a flow of knowledge.
- Universities in both Europe and India have dual degrees and twinning programmes, which hold immense potential. However, they remain fixated on STEM subjects and do not adequately represent projects in the social sciences and humanities.
- Global diversity in rankings is climbing up, demonstrating a real shift in the balance of power in the global knowledge economy. More holistic ranking indicators can make rankings more representative of what developing countries have to offer.
- France is the only European Union member that observes a mutual qualification framework with India. Fine-tuning the EU's migration policy as a whole to include mutual recognition will create a growing cohort of Indians who are skilled professionals and understand European culture.
- The focus of the EU on creating a knowledge economy can change the stereotype of looking at employability as the sole academic goal. EU's knowledge economy must not be driven solely by employability but through meaningful knowledge transfer.

Introduction

India and the European Union have cultivated a flourishing relationship in the realm of cooperation in higher education. There is a certain political compatibility that many European Union member states share with India; be it democracy, or rule of law, among others, [making them strong allies](#) in an increasingly globalised world. The relationship commenced with diplomatic ties, largely trade-related, then acquiring a more political and economic dimension in 2004, when the Fifth India–EU Summit meeting at The Hague decided to upgrade their relationship to a [“strategic partnership”](#).

Today, the EU-India partnership has developed into a shared vision to mitigate climate change and a global transition to a multipolar world. However, despite the multi-faceted nature of their partnership, there has been little exploration in fostering educational initiatives between the countries.

The research in this study will examine potential opportunities in internationalising higher education between both parties through general indicators for what constitutes a holistic higher educational framework. It tries to bring socio-economic, political, historical, and financial layers to higher education, the interpretation of which can differ between a third-world country and a first-world European nation. Additionally, it will aim to highlight equity, diversity, and inclusion as unique features that can change the face of a sustainable internationalisation of higher education.

The paper will dominantly refer to secondary data and will be doctrinal in its research. Qualitative analysis has been conducted to understand the higher education landscape vis-à-vis EU – India relations. Due to the paucity of academic literature on this subject, analysis has been conducted using research papers from a variety of reputed journals such as the Oxford University Press, Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, and Sage Journals, to name a few. However, we have heavily relied on alternative sources such as the European Commission and European Union publications, Eurostat reports for data points, the website and reports of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and a variety of news media ranging from The Indian Express, Reuters, University World News, Times Higher Education, India Today, The Economic Times, to name a few.

The gaps in this study emerge from the considerable dearth of literature on the internationalisation of higher education. The educational ties that the EU and India share are still growing, emerging from a strategic partnership based on trade and investment. This

could be one of the reasons for this huge gap in available literature. Coupled with the increasing number of Indians moving to Europe for higher education, the emphasis on the need for such a study to be conducted can be carved out. Through our paper, we examine the various factors that affect the internationalisation of higher education and how both the EU and India can cooperate in creating this flow of knowledge, acting as harbingers of change in the field.

Setting the Tone – Existing Landscape for Internationalising Higher Education in EU and India

EU and India have proactively encouraged cooperation on a plethora of issues surrounding specialised education and research. [Bilateral agreements](#) have been signed on subjects around education and training, science and technology, research and innovation, among others.

India's [National Education Policy \(NEP\)](#) is a cohesive document that draws out the internationalisation of higher education as a key objective in the sector's progress. India is working towards achieving 'Internationalisation at Home' (IaH), through the promotion of global perspectives in Indian universities. It is also developing courses and programmes in subjects unique to India, such as Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH systems of medicine, yoga, arts, music, history, and modern India, and internationally relevant subjects in streams of science and social sciences.

The NEP envisions a network of research/teaching collaborations and faculty-student exchanges in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Indian universities are encouraged to set up campuses in other countries based on their positive performance, and the same would be applicable for other nations to set up campuses in India, which would be referred to as [Foreign HEIs \(FHEIs\)](#). Under this, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India has issued a regulation, offering twinning, joint, and dual degree programmes through collaboration between Indian and foreign universities. The [UGC Guidelines on Internationalisation of Higher Education](#) elaborate on these aspects.

Looking at the EU landscape, there is a range of disciplines that would benefit from a partnership with India. EU's strategy of connecting European nations to Asia stems from its goal of [security policy engagement](#). EU's landmark [Global Gateway strategy](#) promises to build a relationship with nations through investment in infrastructure, green energy, education and research for sustainable development. It comes at a time when EU leaders are

increasingly becoming aware of the changing geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region as well. The EU has considered [Japan, India, and the ASEAN](#) nations as key partners in achieving this connectivity with the Indo-Pacific.

