



Strategic Partnership With **U.S. News** & WORLD REPORT

Transnational Education (TNE)



Building Sustainable
Partnerships for
a Global Future

— India context

Index

◆ Introduction	1
◆ India at the crossroads of global higher education	3
◆ Understanding Transnational Education: definitions and models	5
◆ The Indian policy push: NEP 2020 and beyond	6
◆ Current landscape of TNE in India	9
◆ Current developments and Challenges	12
◆ Opportunities for Indian institutions	14
◆ Challenges in building sustainable TNE partnerships	16
◆ Role of technology and digital delivery	18
◆ Strategic role of Indian government and agencies	19
◆ Agent ecosystem and recruitment interface	20
◆ Case studies of emerging models (short)	21
◆ Strategic recommendations for sustainable TNE partnerships	23
◆ Conclusion	24





How to Navigate Transnational Education (TNE): Building Sustainable Partnerships for a Global Future

Introduction

India today stands at a defining moment in its higher education journey. With the world's largest youth population, a rapidly expanding middle class, and an ambitious vision to transform into a global knowledge hub, the demand for quality, internationally benchmarked education has never been greater. At the same time, global universities are reimagining their engagement with India not just as a source of outbound students, but as a strategic partner in research, innovation, and sustainable development.

Transnational Education (TNE) lies at the heart of this transformation. More than a pathway for student mobility, TNE represents a multidimensional partnership encompassing joint degrees, faculty exchange, international branch campuses, digital learning ecosystems, and cross-border research collaboration. In the Indian context, the launch of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, coupled with the UGC's 2023–24 regulations allowing foreign universities to establish campuses in India, signals a paradigm shift in how India engages with the world. Early movers such as Deakin University and the University of Wollongong opening campuses in GIFT City, Gujarat, highlight that the shift is already underway.

But navigating TNE is complex. Institutions must balance regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and cultural alignment while ensuring that partnerships deliver long-term value for students, faculty, society and countries. The challenge is not merely to import models but to build sustainable, reciprocal frameworks that position India as both a host and a global provider of education.

This report explores how India is positioning a strategic path in TNE, leveraging its demographic dividend, digital infrastructure, and policy momentum to build partnerships that are purpose driven, future-ready, and globally competitive. It brings together current policy developments, examples from India and abroad, and actionable recommendations to reimagine India's role in the evolving global education ecosystem.

Transforming Education with **TNE**

Policy shift towards
global education

Foreign universities
can establish
campuses

Deakin, Wollongong
open campuses

Limited Global
Engagement

NEP 2020
Launch

UGC
Regulations

Early Movers

Enhanced
Global
Education

India lacks global
education

India engages with
the world

India at the crossroads of Global Higher Education

How India's growing middle class is reshaping higher-education trends?

India's rapidly expanding middle class is fundamentally reshaping higher-education trends. Rising disposable incomes, aspirational lifestyles, and a deep cultural emphasis on education are driving unprecedented demand for global-quality degrees. For many families, higher education is no longer just about securing employment but about social mobility, global exposure, and long-term competitiveness.

This shift is visible in two parallel trends: a surge in outbound mobility, as more students seek international experiences, and an increasing openness to global programs delivered within India through transnational education. Parents and students are also showing a growing preference for industry aligned, skill focussed, flexible learning pathways such as dual degrees, short-term certifications, and hybrid programs as these balance affordability and aspiration with prestige.

In short, India's middle class is not only expanding the higher education market in terms of volume but also redefining its expectations - demanding quality, recognition, return on investment and international relevance closer to home.

India's aspiration to become a global knowledge hub



NEP 2020 explicitly prioritises internationalisation, portability of credits, and institutional autonomy to raise global standing, the policy frames India as both a sender and future host of world-class education. The government's Study in India initiative, NIRF benchmarking and recent approvals of international campus LOIs (Letter of Intent) signals strategic push to convert demographic advantage into an education trade and exports opportunity.

Why TNE matters now more than ever



- Students seek global reputations with lower relocation cost and visa friction.
- For most Indian families, overseas education is a major investment, and students are increasingly driven by data on graduate employability, ROI, and pathways to global careers when selecting institutions
- Indian institutions want inbound partners, joint research and pathways upgrade teaching & employability.
- Employers want micro-skilled, internationally aware graduates
- TNE can shorten that employer-skill gap. (Mobility data and policy shifts make now the window to structure long-term, not ad-hoc, collaborations.)
- With global economic uncertainty and rising costs, studying with TNE arrangement offers a more accessible, and value driven route to international exposure and career outcomes.



Understanding Transnational Education: Definitions & Models

What is TNE?

Transnational Education (TNE) refers to the delivery of higher education programs and qualifications by an institution based in one country (the awarding institution) to students located in another country.

The distinctive feature of TNE is that learners can access international curricula, degrees, and academic experiences without relocating permanently to the provider's home country.

Common TNE models (with short definitions + India relevant examples)

Dual / joint degrees & articulation (twinning)

Students complete parts of a program in two institutions & receive one or two degrees. (Often used by Indian colleges with UK/Australia partners.)

Validation / franchising

A foreign provider validates an Indian institution's delivery; degree awarded by the foreign university in some models. (UGC has warned about unapproved arrangements; formal approvals are now required).

Offshore branch campuses

A foreign university operates its own campus in India (e.g. Deakin, University of Wollongong in GIFT City). This is the model NEP explicitly opened for top ranked institutions.

Online / blended delivery & stackable credentials

Fully remote or hybrid programs, micro-credentials and stackable credit routes (increasingly common via edtech partnerships).

Collaborative research hubs & co-located innovation centres

Research partnerships, joint labs, international PhD cotutelle. (Often the R&D hook for campus or program partnerships.)

The Indian policy push: NEP 2020 & Beyond

NEP 2020's vision for internationalisation & TNE



- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly identifies internationalisation as a key pillar for reforming India's higher education. Among its objectives are encouraging Indian universities to establish campuses abroad; facilitating foreign universities of high rank to set up campuses in India; promoting student and faculty exchange; and counting credits earned abroad toward degrees at home.
- NEP also aims to leverage India's cultural heritage (e.g. in languages, AYUSH, Indology) as part of attracting global interest, and envisions HEIs having offices of International Affairs to coordinate these cross-border educational activities.

Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) / National Credit Framework



- By January 2024, over 3 crore students had registered with the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), reflecting strong uptake.
- As of mid-2023, more than 1 crore students had already registered, showing rapid momentum in just a few months.
- Alongside students, a large number of HEIs have also joined: by early 2024, there were 1,693 academic institutions (universities, Institutes of National Importance, etc.) registered on the ABC platform.

Regulatory shifts around foreign university campuses



- As of late October 2025, 17 foreign universities have announced plans to set up campuses in India, with several already having received permission from the University Grants Commission (UGC) to do so.
- Separately, under new UGC 2023 regulations, five foreign universities recently received Letters of Intent (LoIs) / approval to set up campuses in India—including Illinois Institute of Technology (USA), University of Liverpool (UK), Victoria University & Western Sydney University (Australia), and Istituto Europeo di Design (Italy). Their campuses are expected to begin operations in 2026–2027.

Implementation of internationalisation guidelines



- Following NEP 2020, a set of Guidelines for Internationalisation of Higher Education was issued on 29 July 2021, requiring HEIs to set up Offices of International Affairs. Roughly 700+ HEIs have since established such offices.
(Source: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/int_he.pdf)
 - Another regulatory measure: Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Educational Institutions to offer Twinning, Joint Degree and Dual Degree Programmes, issued on 2 May 2022. This opens structured frameworks for partial foreign credentials and mobility.
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Challenges & gaps in policy translation



- While NEP laid out bold reforms, there is a gap between the number of universities applying vs. those approved over 50 applications but only 3 operational so far. This suggests that regulatory, quality, or infrastructural hurdles are still critical.
 - Implementation capacity and institutional readiness vary widely. Some HEIs still lack dedicated international affairs offices, infrastructure, or clearly defined policies for handling foreign collaborations.
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Policy outcomes & ongoing reform momentum



- The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC's) high registration numbers imply strong demand among students for flexibility, mobility and recognition of credits—core NEP goals.
 - The movement of foreign universities into India (via approvals and Lols) is a recent but concrete signal of the regulatory environment becoming friendlier to TNE. Combined with inflows of applications, this suggests that foreign providers see India as increasingly viable for cross-border delivery.
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List of Foreign Universities that have received Letter of Intent (LOI)

University	Country of Origin	Location in India (proposed / confirmed)	Status (LoI / Approval / Operational)	Expected Start / Admission Cycle
University of Liverpool	UK	Bengaluru, Karnataka	LoI given by UGC to open campus	Academic Year 2026-27
Illinois Institute of Technology	USA	Mumbai (location to be finalized)	LoI approved	Expected to begin operations by 2026
Victoria University	Australia	City not yet finalized	LoI given	By 2027 anticipated; admissions / courses likely after ~18 months from LoI issuance
Western Sydney University	Australia	Greater Noida / NCR region	LoI given	Starting by 2026 – courses to commence then
Istituto Europeo di Design (IED)	Italy	Mumbai / Maharashtra region (proposed)	LoI given	Expected by 2026-27 cycle
University of York	UK	Mumbai / Maharashtra region	LoI granted	Admissions likely to begin by late 2026
University of Western Australia (UWA)	Australia	Mumbai & Chennai (planned)	LoI granted	Expected from 2026 onwards
University of Aberdeen	UK (Scotland)	Navi Mumbai / Mumbai Metropolitan Region	LoI granted	To start admissions by December 2026 (or around that time frame)
University of Southampton	UK	Gurugram, Haryana	Operational approval (first campus opened under new UGC rules)	Classes begin August 2025 in UG & PG programmes

Current landscape of TNE in India



Outbound Student Mobility: Scale & Trends

In 2024, approximately 7,60,073 Indian students went abroad for higher education (according to Bureau of Immigration data). This is down somewhat from a peak of 8,95,000 in 2023, but markedly up from 2.6 lakh in 2020, reflecting post-COVID recovery and rising demand. A key demographic shift: more than 57.2% of Indian students now coming from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, up from 47% the previous year. Similarly, over 50% come from State Boards schooling backgrounds, indicating widening access. STEM, AI, business / management etc. continue to dominate among those going abroad.



Inbound / Foreign tInstitution Presence in India

- GIFT City, Gujarat (GIFT IFSC) is emerging as a focal point for foreign university branch campuses (also called International Branch Campuses, IBCs). Under the IFSCA regulations (2022) a framework allows QS top-500 institutions to establish campuses/offshore education centres.
- As of mid-2025, four foreign universities are already operating in GIFT City. Deakin University and University of Wollongong (both from Australia) began operations in 2024.
- In addition to GIFT City, the UGC has issued Letters of Intent (Lols) to 12 foreign universities to establish campuses across India. Out of these, 6 will be in Mumbai. There are also plans for campuses in Bengaluru, Gurugram, Delhi-NCR, Greater Noida, and Chennai.



Regulatory & Infrastructure Enablers

The regulatory environment has been actively reformed:

- IFSCA regulations (2022) for setting up branch campuses in GIFT City, allowing relaxed infrastructure norms, ability to repatriate funds, and equivalence of degrees.
- UGC's newer regulations and issuance of LoIs to foreign universities under the Foreign Higher Educational Institutions (FHEI) or branch campus framework.
- Infrastructure investment: at GIFT City, a ₹450 crore central hub is being built to house foreign universities' classrooms, labs, and academic facilities.

Current developments & Challenges

Emerging Models under the current landscape



- Deakin University and University of Wollongong are pioneers they have already launched postgraduate programmes in GIFT City (e.g. Business Analytics, Cyber Security) under the new branch campus regulations.
- The University of Southampton has become the first foreign university to open a campus under the UGC's regime in Gurgaon, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- Other universities are in the pipeline: Queen's University Belfast, Coventry University, University of Surrey among others have expressed interest or received approvals for campuses (especially in GIFT City or other Indian metro / non-metro hubs).

Shifts in Demand & Access



- Increasing access: Students from Tier 2/3 cities and State Board backgrounds are forming a growing share of outbound student mobility. This points to greater awareness / aspiration beyond traditional urban centres.
- Slight dip in 2024 in absolute numbers going abroad (2023 > 2024) but still at historically high levels. This may reflect cost pressures, visa or regulatory changes in destination countries, or increasing attractiveness of domestic / global-local TNE options

Challenges Visible in the Current Landscape



- While many Lols have been issued, only some campuses are operational. Lols do not always translate quickly into fully functioning campuses due to infrastructure, faculty hiring, or regulatory/compliance delays.
- Location concentration: Many campuses are planned in large metros (Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Chennai) and GIFT City. Rural / interior states are not represented so far.
- Affordability remains a concern: even when foreign campuses are domestic, fee levels tend to be high relative to local public universities. The promise is cheaper than going abroad, but still steep for many.
- Quality assurance and student experience will be crucial: maintaining parity of delivery, faculty, research, recognition etc will determine whether these TNE offerings are trusted



Opportunities for Indian institutions

Where Indian HEIs can create value through partnerships

Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can create significant value through strategic partnerships in Transnational Education (TNE). These collaborations offer multifaceted benefits, including academic enhancement, research advancement, global recognition, and socio-economic development.

Strategic Value Creation Through TNE Partnerships

Academic and Research Excellence

Collaborations with international institutions enable Indian HEIs to access cutting-edge research, advanced curricula, and global best practices. For instance, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur's partnership with Vietnam National University focuses on areas like artificial intelligence, smart city planning, and drone technology, aiming to address pressing global challenges.

Global Recognition and Brand Enhancement

Engaging in TNE partnerships enhances the global stature of Indian HEIs, attracting international students and faculty. The collaboration between Maharashtra and Cambridge University Press exemplifies efforts to elevate educational standards and gain international accreditation.

Economic and Workforce Development

TNE partnerships contribute to economic growth by aligning educational outcomes with industry needs. The "Viksit Bharat 2047" initiative, a collaboration between Goldman Sachs and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), aims to empower women entrepreneurs, fostering economic inclusion and innovation.

Cultural Exchange and Global Citizenship

TNE fosters intercultural understanding and prepares students for global challenges. Programs like those offered by upGrad, in partnership with universities across Asia and the Middle East, facilitate cross-border learning experiences that broaden students' perspectives.

Frameworks for Effective TNE Partnerships

To maximize the benefits of TNE, