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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Empty Chairs: On the Faculty Crunch in India's Top Institutes

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Empty Chairs: On the Faculty Crunch in India's Top Institutes

 **The Indian Express** 10 June 2026 **GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India wants world-class universities, but a large share of teaching posts in its best institutes lie vacant. What is blocking the staffing of the very institutions India is counting on?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources **HOW**

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

A persistent reality sits behind India's higher-education ambitions: a large share of **faculty posts lies vacant** across the **IITs, NITs and IIMs**. For an aspirant, this is a **GS2 (governance, education, human resource) lead** on why India's premier institutes are understaffed even as the country aims for global rankings and a knowledge economy. The problem is less about money for buildings than about **people in chairs**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

A significant share of sanctioned **faculty posts** in the **IITs, NITs and IIMs** is **vacant**, raising student-teacher ratios and hitting **teaching and research quality**. The causes: a thin **PhD pipeline, pay and career disparities**, slow recruitment, and contested **roster** implementation. The fix is not to lower standards but to **widen the pool**: better pipelines, pay parity, faster hiring, transparent rosters, and diaspora and industry talent.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Faculty vacancy	Unfilled sanctioned teaching posts	Higher student-teacher ratios
PhD pipeline	Supply of qualified candidates	Too thin to fill posts
Pay parity	Competitive academic pay and careers	Academia loses talent to industry
Recruitment roster	Reservation implementation in hiring	Contested, leaving posts in limbo

THE ANALYSIS: WHY THE CHAIRS STAY EMPTY

- 1 The pipeline is thin.** Too few PhDs and postdocs are produced to fill premier-institute posts.
- 2 Academia loses on pay and prestige.** Industry often outcompetes academic careers for talent.
- 3 Recruitment is slow.** Cumbersome processes and contested roster implementation leave posts vacant.
- 4 Research output suffers.** Shortages directly undercut research and global-ranking aspirations.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

the IITs, NITs and IIMs (the last governed by the IIM Act, 2017); the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the AICTE. Policy frame: the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which targets quality, research and institutional autonomy; the ANRF (Anusandhan National Research Foundation) for research funding. Concepts: student-teacher ratio; the PhD/postdoctoral pipeline; the reservation roster in faculty recruitment; pay parity. Goal: global university rankings, a knowledge economy, and research-and-development intensity. Linkage: human capital, demographic dividend and innovation.

THE DEBATE

Argument for holding standards: Quality must not be compromised to fill numbers; it is better to keep posts vacant than to lower recruitment standards.

Argument for urgent staffing: Persistent vacancies cripple teaching and research; the system cannot meet its goals half-staffed.

The balanced verdict: The answer is not to lower the bar but to **widen the pool** that can clear it, strengthening pipelines, pay and recruitment, and resolving roster issues transparently, so that filling chairs raises quality rather than merely counting heads.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A weak answer blames one cause (low pay, or slow hiring, or the roster). The strong answer maps the reinforcing loop, pipeline, pay, process and roster all feed the vacancy, and shows that only a coordinated fix works. The move is from “fill the posts” to “repair the pipeline that fills the posts.” The same lens applies to shortages of doctors, judges and skilled workers.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Thin PhD pipeline + pay/prestige gap + slow recruitment + contested roster -> persistent faculty vacancies. The consequence: higher student-teacher ratios + weaker research + lower rankings. The fix: stronger pipelines + pay parity + faster hiring + transparent roster + diaspora/industry talent -> chairs filled with quality.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Strengthen the PhD and postdoctoral pipeline** with funding and mentorship.
- ② **Ensure pay parity and clear career progression** to retain talent.
- ③ **Speed up and professionalise recruitment** and implement the roster transparently within the law.
- ④ **Attract diaspora and industry talent** and tie staffing to research and teaching outcomes.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“Faculty shortages in India’s premier technical and management institutes undermine the goals of higher-education reform.” Examine the causes and suggest remedies. (250 words)

“World-class institutions are built on people, not buildings; India’s empty chairs are its real ranking problem.”

IITs · NITs · IIMs (IIM Act, 2017) · UGC · AICTE · NEP 2020 · ANRF · student-teacher ratio · faculty roster.

Is it better to keep a post vacant than to fill it below standard, and how should the system escape that trade-off?

Connects to GS2 PYQs on education, institutional capacity and human-resource development; a probable question is the causes-and-remedies framing above.

static GS2 on education governance and NEP 2020; the wider theme of human capital and the demographic dividend.

Sources: Indian Express, Ministry of Education, UGC

Source: Empty Chairs: On the Faculty Crunch in India's Top Institutes — Ujivari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Large and persistent faculty vacancies across the IITs, NITs and IIMs threaten teaching quality, research output and India’s higher-education ambitions, and reflect deeper problems of pipeline, pay parity, recruitment process and the roster, which must be fixed together.

✓ SUPPORTING

- A significant share of sanctioned teaching posts in premier institutes lies vacant, raising student-teacher ratios and straining quality.
- The causes include a thin PhD pipeline, pay and career disparities, cumbersome recruitment, and roster and reservation-implementation issues.

- Faculty shortages directly undercut research output and India's aspirations for global university rankings and a knowledge economy.

COUNTER

Some argue that quality cannot be compromised to fill numbers, and that it is better to keep posts vacant than to lower recruitment standards.

WAY FORWARD

Strengthen the PhD and postdoctoral pipeline, ensure pay parity and faster recruitment, resolve roster issues transparently, attract diaspora and industry talent, and tie staffing to research and teaching outcomes.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"Faculty shortages in India's premier technical and management institutes undermine the goals of higher-education reform." Examine the causes and suggest remedies. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India wants its premier institutes to rank among the world's best and to anchor a knowledge economy. It is hard to do either when a large share of the teaching chairs sits empty.

BODY

The scale of the vacancy problem is the starting point: across the Indian Institutes of Technology, the National Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management, a substantial fraction of sanctioned faculty posts is unfilled, pushing up student-teacher ratios and stretching existing staff across teaching, research and administration. The causes are structural and reinforcing.

The PhD and postdoctoral pipeline is too thin to supply enough qualified candidates, partly because academic careers struggle to compete with industry on pay and prestige. Recruitment is often slow and cumbersome, and the implementation of the reservation roster has at times been contested and

litigated, leaving posts in limbo.

The result is a direct hit to research output and to India's standing in global rankings. The counterpoint, that standards must not be diluted merely to fill numbers, is valid and important; the answer is not to lower the bar but to widen and deepen the pool of those who can clear it.

That means strengthening the PhD and postdoctoral pipeline with better funding and mentorship, ensuring pay parity and clear career progression, speeding up and professionalising recruitment, implementing the roster transparently within the law, and actively drawing in diaspora and industry talent. Staffing should be tied to research and teaching outcomes so that filling chairs improves quality rather than merely counts heads.

CONCLUSION

World-class institutions are built on people, not buildings. Until India fills its empty chairs with the right scholars, its higher-education ambitions will remain half-staffed.

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