

India Higher Education Research Conference (IHERC) 2025

21-22 November, 2025 at R&I Park, IIT Delhi

IHERN will organise its flagship research conference, Indian Higher Education Research Conference (IHERC) on 21-22 November, 2025 in New Delhi, India. The conference will serve as a platform for presenting high-quality research of relevance to Indian higher education, and also for discussing practice and policy issues relating to Indian higher education. The conference will enable and promote researching the scholarly field of higher education, and linking the same with the practice and policy of higher education in India. IHERC 2025 will be at the intersection of various scholarly fields, including but not limited to higher education studies, the empirical context of higher education in India, and the practice and policy of higher education in India. The conference expects to have participation from the global scholarly community, with interests in Indian higher education.

Venue: IHERC 2025 will be held in New Delhi, India. The venue will be announced later.

Themes of the Conference

The conference will be organized around contemporary topics of relevance to higher education in India, including but not limited to the below:

- » Employability and student success
- » Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education: India and the Rest of the World (session by World Access to Higher Education Network (WAHEN), University of West London, UK)
- » Expansion, Access, and Participation in Higher Education

- » Financing in Higher Education
- » Higher education and development
- » Industry academia relationship
- » Internationalisation of higher education
- » Leadership in Higher Education
- » Policy in higher education
- » Privatization and marketisation
- » Research excellence and global competitiveness
- » Sustainability in higher education
- » Teaching quality and learning outcomes
- » Technology integration or online higher education (Special session by NIEPA, Delhi)
- » Probing Interdisciplinarity: Goals, Contours and Response (Special session by IIM, Ahmedabad)
- » The Many Purposes of Higher Education in a Globalized World (Special session by Indira Mahindra School of Education, Mahindra University)
- » Third mission of universities
- » Other topics of relevance to higher education in India

Special Sessions

Special sessions will focus on specific thematic areas within the broader conference topics. Authors submitting their abstracts to the conference will have the option to submit their papers under a relevant special session. Details of the special sessions are provided below.



Transnational Education (TNE) Development in India (by: Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF), c/o Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia)

The proposer for this special session is The Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF) (<https://ctef.com.my/v2/>) , which is a collaborative entity between the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia and the Commonwealth Secretariat in London (<https://thecommonwealth.org/>). CTEF role is to share best practices in the development of Malaysia higher education system with other developing countries in the Commonwealth. In Malaysia, Transnational education (TNE) in the form of partnerships with foreign institutions, started in the early 1950s. Over the decades, Malaysia has developed a robust TNE framework, hosting numerous international branch campuses and fostering collaborations with foreign universities. Arguably, TNE has become a key driver for Malaysia's engagement in global higher education, enabling Malaysians and other students in Asia to access international qualifications. Over the years, Malaysia has and continues to host numerous international branch campuses, collaborates with prestigious universities from the UK, Australia, Japan, and China, and promotes blended learning models to enhance accessibility and quality. In 1998, the first branch campus, Monash University Malaysia, was established, followed quickly by the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus in 2000. These international branch campuses have set a benchmark for quality assurance and institutional collaboration, reinforced by a proactive approach and regulatory regime by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

In India, the development of TNE is still at an early stage. However, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 encourages international collaboration and allows foreign universities to establish campuses in India. The increasing demand for higher education in India presents an opportunity to structure the TNE expansion, particularly in technology, healthcare, and management. By leveraging Malaysia's experiences, potential research areas for India's TNE development are wide-ranging, such as developing policy framework for sustainable TNE growth, curriculum development, enhanced student mobility and employability, and public-private partnerships in the provision of TNE.

- **Digital Technology Integration in Teaching and Learning in Indian Higher Education (by Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi)**

Digital technology has emerged as a viable tool to support teaching and learning in higher education globally. The role of digital technology becomes much more vital for the Indian higher education sector, which is the second-largest higher education system in the world with an enrolment of 43.3 million and a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 28.4%, which National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) aims to increase to 50% by 2035. There are three vital aspects of digital technology in Indian higher education. The first is understanding how higher education institutions (HEIs) in India integrate digital technology into teaching and learning. The second is institutional policies and mechanisms regarding the use of digital technology. The third significant aspect is

understanding the factors that work as promoters and inhibitors. This special session will specifically answer three vital questions.