It is crucial to establish that both the EU and India are quite interlinked in the internationalisation of the higher education domain. As of 2022, [more than 1.3 million Indian students are studying in over 79 countries worldwide](#). Among these countries are [Germany and France](#), where universities receive a record number of applications from India. The most recent example of this is the [174 Indian students](#) who have been awarded the Erasmus Mundus scholarships for the degree programmes in 2023-24. This is the highest number of applicants selected from India so far and represents the growing interest among students to pursue higher education in the EU. Furthermore, emphasis on [comprehensive internationalisation](#) in higher education frameworks for both EU and India is a contemporary concept that holds relevance today.

However, despite this available data, the focus on the education sphere has been shorthanded. Especially in India, contrary to the EU, internationalisation is still largely attributed to adapting to foreign markets, and less focus is placed on upgrading Indian higher education to compete with global standards. Outbound student mobility receives much more attention than [internationalisation for all students](#) domestically. Similarly, several potential programmes and outlooks can benefit from an analysis through an EU-India lens.

Opportunities and Initiatives to Boost the Internationalisation of Higher Education

In 2005, the EU and India signed a Joint Action Plan (JAP) in New Delhi. This Plan was committed to [deepening political dialogue and cooperation](#) while bringing together people and cultures. The Ninth Summit of the JAP recognised [education as a new area of interest](#) between both nations and creating people-to-people connections through higher education.

More recently, at the EU–India leaders’ meeting in 2021, the bilateral statement recognised the need for close and comprehensive cooperation on the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility, along with [positive cooperation on the Erasmus+ programme](#). These agreements have been an effective starting point for ties resting on internationalising higher education.

The Erasmus+ Programme is the quintessential EU-India educational cooperation tool. The programme has the Jean Monnet Actions, which offer training and opportunities in higher

education and research. These activities have percolated to various Indian universities in their attempt to disseminate European culture and society through various subjects such as cinema, languages, and philosophy, among others. In India, universities have also utilised this platform to discuss the [philosophies of life in Europe and India](#).

The Erasmus+ programme has demonstrated [improved employability](#) through soft and hard skills, including command over languages, work experience, and so on. Participants have become tolerant of polarised views and cultures, and curious about new challenges. Erasmus must recognise the opportunity that India presents: delivering a large group of students who are curious, willing to participate in cultural exchanges, and develop a flow of knowledge and know-how.

Efforts to bring about similar connectivity and inclusion have been facilitated through the concept of dual degrees. Dual vocational education and training (VET) have been a part of the [European repertoire of policy recommendations](#) on an issue that has plagued European nations for a long time: skill mismatches and youth unemployment to improve global industrial competitiveness and social cohesion.

In this respect, SciencesPo's Urban School announced its first dual degree with the School of Habitat Studies at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) to create a [dual Master's degree in urban development](#). The notable factor in this dual degree is the combination of two culturally diverse perspectives on urban development which will occur by completion of part of the course in Paris and the other in Mumbai.

While dual degrees hold immense potential, their strength is still limited in many universities. More enrolments for these degrees will ensure greater people-to-people connections and can often facilitate [cutting-edge research on contemporary issues](#).

In addition to dual degrees, universities also provide twinning programmes, a collaborative arrangement between universities to allow students to complete a course partly in one university and the rest in the other. The [fundamental difference](#) between a dual degree and a twinning programme is that the former offers two separate degrees from both participating universities, and the latter, owing to its collaborative nature, offers a single degree. Indian students in twinning programmes receive an Indian degree on the completion of the course. Twinning programmes are a great way for Indian students to benefit from an additional foreign education, allowing them to have a more culturally diverse experience. Since the cost of foreign education can often be on the higher side, this arrangement allows students to

pursue their education in their home country at a significantly lower cost, along with access to [high-quality academic resources](#).

The UGC notified the [University Grants Commission \(Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institutions to offer Twinning, Joint Degree and Dual Degree Programmes\) Regulations, 2022](#) on May 2nd of the same year. This regulation allows and encourages all universities to engage in academic collaborations with FHEIs. Universities no longer require UGC's prior approval for rolling out such a programme, significantly reducing the administrative hurdles in internationalising higher education.

While these programs are gaining ground in India and the EU, they are still quite inaccessible. A [minimum period of study abroad](#) is required for the new twinning and dual degree programmes. While this facilitates internationalisation in one way, it excludes programmes spent entirely in India, making it difficult for those students who cannot afford to go abroad. The UGC Guidelines also require that partnerships with Indian universities must only be with those that are among the world's Top 1000. Arguably, this precludes smaller and more specialised institutions that might not feature in the top rankings but might be world-leading in specific disciplines.

Moreover, these programmes remain fixated on STEM subjects. There is little emphasis on creating such programmes for disciplines such as the arts, social sciences, and humanities. A [study](#) conducted by the University of Oxford tried to understand the motivations behind mobility decisions made by Indian students studying abroad. This study included a huge chunk of researchers in the social sciences and humanities streams.

They found that there is generally a certainty of [financial longevity in STEM courses](#) over other social science courses. Additionally, due to lower budgets for arts and humanities courses in India, these courses are often bestowed less importance than STEM. The widespread impartiality in disseminating knowledge in the social sciences and humanities comes from this financial bias. It [favours researchers with more resources](#), typically belonging to wealthier nations and prestigious institutions. The ensuing imbalance creates a vicious cycle of voices in these fields often being sidelined despite their rich reservoir of local insights and perspectives. With increasing efforts to make the social sciences and humanities feasible career options, both the EU and India can focus on building sustainable higher educational programmes in these streams. Europe is home to several bodies of the UN, along with myriad universities that focus on research in the social sciences and humanities.

This makes EU the perfect partner for India, where a burgeoning class of social science aspirants are looking for diverse university experiences.

Systemic bias is again further reflected and often perpetuated by world university rankings. Global rankings have mainly rested on achieving two goals: one, as a consumer guide for prospective students, and two, as indicators of the quality and productivity of a nation's universities. While this system incentivises universities to improve facilities and systems, it has induced practices of defining a good university through a set of [vague indicators and myopic aspirations](#).

However, global diversity in rankings is climbing up, demonstrating a real shift in the power balance in the global knowledge economy, which, until now, [leaned dominantly towards Western nations](#). Notably, there is a brain drain from the Global South to the Global North universities, which can tilt in favour of the latter. But more holistic ranking indicators can help diminish that. With increased people-to-people connections between EU and India with student mobility, rankings must be more representative of what developing countries have to offer.

Even within Europe, there is a divide that separates the educational standards of Western and Eastern Europe. There is, primarily, the issue of the [language barrier](#), and secondarily that of the historical context which separates the teaching processes in both parts of Europe. This is of particular interest here because Indians see Eastern European nations as cost-effective, convenient modes of higher education. In Poland, about a quarter of the total students with Asian citizenship are Indians. This is true for other nations in the region too. Medical students especially prefer completing their graduation in Eastern Europe due to the cost, which is [often lesser than](#) those of private medical colleges in India. Additionally, many universities follow the European Credit Transfer System, which makes it convenient for them to change institutions in Europe in the course of their higher education.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool under the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for the recognition of qualifications. The EHEA stems from the Bologna Declaration, to be recognised as a ['Europe of Knowledge'](#), making student mobility accessible and seamless. The Declaration of 1999 attempts to promote mobility by [overcoming obstacles to free movement](#) by students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff in Europe. Under this, the ECTS allows credits taken at one higher education institution

to be considered in [pursuing a qualification in another](#). This kind of flexibility makes a European education conducive for its beneficiaries.

In this regard, [India and France share](#) a mutual qualification framework, wherein they recognise diplomas and professional qualifications to encourage skilled mobility between the two nations. This step is vital in promoting a variety of cultural exchanges, in line with India and the EU's strategic partnership. Both nations have also encouraged the development of educational partnerships to strengthen cooperation in VET. As per the agreement, the following educational qualifications in India are recognised by the French government:

| Indian degree recognised by the Government of India | French equivalent |
|--|--|
| All-India Senior School Certificate Examination (AISSCE), which includes the CBSE (Central Board for Secondary Education), state boards, pre-university (PU) or any equivalent recognised by the Government of India | Baccalauréat |
| Bachelor's degree | License |
| Master's degree | Master's and Master's level qualifications |
| PhD | Doctorat |

*This [does not apply](#) to professional degrees such as law, medicine, and any such discipline regulated by a professional council.

Presently, France is the sole nation that has such a framework with India. Countries such as Germany, where the [highest number of international students](#) are Indians (42,578 as of 2023), have been in talks with India about establishing one, but this has not been approved yet. Fine-tuning the EU's migration policy must include an alignment of qualifications, including language training and mutual recognition mechanisms so that a growing Indian diaspora can be trained for [highly-skilled and skilled professions](#). This will benefit those Indian students seeking to explore employability in the European market.

