Does higher ranking ensure higher student satisfaction: evidence from higher education institutions in India

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Abstract

Purpose – Prospective students and other stakeholders in the education system use global and national rankings as a measure of the quality of education offered by different higher educational institutions. The ranking of an Institution is seen as a measure of reputation and has a significant role in attracting students. But are students happy in the top-ranked institutions? Does a high rank translate into high student satisfaction? This study answers this question taking data from top educational institutions in India.

Design/methodology/approach – This study examines how the top-ranked higher education institutions in India fare on student satisfaction. Using the data on key performance indicators published by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) and student satisfaction scores of these institutions reported by NAAC, the study explores a possible relationship between the ranking of an institution and its student satisfaction score.

Findings – The study finds no significant relationship between the ranking of an institution and its student satisfaction score. The only institutional performance dimension which has a positive correlation with student satisfaction is graduate outcome. The diversity dimension is seen to be negatively correlated with student satisfaction.

Practical implications – The importance of modifying the ranking frameworks to account for the real drivers of student satisfaction is highlighted. The items in the student satisfaction survey should be regularly updated to reflect the actual concerns of the students. This is very important given the fact that the number of Indian students going abroad for higher education recorded a six-year high in 2022 at 750,365.

Originality/value – With more than 50,000 institutions catering to over 40 million students, India has the largest higher education system in the world. Given the high level of competition among these institutions, ranking and accreditation have become important parameters used by students for selection of an institution. But do top-ranked higher education institutions have the most satisfied student community? The assumption is disproved using the most credible secondary data. This study is the first of its kind in the Indian context. It has huge implications for the most respected ranking frameworks.

Keywords Student satisfaction, NIRF, Higher institution ranking, NAAC

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Higher Education sector across the globe is undergoing drastic changes over the last decade. Academic institutions face increasing competition to attract quality students due to the pressures of globalization (Díaz-Méndez and Gummesson, 2012). There are increasing levels of scrutiny by students, parents, and prospective employers regarding the value delivered by educational institutes.

Global and national rankings assist prospective students and other stakeholders in the education system in understanding the quality of education offered by different institutions across the globe. The rankings have been instrumental in helping higher education institutions improve their quality of education and strengthen their competitiveness in the market.
The concept of student satisfaction has attracted much attention in recent years and has become one of the major goals of all educational institutions. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) all across the world are increasingly striving to improve student satisfaction to attract and retain students. Student satisfaction is generally assumed to be a significant determinant of positive word-of-mouth, retention, and loyalty (Temizer and Turkyilmaz, 2012). Reputation management has become an important agenda for institutions as it decides how stakeholders form a perception of the institution and its programmes (Bush et al., 1998; Standifird, 2005).

The total enrollment in higher education in India stands at nearly 41.3m in 2020–21 spread across 1,113 Universities, 43,796 Colleges, and 11,296 standalone Institutions (AISHE final report 2020–21, available at https://aishe.gov.in/aishe). Many studies have shown that there is a significant level of dissatisfaction among students over the quality of education and curriculum offered by the Higher Education Institutions in India making higher education in the country less attractive (Kanwar and Sanjeeva, 2022; Kaur et al., 2022; Dutta et al., 2021; Kapasia et al., 2022). The increasing rate of migration of Indian students to developed countries is a testimony to that (Deshmukh and Sankpal, 2022; Mehra and Kaur, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education, Government of India, the number of Indian students going abroad for higher education recorded a six-year high in 2022 at 750,365. Hence the governments at the central level and state levels have taken up higher education reforms as a top priority. The vision of the National Education Policy (2020) by the Government of India is to make all HEIs become multidisciplinary catering to larger student enrollments preferably in the thousands by 2040 National Education Policy, available at https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf).

In 2015, The Ministry of Education, Government of India, launched and approved the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) to outline an approach to rank educational institutions in India. NIRF has the mandate for annual ranking of institutions of higher education in different categories and subject domains. Ever since its introduction, the NIRF ranking has become the most respected measure of the reputation of an academic institution in India.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 by the Government of India to assess and accredit Higher Education Institutions in India. A unique aspect of the accreditation process of NAAC is an independent student satisfaction survey conducted as part of its accreditation.