1. How do India HEIs integrate digital technologies in teaching and learning?
2. What are institutional mechanisms to promote the integration of digital technology in teaching and learning in Indian HEIs?
3. What are the factors (promoters, inhibitors) in integrating digital technology in teaching and learning in Indian HEIs?

- **Probing Interdisciplinarity: Goals, Contours and Responses (by: Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad)**

Research on interdisciplinarity highlights both its potential benefits and inherent complexities. While challenges such as the ongoing climate catastrophe, transformational changes in technology and geopolitics risks abound, critical questions on the ability of higher education systems to respond to them are being raised (Miotto et al., 2020). The need for interdisciplinarity has been a much-cited reform (Gibbons et al., 1994). Along these lines, India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates a shift toward flexible, multidisciplinary learning, recommending Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities to embed interdisciplinarity structurally (NEP, 2020). Similarly, the University Grant Commission's (UGC) (2022) guidelines emphasize curricular flexibility, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and institutional integration. However, scholars note that translating these policy aspirations into practice remains uneven as Indian universities continue to navigate structural constraints and entrenched disciplinary boundaries (Chandra, 2017; Jalote, 2021). Literature suggests that while structural commitments often increase interdisciplinary outputs, they may not consistently translate into greater scholarly impact, especially across cognitively distant fields (Leahey et al., 2017; Leahey & Barringer, 2020).

This special session at IHERC 2025 invites theoretical contributions, empirical studies, institutional case analyses, and practitioner insights examining how interdisciplinarity is conceptualized, structured, and experienced within Indian higher education. Submissions may address governance models, curriculum design, faculty and student experiences, institutional practices, and stakeholder perspectives. Key questions include: How is interdisciplinarity implemented beyond policy rhetoric? What institutional structures and practices facilitate or hinder interdisciplinary integration? How do faculty and students navigate interdisciplinary identities, and what are the implications for knowledge legitimacy, professional careers, and graduate pathways? How do external stakeholders perceive interdisciplinary qualifications, and how might global practices and experiences inform India's evolving interdisciplinary strategies?

- **Equitable access and success in higher education: India and the rest of the world (By: World Access to Higher Education Network (WAHEN) @ University of West London, UK)**

The session will examine connections between the key challenges and opportunities to extend access to higher education for those from low income and other marginalised communities in India and the rest of the world. India has ambitions to extend participation in its higher education system whilst also creating opportunities for those from lower caste and income groups as well as rural, disabled and other groups who face difficulties in entering higher education. Achieving these goals will be challenging. There is no country in the world where inequalities in access and success by social background do not exist. However, there is a growing community of researchers, policymakers academics and leaders who are working individually and together on ways of meeting this challenge. It is vital that work in India can be strengthened by deepening the theoretical basis and practical knowledge relating to equity work through dialogue nationally and globally. The session will include a keynote address which brings the present Indian context together with the global picture now. We would then like to feature papers that examined the equitable access and success issue in India from a thematic perspective (e.g. looking at financial barriers and access: how higher education is understood in different communities, student experiences of specific student populations); a policy perspective at either the national, regional or institutional level and potentially a paper that includes content from India and another country(ies). We will be keen in the session to ensure that there is time for discussion to explore bridging and common points emerging from across the papers and in particular looking to establish several areas where further enquiry and collaboration would be valuable. Given the present geo-political climate a session that looks at equity in higher education placing India in the global context that is knowledge and solution focused could be extremely valuable.

- **The Many Purposes of Higher Education in a Globalized World (By: Indira Mahindra School of Education, Mahindra University)**

Historically, the relationship that higher education institutions built with both state and society have not remained static, they have mutated and transformed over time. The changes that have affected higher education have not remained restricted to internal dynamics within institutions but extended to the manner in which they responded to changes taking place in society at large. We identify three important points in the history of higher education that have an important bearing on the state of higher education today. The first pertains to the emergence of the university of teaching and research in the nineteenth century and its subsequent adoption as a model in different parts of the world. Second, the massification of higher education and connected to it the idea that higher education as a site of social mobility and finally the rise of neo-liberal globalization and the concomitant changes it has affected in higher education. Higher education as a sector today is, in a manner of speaking, witnessing the culmination of the above three processes. It can be argued that we are still seeing them unfold and it is hard to predict

how they will ultimately culminate. But there are certain changes underway today that prompt us to raise specific questions about the purpose of higher education today.