While these points are fair, it is concerning that employability is seen as a prudent indicator and motivation for student mobility between EU and India. Comprehensive internationalisation of higher education does not serve the purpose of generating [outgoing 'employable' candidates](#). It is looking to develop culturally informed candidates who are seeking knowledge. The idea of job-ready graduates perpetuates this narrow lens of looking at attaining an education. Recently, there was discussion around [microcredentials](#), which are short programmes and non-traditional certifications for anybody looking to upskill for a job. These courses are built with a view of equipping participants with a particular skill. While

this is one aspect of why students aspire to gain an education, it is only part of the many reasons why educational institutions must provide it. This is inevitably reflected in funding and the quality of student learning in certain courses like the humanities and social sciences.

The European Union has aspired to develop into a knowledge economy, focusing on education and learning and the transfer of knowledge. The [Bologna Process](#) is an intergovernmental higher education reform process that mainly focuses on the recognition of European higher education systems and the improvement of the conditions for exchange and collaboration within Europe. This makes the EU a leader in changing the stereotype of looking at employability as the sole academic goal. It has the potential to change the way the world, and India, view education, and in that process, uplift its quality as well as reach.

Even as we turn to scrutinise India's take on internationalisation, we must look inward. IaH is now a part of the NEP, but there is a lot more to do in this regard. [Comprehensive internationalisation](#) recognises that there is much more to the Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) than placing focus solely on outbound mobility. We have previously discussed the emphasis on a Western philosophy of education dominating the world of education through rankings and linguistic and economic advantages. But we must understand that internationalising or globalising higher education can often, both intentionally and unintentionally, be unequal in who provides this knowledge. Oftentimes, overlooking knowledge systems from the Global South has not only economic consequences but [intellectual and social ones too](#). For an equitable internationalisation of higher education, it must be decolonised and space must be created for indigenous knowledge and the unique solutions required to deal with the same problems in a third-world nation. In India, the lingering effects of British colonialism have manifested in creating barriers to education for people belonging to specific religious communities and castes. Hence, decolonising conversations [through European colonialism](#) as a baseline is essential. Understanding transnational similarities and differences may bridge the gap in literature and diversity in academia and higher education.

An inclusive framework for internationalising higher education must include institutional aspirations, where universities have missions, ethos and practices that distinctly support their curriculum. They must be influenced by local contexts so that students can grasp the pulse of the community they are surrounded by. This includes [local legislation and policy](#). National and regional contexts affect economic perspectives and how policy is viewed through an

economic, political, and social-cultural lens. Coupled with this is having clarity on global narratives and education models; this is in line with the neo-liberal construction of globalisation that considers the multipolar world we live in, and the kind of world students want to create. The flow of knowledge is inclusive when students and researchers bring diverse national and local contexts to decision-making and academia.

The Way Forward

The EU and India have been slow to respond to their growing similarities and potential collaboration opportunities. However, with increasingly active initiatives from both sides to further their partnership, higher education will become more seamless in the coming years. India's NEP is its most effective and recent tool to redefine the internationalisation of higher education both at the global level and at home. The EU is a frontrunner in the changing face of higher education and can provide a platform for a neo-liberal construction of the same.

In addition to this, both nations have the biggest asset connecting them: people. This mobility is bound to have a positive impact on the way the EU and India interact with each other in an inclusive higher education arena. The Erasmus+ Programme has only grown in its inclusion of Indian students, and the UGC Guidelines of dual degree and twinning programmes have made it easier for foreign universities to partner with Indian counterparts. But more focus is required on creating systems for the social sciences and humanities, and to make internationalisation more accessible to those who cannot afford it. Along with this, there is a need to recognise newer avenues of growth in the field. Equity and inclusion must be reflected in the global rankings, provide a level playing field for opportunities in Western and Eastern European education institutions, and look beyond the overpowering outcome of graduate employability from higher education institutions. There is much to be done in developing how we perceive higher education, and both India and the EU can be the ideal combination of nations to achieve this. There is potential in taking ideologies both from the Global North and Global South into account when visualising the future of a sustainable higher education framework globally.

Sentences to be highlighted as quotes

1. There is assurance of financial longevity in STEM courses over other social science courses. Additionally, due to lower budgets for social sciences and humanities courses in the EU and India, these courses are often bestowed less importance than STEM. The lack of funding for social sciences and humanities impedes the development of research, innovation and higher education between India and the EU.
2. India and France share a mutual qualifications framework, wherein they recognise diplomas and professional qualifications to encourage skilled mobility between the two nations. This step is vital in promoting skilled migration, aligning with India and the EU's strategic partnership. In alignment with this best practice, other European nations must follow suit.
3. We must understand that internationalising higher education can often, both intentionally and unintentionally, be unequal in who owns the knowledge. Often, overlooking knowledge systems from the Global South has not only economic consequences but intellectual and social ones, too. This has sparked a discourse around equity, equality, diversity and inclusion and decolonising the curricula in higher education.