The study explores the possible link between the NIRF ranking of an institution and the satisfaction level of its students. Given the authenticity of the conducting agency and the comprehensive nature of its parameters, NIRF rank is used as a major selling proposition by higher education institutions to attract students. But are the students studying in the top-ranked institutions happy with what they receive in the institutions? This study looks at how the institutions ranked high by NIRF fare on the important aspects of student satisfaction. The researcher has taken the data of top institutions on key performance indicators published by NIRF. The student satisfaction scores of these institutions reported by NAAC are taken as a measure of student satisfaction. The study checks for possible correlation between the NIRF performance scores of the institution and its student satisfaction score. The study also explores the possible association of various dimensions of institutional performance with student satisfaction.

Previous research

Student satisfaction

Satisfaction has been defined as the perception of pleasurable fulfillment of a service (Oliver, 1997). The literature on higher education depicts students as service customers (Chung and McLarney, 2000; Díaz-Méndez and Gummesson, 2012). An adaptation of the
customer satisfaction concept in education is proposed by Elliot and Healy (2001) who indicate that student satisfaction results from the evaluation of their experience with the education service received. Students evaluate their experience concerning institutional factors such as instructor (Dana et al., 2001), quality of instruction (DeBourgh, 2003), interaction with classmates (Fredericksen et al., 2000), infrastructural facilities (Helgesen and Nesset, 2007), and career progression. Any negative experience students receive during their study could adversely affect student satisfaction (Annamdevula and Bellamkonda, 2016).

There are many studies proposing measures of student satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2022; Dutta et al., 2021; Kapasia et al., 2022; Clemes et al., 2008). Various SERQUAL models are popularly used in studies on student satisfaction. European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) has been adopted in many studies (Temizer and Turkyilmaz, 2012). Clemes et al. (2008) have studied service quality in HEIs using an enhanced SERVQUAL approach. Firdaus (2004) proposed a scale called HEdPERF which is used by many researchers (Arrivabene et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2016).

Reputation of the institution

The reputation of a firm is the overall perception of what it stands for and what customers may get when buying its products or using its services (Schuler, 2004; Weiss et al., 1999). Reputation management is also looked upon as an important factor in attracting students (Bush et al., 1998; Standifird, 2005).

The ranking of an Institution is seen as a measure of reputation and has a significant role in attracting students (Díaz-Méndez and Gummesson, 2012). University rankings feature highly among the debated issues in education (Fernandes et al., 2022). University rankings exert substantial influence on the long-term image development of the institution (Marginson, 2007). Reputation, which accounts for 50% of the weightage in QS rankings and 30% in Times Higher Education Rankings, plays a vital role in giving institutions a much-needed boost in the global ranking space (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009). Rankings have achieved an iconic status in some countries like Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Borishade et al., 2021). Universities are using rankings to brand themselves and to market them using their success in rankings (Fernandes et al., 2022). Graduate jobs are now linked to the performance of the institution in rankings (Söderqvist, 2002).

Linkage between reputation and student satisfaction

There are many studies highlighting the strong association between the reputation of the firm and the satisfaction of the stakeholders (Lim et al., 2000; Hildebrandt, 1998; Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). Similar studies are reported from the field of education as well (Thomas, 2011; Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Avram, 2016).

Brown and Mazzarol (2009) argue that brand image is a crucial factor for any university to increase student satisfaction and loyalty. According to Beerli et al. (2002), affective image is the component with the biggest impact on student satisfaction. University image is a strategic managerial issue that affects the HEI’s ability to recruit students and retain motivated students (Sung et al., 2008). The university’s image is important because it informs how students feel about the institution. This feeling is formed through tangible objects, such as infrastructure and published ranking (Alwi and Kitchen, 2014). Higher education institutions need to evaluate the quality of their programs and consider rankings and ratings generated by third parties to attract and retain potential students (Pinna et al., 2023; Avram, 2016).
National institutional ranking framework (NIRF)  
NIRF provides performance scores and rank of all HEIs under a common “Overall” rank in addition to a separate rank in categories such as Universities, Research Institutions and Degree Colleges. The scores and ranks are provided for the top 100 institutions in the main categories and for lesser numbers in other categories (https://www.nirfindia.org/About).

NIRF reports the total performance score as a weighted average of scores on five parameters namely Teaching, Learning and Resources, Research and Professional Practice, Graduation Outcomes, Outreach and Inclusivity and Peer Perception. Each parameter score is reported out of 100 and an overall rank based on the total performance score is also awarded (https://www.nirfindia.org/Parameter).

NAAC student satisfaction survey  
The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has the mandate to assess and accredit Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). NAAC has identified a set of seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures. They are Curricular Aspects, Teaching-learning and evaluation, Research, Innovations and extension, Infrastructure and Learning Resources, Student Support and progression, Governance, Leadership and management, and Institutional Values and Best Practices (http://naac.gov.in/index.php/en/).

A unique aspect of the accreditation process of NAAC is that it has endeavored to conduct a Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), the results of which will form part of the accreditation process (http://naac.gov.in/images/docs/apply_online/RAF-SSS-Guideline_29-1-2020.pdf).

Why NAAC student satisfaction data  
The method adopted by NAAC for generating average student satisfaction score of an institution is methodological and systematic. NAAC uses a stratified random sampling method to select students from the database supplied by the institution. The students, who are randomly picked by the system, will be sent an online link of this “Student survey” to the email address/mobile number of the student and the student will have to fill the survey before a stipulated date. Responses should be received from at least 10% of the student population or 100, whichever is lesser (http://naac.gov.in/images/docs/apply_online/RAF-SSS-Guideline_29-1-2020.pdf).

The NAAC SSS questionnaire has twenty-one questions out of which twenty questions are objective in nature, while one question is open-ended to elicit suggestions for improvements. The questionnaire is based on the Likert-type scale where the responses are to be given on a scale of 0–4, with the most positive response being rated as 4 and the most negative response being rated as 0. Questions vary from specific teaching skills of the teacher to the overall approach of the teacher and institution concerning providing the right environment. Analysis of the survey will be done using software that will aggregate and average the responses to the 20 questions and generate a Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) Score for the institution (http://naac.gov.in/docs/Apply%20now/SSS-Questinnaire_Students.pdf).

Methodology  
The focus of this study is to check for possible relationships among student satisfaction and various institutional performance parameters. The study used the scores provided by NIRF for measuring the performance of the institution and the Student Satisfaction Survey score provided by NAAC as a measure of the satisfaction of students in that institution.
Rationale
The NIRF score was considered the most suitable performance measure of an institution given the following facts.

1. It is conducted by an agency under the Ministry of Education, Government of India with a very high reputation and acceptability.
2. It is very comprehensive covering five major parameters of institutional performance.
3. NIRF deploys objective parameters and metrics with factual data gathered from applicant institutions as well as from third-party sources such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Derwent Innovation.
4. NIRF Team makes use of triangulation methods for detecting aberrations, contradictions, and inconsistencies and effecting corrections in consultation with the concerned institution.

The study has used the data given for the top 100 institutions in the DEGREE COLLEGES category as given in the NIRF India Ranking 2023 Report. Though NIRF data is available for higher education institutions (HEIs) under other categories such as Universities, Research Institutions, Engineering, and Management, it was decided to consider only degree colleges based on the following arguments.

1. Colleges represent the majority of the students enrolling for higher education in India. As per AISHE’s final report 2020–21, out of the 41.3 million students enrolled for higher education in India, about 78.09% of these students are enrolled in undergraduate-level courses and the remaining 11.5% are enrolled in postgraduate-level courses. The enrollment is highest in Arts (33.5%), followed by Science (15.5%) and Commerce (13.9%). At the postgraduate level, the maximum students are enrolled in the Social Science stream (20.56%) followed by science (14.83%). The majority of the students under these streams are enrolled in degree colleges (https://aishe.gov.in/aishe/BlankDCF/AISHE%20Final%20Report%202020-21.pdf).

2. Institutions under other categories are skewed in their focus and student enrollment. Universities focus more on postgraduate and Ph.D. level programmes, discipline specific categories like engineering and management cater only to selected groups of students. The colleges in India are very diverse and cater to a range of programmes both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Arts and Science. Hence they can be true representatives of the higher education institutions in India.

The NAAC Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) score was taken as the best measure of student satisfaction given the following facts (http://naac.gov.in/images/docs/apply_online/RAF-SSS-Guideline_29-1-2020.pdf).

1. The NAAC is a Government agency that is authorized to conduct the SSS and all HEIs have to abide by the rules of the NAAC.
2. NAAC uses a stratified random sampling method to select students from the database supplied by the institution. The identity of the participating students will remain anonymous throughout the process.
3. NAAC survey guarantees responses from at least 10% of the student population or 100 students, whichever is lesser, from every institution. Otherwise, the score will not be reported.
The NAAC SSS questionnaire is comprehensive and objective where data is collected on a Likert-type scale of 0–4. This makes it easy to analyze the data quantitatively.

Data collection
The scores of the top 100 colleges ranked college category were collected from the NIRF website (https://www.nirfindia.org/2023/CollegeRanking.html). The following data was taken for each college. Performance score reported (out of 100) for each parameter namely Teaching, Learning and Resources (TLR), Research and Professional Practice (RP), Graduation Outcomes (GO), Outreach and Inclusivity (OI), Peer Perception (PP), the total weighted score and the NIRF Rank awarded.

For each of these 100 colleges, valid NAAC SSS scores were checked at the official NAAC portal https://assessmentonline.naac.gov.in/public/index.php/hei_dashboard. 72 colleges out of these 100 had valid NAAC data available. For these 72 colleges, the reported SSS data was collected from the attached Grade sheet. The SSS score is reported as item 2.7 under Criterion 2: Teaching-learning and Evaluation. The Grade Point Average (GPA) score for the SSS was calculated by dividing the reported Key Indicator Wise Weighted Grade Points by Key Indicator Weightage. This calculation accounted for the differences in the indicator weightage for autonomous colleges and normal colleges resulting in a score standardized on a 0–4 scale.

The NIRF ranking is done every year as the NAAC assessment happens once in 5 years. Hence the NIRF 2023 data may not be directly comparable with the NAAC data which could have been collected any year during the last 5 years. Hence the data collection framework is to be made comparable. NIRF 2023 ranking is declared based on the data for the academic year 2021–22. Hence institutions that have NAAC accreditation done in 2021 and 2022 were considered. Hence 17 colleges were dropped from the analysis as their NAAC scores were outside the permitted period. This resulted in the final data set of 55 colleges on which further analysis was done. A flowchart on the selection process is shown in Figure 1.

Findings
Descriptive
The skewness and kurtosis values are in the acceptable range (within ± 1). The total NIRF scores varied from 52.49 to 74.81 and the SSS scores varied from 2.75 to 3.80 (Table 1).
**Relationship between the NIRF score and the student satisfaction score**

To check for the possible relationship between the total NIRF score and the NAAC SSS score, a correlation analysis was done. In this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the NIRF total score and the NAAC SSS score. Given the fact NIRF rank is also available as ordinal data and the sample size is not very high, the Spearman rank-order correlation was also calculated between NIRF rank and NAAC SSS score.

The correlation analysis showed the Pearson Correlation coefficient between the NIRF total score and SSS score is insignificant ($0.676 > 0.05$) at 5% level. The result is reiterated by the Spearman Correlation analysis ($0.817 > 0.05$) (Table 2). This means no significant relationship is seen between the ranking of an institution and its student satisfaction score.

**Relationship between student satisfaction and each of the NIRF parameters**

Table 3 depicts the correlation between the SSS score and NIRF parameters scores. The results show that only two parameters namely graduate outcome (GO) and outreach and inclusivity (OI) are significantly related to SSS scores. Linear regression also was done to explore the strength of the relationship between the SSS score and parameter scores of the NIRF scores with the SSS score as the dependent variable and each of the NIRF parameters as independent variables. The analysis again reiterated the finding that only GO and OI are significantly related to SSS scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total NIRF score</td>
<td>52.49</td>
<td>74.81</td>
<td>59.81</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>-0.629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLR parameter score</td>
<td>50.26</td>
<td>77.58</td>
<td>65.96</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>-0.340</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPC parameter score</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>84.54</td>
<td>38.73</td>
<td>21.72</td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>-0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO parameter score</td>
<td>54.44</td>
<td>92.87</td>
<td>74.51</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>-0.487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI parameter score</td>
<td>29.85</td>
<td>80.27</td>
<td>38.73</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>-0.346</td>
<td>0.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP parameter score</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>86.61</td>
<td>30.61</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAAC SSS score</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-0.273</td>
<td>-0.415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source(s):** The author’s own work

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Parameter Pearson correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total NIRF score</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Coefficient  -0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. Value (two-tailed) 0.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIRF rank</td>
<td>Spearman’s rho Correlation Coefficient  -0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. Value (two-tailed) 0.817</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source(s):** The author’s own work

**Table 2.** Correlation between total NIRF data and NAAC SSS score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Pearson correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching, learning and resources (TLR)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and professional practice (RP)</td>
<td>0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation outcomes (GO)</td>
<td>0.277*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach and inclusivity (OI)</td>
<td>0.275*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer perception (PP)</td>
<td>0.193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** * $p < 0.05$  
**Source(s):** The author’s own work

**Table 3.** Pearson correlation of NIRF parameters with student satisfaction
significant in the model with Standardized Beta Coefficients of 0.378 and −0.366 respectively. Other variables namely TLR, RPC, and PP are seen to be insignificant (Table 4).

Implications
The study clearly shows that the top-ranking institutions may not offer the best of student satisfaction. This is not so desirable result given the efforts made by the regulating agencies to make higher education student-centric.

Lack of relationship between student satisfaction and teaching, learning and resources (TLR) parameter
The TLR score out of 100 is awarded based on the following questions with marks in brackets (https://www.nirfindia.org/nirfpdfcdn/2023/framework/College.pdf).

1. Faculty Student Ratio (25)
2. Faculty with Ph.D (20)
3. Student Strength (20)
4. Financial Resources and Utilization (20)
5. Online Education (15)

A Faculty Student Ratio of 15 will give the institution full marks against the question. An institution with 95% of the faculty having a PhD will get full marks under the question. The Financial Resources and Utilization question looks at the quantum of money spent for augmenting resources and maintenance of the campus facilities. However, these measures need not translate to student satisfaction in colleges.

Students are more concerned about the quality of teaching and teaching support than absolute figures. The quantity of faculty may not be a substitute for the quality of faculty. Thomas (2011) showed that teaching quality and the role of the teaching staff are the major drivers of student satisfaction in India. Tompkins et al. (2016) have shown that it is the quality of faculty support that drives satisfaction more than anything else. The teacher’s performance in terms of the ability to guide, assist, and motivate the students is seen to be important in keeping students satisfied (Yengin et al., 2010; Mohammed et al., 2022). It is also an open secret that a Ph.D. degree does not necessarily translate to better academic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients (B)</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients(β)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching, learning and resources (TLR)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and professional practice (RP)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>−0.034</td>
<td>−0.253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation outcomes (GO)</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.378</td>
<td>2.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach and inclusivity (OI)</td>
<td>−0.008</td>
<td>−0.366</td>
<td>−2.761**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer perception (PP)</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>−0.181</td>
<td>−1.369**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>3.029</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.160**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durbin Watson</td>
<td>10.948</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Regression model for student satisfaction

Note(s): * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01
Source(s): The author’s own work
knowledge or teaching skills. Bell and Brooks (2019) find no link between student contentment and the percentage of faculty holding formal teaching qualifications.

Lack of relationship between student satisfaction and research and professional practice (RP) parameter
The 100 marks under Research and Professional Practice (RP) are awarded based on the following questions (https://www.nirfindia.org/nirfpdfcdn/2023/framework/College.pdf).

1. Publications (35)
2. Citations (35)
3. Patents (15)
4. Research Projects (15)

Research publications and research projects are very important for teachers and are to be greatly appreciated. Umbach and Porter (2002) argue that institutions with high research grants have higher student satisfaction.

But the question is whether the quest for academic research comes at the expense of student-centric work such as teaching, student mentoring, and student counseling. William and Zemsky (1994) proposed “academic ratchet theory,” which states that faculty increase their discretionary time by reducing institutional responsibilities. He has also argued that research university faculty prefer smaller teaching loads than liberal arts faculty. Lin et al. (2019) found students’ research experience does not significantly predict student satisfaction. Bell and Brooks (2019) have seen that students are happiest where the amount of top-rated research is lower.

The academic research undertaken by the teachers should result in improved quality of teaching in the classroom. The postgraduate students should also be encouraged to publish jointly with teachers. Similarly, students should also be involved in the research projects taken up by the teachers. This will help them feel more value-added and hence satisfied.