The expansion of higher education, both in terms of number of institutions and students has resulted in larger and more diverse classrooms. While this has posed challenges to the expectations from teachers, it has also led to a transformation of how teaching is framed in institutions. As the very act of teaching is sought to be captured through quantifiable metrics, teachers are also expected to produce research output which adheres to quantifiable standards. In other words, the bureaucratization of the university is a process that is well underway. In the market place of higher education today institutions are engaging in product- differentiation, also to have a competitive edge over other intuitions. The issue of measurement of teaching and research as they define the university today also end up creating changes in other related spheres of higher education as both intended and unintended consequences.

Policy initiatives such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which targets a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2035, reflect ambitions for further expansion. However, this is accompanied by increased regulation, such as the establishment of the National Testing Agency, which introduces new layers of gatekeeping. While centralization and uniformity may compromise diversity, their long-term effects on quality and professionalization remain uncertain. The globalized world and its reliance on technology as the interface of information dissemination has created inter-connectedness in the challenge to the process of knowledge production. Institutions today are also competing with modes of disinformation and misinformation which have challenged the knowledge that is produced and disseminated through institutions. It remains to be seen how higher education institutions respond to this challenge.

The above described processes and issues are at play in the context of higher education in India. This special session seeks to put together a set of presentations which will address some of the issues discussed above while framing the discussion in the context of the purpose of higher education. For multiple reasons the question about the purpose of higher education is up for discussion in the market place for ideas, the panel seeks to intervene in that discussion with perspective that address different facets of the higher education sector in India today.

Important Dates

10 August, 2025	Deadline for abstract submission
21 August, 2025	Acceptance decision
1 September, 2025	Registration to open
22 October, 2025	Deadline for full draft paper submission

Abstract Submission

Abstracts to the IHERC can be submitted in two categories. Authors will be required to submit a 1,000 word (extended) abstract, mapped to one of the themes of the conference. Upon acceptance, authors will be required to submit full papers, not exceeding 7,000 words, prior to the conference.

Category A: Academic Research Papers

Papers in this category will be based on rigorous research with a contribution to knowledge and potential for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Papers can be focused on higher education as a field of study or from other disciplines that examine higher education. Abstracts must be placed with respect to the current state of the field and the contribution must be clearly described. Abstracts need to highlight the academic contributions, an explanation of the methodological approach and findings. Papers need not be based on Indian higher education, but need to demonstrate connections with the same in the abstract and the presentation. This category of submissions is suited for academics, doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, researchers working on think-tanks, and research staff working on higher education.

Category B: Research to Practice Papers

Papers in this category will be based on strong empirical evidence about Indian higher education. These papers need not be immediately aimed at peer-reviewed journal publications, but need to demonstrate contribution to the collective understanding of Indian higher education policy and practice. Papers in this category will need to be empirically sound with clear evidence or pathways for

influencing practice and policy. These will contribute to the conversation between researchers and practitioners on Indian higher education, and provide insights from practice around various aspects of Indian higher education. This category of submissions are suited for researchers, higher education practitioners from universities, policy makers, consultants, and research professionals and practitioners in think tanks.

Abstract Submission link:

https://easychair.org/account2/signin_timeout?l=476965907239845158

Conference Fees and Registration

For this year, IHERN will cover 50% of the conference registration fee for all IHERN members.

Category	Non-IHERN Member Fee (INR)	IHERN Member Fee (INR)
Faculty/Researcher	8000 INR	4000 INR
Student	3000 INR	1500 INR

Become an IHERN Member

Please use this link **<https://iiitd.ac.in/IHERN/applications/register.php>** to become a member of IHERN. Those not presenting any paper will also need to register to attend the conference.

Contact

All queries for the conference can be sent to **iherc2025@iiitd.ac.in**