



## ARE SCHOLARSHIP SHORTCOMINGS IN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA CONFINING HEALTHCARE ONLY TO THE WELL-HEELED-A QUESTION OF QUALITY IN THE MEDICAL PEDAGOGY IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** This study attempts at gaining insight into the importance of scholarships in a country such as India and students' perception of such scholarships. It aims at analyzing the pedagogical differences between government and private universities in India.

**Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted at various universities in Tamil Nadu, including undergraduate and postgraduate students. Their perceptions about the need for scholarships and the pedagogical variations between government and private institutions dealing with allied health sciences and medicine were collected.

**Results:** The survey generated a total of 160 responses. The analysis was made using a chi-square test. As disappointing as it may seem, it is not surprising that 65% of the respondents were unaware of government-sponsored scholarships. Although it was found that 22% of the respondents had availed of alternate sources such as student loans to fund their tuition fee, it is unfortunate that the option of scholarships did not dawn on them as an attainable benefit.

**Conclusion:** Thus, it is safe to say that the overall quality of higher education and pedagogical methods in India can be ameliorated to a great extent in several aspects and that private universities offer better education overall. It was also found that many students were unaware of scholarships and, if offered, were accepting of the concept of scholarships to pursue their higher education.

**Keywords:** Scholarships, healthcare, government, private institutions, pedagogy, higher education, India.

### INTRODUCTION:

The lack of health awareness in India is a deep-rooted issue connected with its limited exposure, especially in the lower socioeconomic strata. The solution to any problem must be addressed from the grass-root level, which in this case, is introducing a paradigm shift in the educational environment. This makes it essential that students from all backgrounds are enabled to study this niche. For example, the dentist-to-patient ratio in rural areas is at an unfortunate figure of 1: 2,50,000.[1] A diverse pool of healthcare professionals is required to broaden the awareness of the nation's general health. The core of this analysis is to identify the variance between government and private institutes and financial constraints students face to study healthcare, medicine, and allied sciences in India. Medical and dental colleges have a very well-known selection criterion named NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test). The criterion, although examining the students' calibre, somehow falls short when it comes to allocating admissions for deserving candidates. However, when it comes to the other paramedical branches such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, nursing, laboratory technology, etc., the situation is a lot more abysmal. Furthermore, according to the Centre for Disease, Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP) US, India faces a colossal shortage of 2 million nursing staff who are trained in administering antibiotics which prevent patients from accessing life-saving drugs.[2] The number of allied healthcare workers is at an unfortunate supply gap of 65 lakh workers in India. Although universities are generating allied healthcare professionals, there isn't a uniform outcome in the quality of these graduates.[3]. To add to the problem, the distribution of these healthcare professionals is disproportionate and can only be improved if there is quality centralization from the government. [4] This brings us to the realization that the private sector arguably offers first-rate and accountable healthcare as opposed to the public sector.[5]

Thus, if the availability, feasibility, and quality of studying these courses increase and standardize, improvement in healthcare is surefire. One may argue

why government institutions are required when there is an abundance of private institutions. The answer lies in the simple fact that increased privatization of colleges and hospitals decreases the accessibility of healthcare to the lower economic strata. In India, dental and medical colleges fall into two main categories: Government and private colleges. On average, admission into private colleges sums up to around 5 lakh per annum for the BDS degree and approximately 7 lakh per annum for the MDS degree. On the contrary, government colleges figure at a very nominal rate at around 12 thousand per annum for the BDS degree and 30 thousand for the MDS degree. There are only around 70 government colleges and 200 private colleges currently. The drastic difference in the fee structure raises the obvious question about the quality of education. [6] However, the question arises as to how students are affording such exorbitant fees despite putting in the effort and scoring well. A candidate merely passing and a candidate securing a high rank both end up paying the same tuition fee in private colleges that they choose because of its quality, infrastructure, and better pedagogy. Scholarship offers are limited and not offered by any colleges. However, government scholarships, although existing (AICTE, IDA, AIMSET, etc..) [7], are obscure to many students. However, the question arises as to how students are affording such exorbitant fees despite putting in the effort and scoring well. A candidate merely passing and a candidate securing a high rank both end up paying the same fees in private colleges. This research analysis aims to throw light on the financial burden, value for money in government and private dental colleges, and prospective scholarship appeal to students.

Furthermore, scholarships not only assess the students' interpersonal skills by requesting SOPs (statement of purpose) and LORs (letters of recommendation) but also enhance the ranking of the universities by picking the cream of the crop. Availing such scholarships not only pays off bills but also sparks a sense of responsibility, sense of belonging and enables students to strive for the greater good of the community.[8]. It encourages persistence, progress, and even more a successful career. [9]. Hence this study aims to improve the education system that can cater to all strata of society.

## METHODOLOGY:

A pool of 160 students was surveyed from both government and private colleges in and around Tamil Nadu between July and October 2021. The sample-set included 92% undergraduate students and 6.5% postgraduate students. The remaining 1.5% of the respondents were pursuing diploma /other courses. A survey was conducted in the format of a questionnaire via google forms as well as in person. The survey comprised 20 multiple choice and subjective questions aiming at understanding the opinions among the students. The questionnaire, before all, recorded the demographic and personal details of all the candidates. Secondly, the subsequent questions posed were crucial in identifying the financial background of the candidates. This was done by assessing how they funded their tuition fee. The following set of questions assesses the awareness of scholarships that are available and if they had applied for scholarships. The last set of questions threw light on the opinions that the students had on private and government colleges. These final set of questions analyze the perceptions that students have about teaching methodologies, infrastructure, prospective careers, and research opportunities. The inclusion criteria consist of students of medicine and other allied health care streams. The exclusion criteria consist of those who are not students of the medical and allied healthcare streams.

## RESULTS:

A pool of 160 students was surveyed from both government and private colleges in and around Tamil Nadu.

**Table 1: Difference in reasons government and private institution students stated while selecting a university**

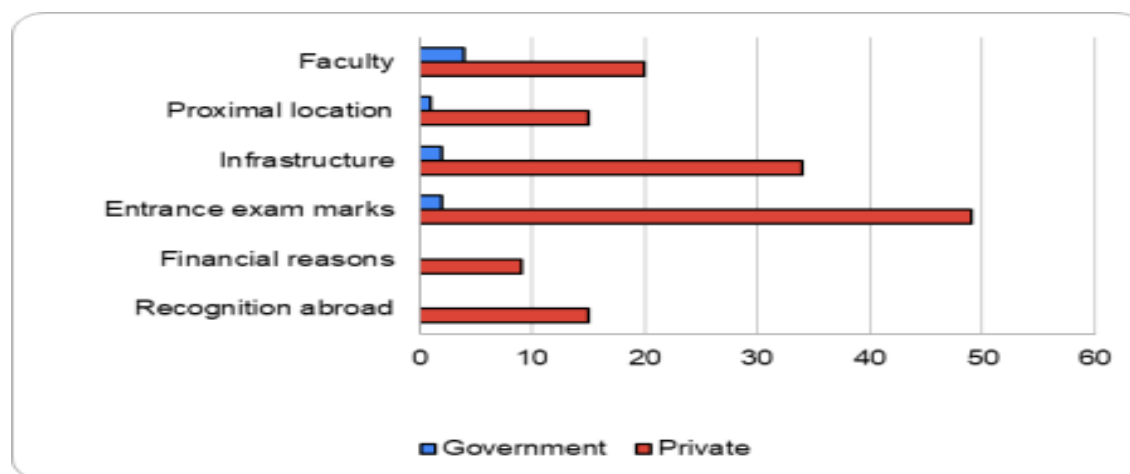
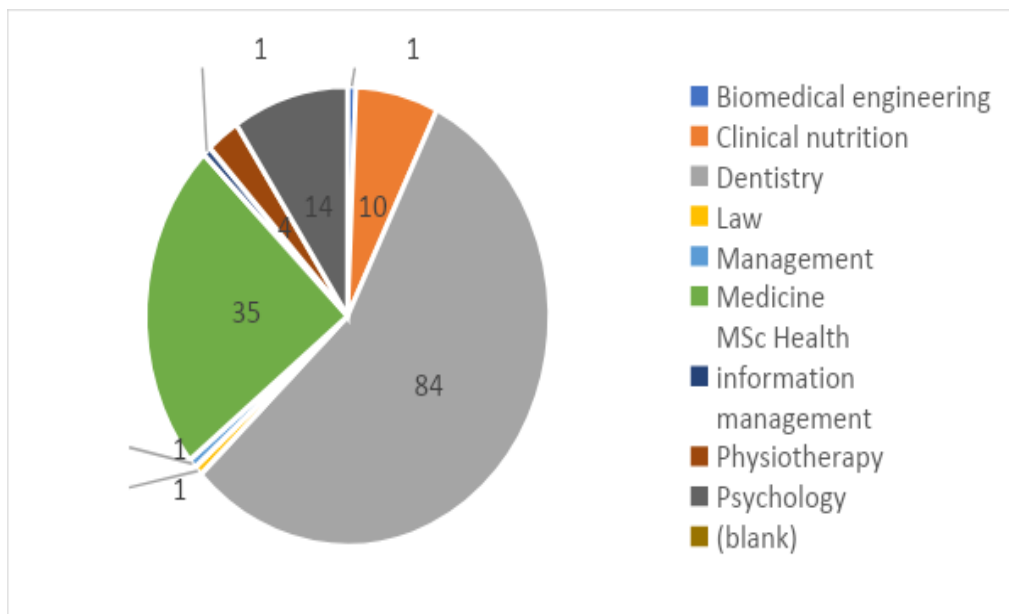


Table 1 shows the difference in reasons government and private institutions students stated while selecting a university. It shows that entrance exam Marks and infrastructure are the key factors in determining their university.



**Figure 1: Distribution of candidates who participated from a plethora of fields**

Figure 1 shows the distribution of candidates who participated from a plethora of fields. It shows that respondents from diverse backgrounds have different opinions on government and private institutes.

**Table 2: Reasons behind selection of university**

Reason	Government	Private	p Value	Total
Faculty	4	20	5.28	24
Proximal Location	1	15	5.28	16
Infrastructure	2	34	5.72	36
Entrance exam marks	2	49	2.7	51
Financial reasons	0	9	2.2	9
Recognition abroad	0	15	0.7	15

Table 2 shows the reasons behind selection of universities. It shows that respondents had a variety of reasons for choosing their university, infrastructure being an important factor.

**Table 3: Perceptions and awareness about the education system in India**

CRITERIA	RESPONSES n(%)
Awareness about scholarships to study in India	164 (100%)
Opinion that there are sufficient dental and allied health sciences government colleges in India	163 (99%)
Seeing value for money in institutions	160 (97%)
Candidates who have applied for scholarships	40 (25%)
Discrepancy between quality of education and infrastructure in private and government universities	162 (99%)
Candidates who availed educational loans	162 (99%)

Table 3 shows the perception and awareness about the education system in India. It shows that there is very little awareness about scholarships among students in India. It depicts that the students believe that there aren't sufficient dental and allied health sciences institutions in India.

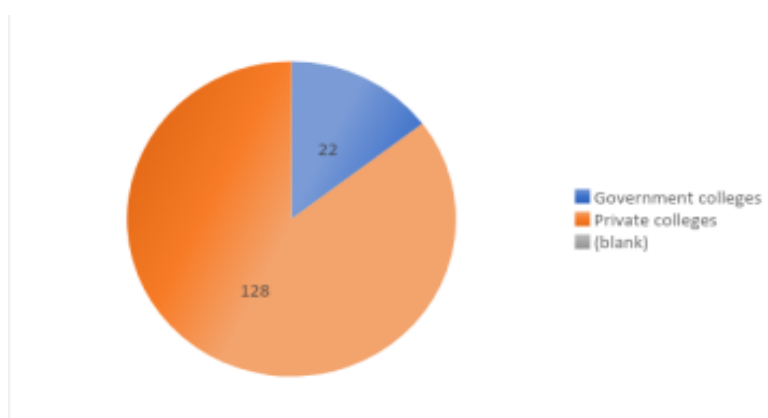
**Figure 2: Views about infrastructure and quality of education among students**

Figure 2 shows the views about infrastructure and quality of education among students. It shows that 85% of the respondents believe that private colleges offer better infrastructure and quality of education in comparison to government colleges.

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## DISCUSSION:

The importance of scholarships in any country, let alone a developing country cannot be emphasized more as it standardized the mode of education. The study that was conducted revealed that majority of the students were entirely unaware of the existence of scholarships to study health sciences in our country. Scholarships in its full essence does not confine itself to financial assistance but also emphasizes on carrying out scholarly work such as publications, research and so on. In India, it is normative that most students enter the medical field with no primary degree with no prior requirement such as pre-medical degree.

When compared to students who already hold a bachelor's degree, those who are new to the subject lack exponentially in terms of research skills. [10]. Subsequently, when students were asked what they looked for in a university before enrolling, they stated that the entrance exam marks, infrastructure and recognition abroad were key factors in selecting their university along with employability (Kumar, Chand, and Mittal 2019; Sevier, 1998), image of the university (Pringle and Fritz 2019, Lansingan et al. 2016), fee structure and proximal location. [11]. Only a very few numbers of students considered the NIRF (National Institute of Ranking Framework) ranking of the college as an important factor. When questioned whether there were sufficient number of governments allied health science universities in our country, many the respondents were of the opinion that there was a severe shortage in such universities. Similarly, according to Graeve H et al, in a country such as India, where allied health sciences are given a step motherly treatment, let alone providing scholarships to pursue the course, its mere importance and gravity were questioned. For instance, in the case of nursing, where the Indian Nursing Council indicate that the patient to nurse ratio be 1:4, in reality there is only a patient to nurse ratio of 1:40. [12]. This may be due to the shortage in number of institutions providing adequate training and migration of nurses from India. [13]. This may also be due to the fact they are underpaid and underappreciated. Addressing the mental health fiasco in our country brings us to the realization that we are at an immense shortage of therapists and psychologists, as low as such that there are only 4000 mental health professionals in our country. [14]. The entire healthcare industry can be regulated by a specialized centralized HCPC (Health Care Professional Council) to meet its requirements. It is even more crucial to address the matter in question concerning the healthcare system, the lack of which can result in devastating consequences; something as sensitive as human life. The analysis drawn from the study points to the direction that students, although having financial constraints, either are not aware or not provided with sufficient scholarship opportunities to aid their education, even when it is apparent that they are in dire need of it. It is unfortunate that to equip oneself in a field as noble as the Aesculapian one, the tuition fee costs an arm and a leg, regardless of one's métiér It is crucial to address that, although many of the respondents have availed alternative sources such as student loans to fund their tuition fees, it is hapless that the option of scholarships did not dawn on them as an attainable benefit.

Unavoidably, exists the ignored truth, the reservation system. The reservation system in India is in place, ideally to enable citizens of the lower socioeconomic strata to procure education. However, the reservation system lowers the standard of selection rather than providing more opportunities and encouragement to the less privileged. Not only does this system reduce the quality of education, but ultimately only gets you into a government institution, which from the study conducted, makes it clear that is a compromise when it comes to the infrastructure and teaching methodology it has to offer. Furthermore, the current system at hand fails to assess an individual at a holistic level, which is essential in a field such as medicine and healthcare, as it takes more than just intelligence to survive in this profession.

Scholarships, on the other hand take into consideration several factors including test scores, letters of recommendation, essays, and communication skills required to make it a successful healthcare professional, thereby providing a more heuristic approach. In juxtaposition with most countries, there exists a comprehensive study of teaching and learning such as the SOTL or the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, which is still in its preliminary stages in our country. According to Boyer (1990), "The scholarship of discovery at its best contributes not only to the stock of human knowledge but also to the intellectual climate of a college or university. Not just the outcomes, but the process and especially the passion, give meaning to the effort ". All forms of scholarship, including the scholarship of teaching and learning, can be characterized by the same six criteria: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique [15].

A recent study revealed that the teaching methodology preferred by students included an amalgam of traditional and modern techniques including problem-based learning, video demonstrations, and hands-on activities to enhance clinical skills. [16]. This combination of traditional and modern teaching techniques is what seems to be lacking in most universities in our country, especially government institutions. The situation at hand can be better handled if universities are ranked based on the amenities they have to offer, students ranked based on their caliber and a perfect fit between the student and university is established. This, in the long run, will build healthy competition between universities as well, which ultimately improves the standard of education.

Limitations: Nevertheless, the scope of this study is limited to views collected only from a confined geographical region and thus has its shortcomings. Furthermore, owing to the pandemic situation, data was collected via google forms, which may have resulted in an information bias. Had the study been conducted in more regions, a more diverse view could have been collected. A larger population set can elicit more accurate results.

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## CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the overall quality of higher education pedagogical methods in India can be ameliorated to a great extent in all aspects. Government institutions and selection criteria have a great responsibility in improving the awareness, availability, and reach of healthcare in terms of offering education as well as services.

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