

Original Article



Unmet Data Needs: Barriers to Policy Making and National Growth

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Abstract:

India's vast higher education ecosystem, plays a critical role in shaping the nation's future through research and innovation. For its further betterment efficient and effective policies are required. However, a key barrier to effective policymaking is the limited accessibility of institutional data. Despite the growing need for evidence-based policies to drive national growth in science and technology, researchers often face resistance from academic institutions due to a lack of trust and transparency. This disconnect impedes data-driven decision-making and hinders collaboration between academia and policymakers. The paper advocates for formal government intervention to authorize data-sharing through official communication and structured frameworks. Addressing these challenges is essential to empower policy researchers, promote innovation, and ensure India's progression toward becoming a global leader in science, technology, and Innovation.

Key words: Data availability, Policy making and government role

Introduction

India's higher education system has a great deal of capacity and consists of more than 1,100 institutions, including universities, INIs, national research laboratories, and other institutions located throughout different ministries of the country. These institutions/universities are important as they are involved in the determinate of the future of India through research and development of technologies. However, a main bottleneck is the problem of inadequate availability of good data that is good, timely, relevant and comprehensive enough to support the needs of policymakers and researchers to come up with good solutions that would adequately guide policy making¹⁻³.

Need for Data in Policy Making

India is planning for the future to become an innovative country by 2047. Various strategies have been practiced and the government has been

attempting to formulate new policies to realize this vision. Still, for these policies to be effective, they have to relate to actual concrete data, which in turn means actual concrete analysis of particular key indicators by policymakers and researchers alike. Such an orientation is crucial to ensure policies meet India's circumstances and problems: this evidence-based approach cannot be overemphasized. However, as it has been found, such data can be rather challenging to obtain.

Data Accessibility Challenge

- One of the major issues is that the participating institutions of higher education in India do not furnish the data desired by policy research fellows/makers due to lack of trust and taking survey studies with very casual approach leading to no replies even after the follow-ups, the answers are either scarce or non-existent.

- University and other academic institutes' websites have a lack of disclosure and lack sufficient data. This lack of openness also poses a challenge to the policymakers/researchers on collection of data for their study/survey from the websites. This results in the failure to collect data that could have served as the basis for empirical evidence.
- Apart from the above reasons most of the research institutes and universities reply that they do not have time to fill the survey form or questionnaire.

Reason of Disconnect

- This gap might be due to the lack of trust that the higher educational institutes have for policy researchers. They do not find them on a position to whom they are answerable even when you are working with one of the India's top institutes.
- They do have a common notion that do we get in return after filling the survey form/questionnaire? As answer is acknowledgement, they there and then only discard the thought of filling it.
- They are unable to see the bigger picture that with each institutions input, policy makers will get more and more clear idea of the current situation of the topic undertaken for study (for policy making) and with maximum responses policymakers/researchers can design the best policy which will work not only for well known institutes/universities of India but also for the ones who are trying climb the ladder for betterment in academia.

This lack of coordinated information transfer between academia and policymakers, makes it unfeasible for the development of a solid and cohesive policy framework.

Government Intervention: A Path Forward

A possible solution which may solve this problem might be that the particular ministry/department under which the policy researchers work may write a formal letter regarding the survey/study being carried out with emphasis on the information sharing with the specific policy fellow/researcher.

- It will attest to the fact that a given study or research project is undertaken under the

endorsement of particular ministry/department.

- It shall also assist in removing apprehensions regarding data misuse.
- It shall increase the credibility between the institution/university and the policy researchers.

Except for INI's and NRL's the websites of most of the universities are obsolete, not user friendly. They should make well informative, easy to use and ensuring visitors can easily find the information they need and interact with the site effectively.

Summary

India has to emerge as a leading country in the field of education, research and innovation. In that case, the policymakers and the researchers must get the right and relevant data from the academic sector. But today's procedures for sharing data are still far from optimal. The lack of data sharing among academic institutions poses a major blow to realistic policy-making processes. These challenges, therefore, need to be addressed by government intervention. By addressing these issues and effectively designing policies that promote innovation, strengthen the research work in academia, will ultimately help the country achieve its goal of becoming a global leader.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement: We thank Department of Science and Technology under Ministry of Science and Technology, New Delhi, Government of India for their support.

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