



## The neglected role of Student-Faculty Interaction in Quality of Indian Higher Education

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### Abstract

*There are various ways to enhance the quality of education in universities as it is an essential vitamin in the diet of students' learning. The research paper focuses particularly on student- faculty interaction which is generally a neglected aspect. The authors adopted intensive secondary research to understand and analyze the role of student-faculty interaction in enhancing the quality of education. Besides, the authors also conducted primary research for economics students for analysis. The authors found that the research in this field is rarely taken up in India by academicians and thus, there are a lot of gaps to fill. There are no large-scale studies conducted to provide evidence regarding the impact of interaction on students and how it is affected by gender, social class, and ethnicity.*

**Keywords:** Student, faculty, quality of education, higher education.

### Introduction

In India, over 320 million<sup>1</sup> active learners have been affected by the closure of educational institutions across the country. When classroom learning is hampered, universities switch to online remote learning. Although the transition was quickly adopted by most universities and colleges, it still has a long way to go. There are a lot of obstacles such as accessibility, pedagogy and curriculum, infrastructure, and capabilities that can affect the transformation process. All such parameters play a crucial role in maintaining good quality education in universities and colleges.

Quality education is an essential vitamin in the diet of students' learning. If left bereft, ailments take place and deficiencies occur, deranging the whole system. Hence, there arises a need to inject supplements that fosters the growth of this vitamin for smooth functioning. There are various ways to do so, such as providing basic infrastructure, good lecture delivery, updated curriculums to list a few. However, in this article authors will be discussing the least mentioned supplement, i.e., Student-Faculty Interaction. It is that dynamic yet neglected aspect of higher education institutions that is responsible for the academic as well as social development of a student. Not only does it influence performance inside the class but has varied impacts on the overall development of both the students and the faculty.

### Literature Review

Student engagement increases when an institution caters to their needs and expectations which can only be conveyed by building up a communication chain with the faculty. Simply hiring qualified professionals, deciding a curriculum, and evaluating students on that basis is not a true measure of educational proficiency. Research shows that not only does healthy interaction acknowledges effective education but also a student's general way of thinking, aptitude, problem-solving skills, and interest in various life goals. The most promising research on this is done which is adapted from Durkheim's theory of suicide. It proves that there is a positive correlation between increased interaction and a student's liking towards academic and non-academic aspects of their college. A study by Austin (1998) stated that a word of mouth by a faculty member regarding a certain program spreads like a wildfire and positively correlates with a student's interest in that arena that in totality produces a ripple effect in other aspects of their institutional lives as well. Recently, the National Survey of student

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<sup>1</sup> Sharma, Kritika. In India, over 32 crore students hit by Covid-19 as schools and colleges are shut: UNESCO. Delhi, 16 April 2020. The Print.



engagement (NSSE)<sup>2</sup> report stated faculty-student interaction as one of the benchmarks of effective educational practice. It claimed to increase both cognitive and affective student development.

### A dynamic topic

Student-Faculty interaction is a dynamic topic for researchers and academicians. Multiple studies have confirmed its benefits as mentioned earlier but the engagement outcome is dependent on various factors. Outcomes may vary in the case of in-the-classroom and outside-the-classroom interface. The faculty who through his/her behavior signals the students to judge their psychosocial approachability in the classroom which in turn leads to the frequency and type of out-of-class interactions. Out-of-class interactions leads to better self-esteem, growth, persistence, and higher study plans among students (Cox et al, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Another variation in impact can be seen in the NSSE survey which shows that students with low self-esteem or first-generation students find it difficult to form a bond with their teachers on a personal level.

### Gender and Race Differences

Barring shyness and low self-esteem, other intertwined issues restrict effective communication and hence positive educational outcomes. Past studies do show that the mentor-mentee interface affects men and women differently and traces of sexist bias have been found. Women felt that their comments were not taken seriously in the class hence their attitude shifted towards more traditional ways like opting for more so-called women-based occupations like nursing and elementary school teachers while men had a better perspective towards gender roles due to better frequency of interaction<sup>4</sup>. In cases where women's comments were taken seriously and interactions were not prejudiced, they did show higher degree aspirations and higher esteem. While gender issues prevail, a study by the Centre for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE)<sup>5</sup>, the University of California suggests that ethnicity and race play a pivotal role too wherever interactions are concerned. It was found that African-Americans and Native Americans received fewer benefits than other race groups despite being in frequent contact with the faculty while Latino students tend to react more towards their professor's expectations compared to other race groups. This study concluded that interactions between faculty and different race students lead to sporadic results on the educational outcomes, signifying conditional yet not practical implications hence deeming the study as vague and not contextually pellucid.

### Case of India

In India there are not many researchers and academicians who have worked on the concerned topic, however, there are some studies that pour light over the existing issues that impact the classroom environment and overall development of the students. The Information and Technology department of Inderprastha Engineering College in Uttar Pradesh came out with a viable solution to bridge the gap between students and professors<sup>6</sup>. An online website called 'MARGDARSHAN' was created wherein students can put up their queries and faculty can attend to them besides providing assignments and notes. The intent was to nullify the problem of awkwardness or low esteem when approaching a professor inside the classroom for formal or informal interaction. Another case study comes from the premises of IIT Delhi that organized a Student-Teacher Interaction Council (STIC)<sup>7</sup> in 2015 that proposed informal interaction between students and teachers over dinners at various hostels hosted by the students who are generally divided into groups based on either their department or the year of

<sup>2</sup> Office of Institutional Research and Analytics. "Results of the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)." 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, B.E., McIntosh, K.L., Terenzini, P.T. et al. Pedagogical Signals of Faculty Approachability: Factors Shaping Faculty-Student Interaction Outside the Classroom. Res High Educ 51, 767-788 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9178-z>

<sup>4</sup> Endo, Jean J. and Richard L. Harpel. "The effect of student-faculty interaction on students' educational outcomes." Research in Higher Education (1982): 115-138.