Positive relationship between student satisfaction and graduation outcomes (GO) parameters
The data shows a positive correlation between student satisfaction and Graduation Outcomes.

The GO marks are awarded based on the following questions (https://www.nirfindia.org/nirfpdfcdn/2023/framework/College.pdf).

1. Placement and Higher Studies (40)
2. Median Salary (25)
3. University Examinations (15)
4. Ph.D. Students (20)

The positive relationship between the GO and SSS is self-explanatory. This is probably the most important driver of student satisfaction. For students, the programme they undertake should provide quality GO to feel satisfied.

This finding may be a departure from the past where teaching-learning aspects were seen to be more important drivers of satisfaction than placement services (Petruzzellis et al., 2006). However many researchers in the past have shown that student satisfaction depends on placement chances (Anne et al., 1997; Letcher et al., 2010; Hampton, 1993).
Negative relationship between student satisfaction and outreach and inclusivity (OI) parameter

Student satisfaction is seen to be negatively related to Outreach and Inclusivity (OI). This comes as a surprise given the importance attached to student diversity in terms of gender, region, and culture.

The questions asked under this parameter are (https://www.nirfindia.org/nirfpdfcdn/2023/framework/College.pdf).

1. Region Diversity (30)
2. Women Diversity (30)
3. Economically and Socially Challenged Students (20)
4. Physically Challenged Students

This leads to the important question of diversity management. Many institutions with high diversity report factionalisms and fights among student groups based on region or religion. Students from the home state may experience an undue advantage given the language and social conditions. Women students may have different rules concerning social life. All these may lead to more dissatisfaction than satisfaction.

The link between the climate of diversity and student satisfaction is supported by Lin et al. (2019) where they stressed the importance of customizing the activities to meet minority students’ interests and paying attention to their feedback. Kaçire et al. (2015) found that in universities where diversity is welcomed and rewarded with supportive policies, students feel relaxed and satisfied. Chen et al.’ study (2014) found that a supportive campus climate is crucial for building student satisfaction.

Limitations and scope for further research

As NIRF publish ranking for only top 100 institutions under each category, the maximum sample size is limited. This study has a sample of 55 colleges given the inclusion criteria. There is a limitation with respect to the generalizability of the findings.

This paper is purely based on secondary data sources and could be supplemented by primary data collected from select institutions under this category. The time frame of data collection is not exactly the same. The NIRF data are for the year 2020–21 and the NAAC SSS data could be collected any time during 2020–22. Though no major change is expected to happen in two years across the scores reported, it could be a limitation with respect to the methodology adopted.

The study was limited to general colleges as they account for more than 60% of the graduates studying in India. The analysis framework can be extended to other institutions including universities, engineering colleges, and management institutes. Though the findings may not be directly comparable, they will help us to understand the student concerns specific to these sectors.

Conclusion

Higher education in India is at the threshold of a big change. The New Education Policy of the Government will have a huge impact on students giving them more flexibility and bargaining power. The alarming rate of outflow of students to developed countries is a matter of deep concern for Indian institutions. Under these circumstances, student satisfaction has become more important than ever.
This study shows the fallacy of assuming better student satisfaction in institutions ranked higher. No relationship was seen between the NIRF ranking of the institution and student satisfaction. The only parameter of the NIRF that has a positive correlation with student satisfaction is the graduate outcome. The diversity dimension is seen to be negatively correlated with student satisfaction.

The ranking framework is an objective assessment that looks at Teaching and Learning performance in terms of quantity - the number of teachers, students, and the qualification and experience of teachers. However, students seem to be more concerned about the quality of interaction between teachers and students. Also, the research publications and projects undertaken by teachers should result in creating a better classroom experience and learning for students. A conscious effort to improve the quality of graduate outcomes – job placements and higher studies options – should be set as a high priority by all HEIs. Policies for encouraging and respecting diversity and meeting the needs of minority groups should be created.

The ranking frameworks may have to be modified to account for the real drivers of student satisfaction. The need is felt for conducting a student satisfaction survey every year and integrating that with the Ranking framework. The items in the student satisfaction survey should be regularly updated to reflect the actual concerns of the students.

References


**Further reading**


**About the author**

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