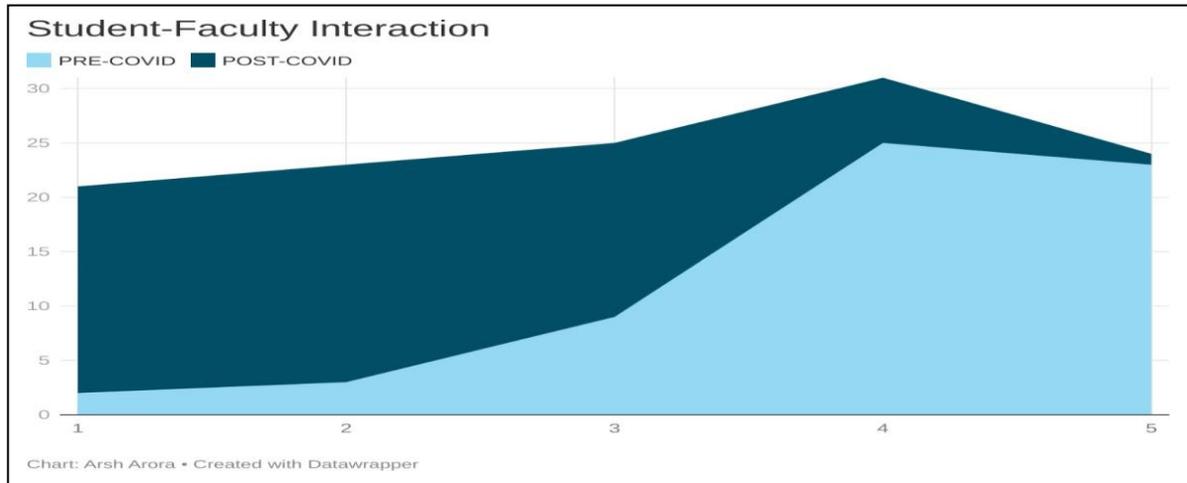
<sup>5</sup> Kim, Young K. and Linda J. Sax. "Different Patterns of Student-Faculty Interaction in Research Universities: An Analysis by Student Gender, Race, SES, and First-Generation Status." CSHE (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Jain, Rakshit, et al. "A Way to Bridge the Gap between Student-Faculty Interaction." International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (2020): 4153-4155.

<sup>7</sup> Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Student Teacher Interaction Council (STIC). 2015. <https://bsw.iitd.ac.in/stic.php>

study. These initiatives aimed to build a rapport among both the stakeholders to foster better learning outcomes amongst students.

A study conducted by the authors among economic students of public universities in Delhi found that there are two contrasting and obvious trends witnessed in student-faculty interaction between pre-covid times and post-covid time frame.



Source: by Author, Figure-1: Student-Faculty Interaction

One can analyze from the graph that the likeliness of interaction on the scale of one to five one being least and 5 being most has fallen due to online education. The authors also found a statistically significant difference in average student-faculty interaction by conducting Paired Samples T-test.

The authors conducted a simple statistical test which single variable regression between two variables viz; likeliness of student-faculty interaction and the likelihood of student bunking the class. The result was that there is a negative relation between the two variables such that if student-faculty interaction increases the likelihood of student bunking the class will reduce by .255 units. One of the unique findings suggests that there is negative relation between increasing student-faculty interaction and grades secured by students. The correlation coefficient between two variables was -0.032 which depicts negative relation but the strength of correlation is weak to make substantive claims.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.193	.519		6.157	.000
	SFI_PRE On the scale of 1 to 10, rate your interaction with professors during physical education started (pre-covid times)?	-.255	.125	-.245	-2.042	.045

a. Dependent Variable: BUNK\_PRE How likely you used to bunk classes (intentionally) during physical education

Source: By Author, Figure-2



### Conclusion and Way Forward

Critically analyzing the literature review, the authors can comment that the educational value of faculty-student interaction outside the classroom is among the oldest and most widespread beliefs in American higher education. Various universities see “faculty-student engagement” as one of the benchmarks of effective educational practice. It is a two-way process where faculty must realize their value as a role model and stride towards the right direction with their actions; and students must try to be vocal about their needs and take ample opportunities to work upon their bond with the faculty, which overall indicates better learning and personal growth.

In the context of Indian higher education, there are a lot of gaps to plaster such as there are no large-scale studies conducted to provide evidence regarding the impact of interactions on students and how it is affected by gender, social class, and ethnicity. Indian universities experience many issues on daily basis such as abled female students dropping out of colleges due to a ‘hostile or ‘inhospitable’ environment, students belonging to a backward class or first-generation college-going students’ being harassed by the authorities, some communities such as from north-east India facing biased treatment. It is not known yet how stakeholders; professors and students perceive student-faculty interaction as an effective tool for enhancing academic experiences, learning levels, and personal development. Therefore, the authors are in the view that this question can be an initiation point for research in Indian universities.

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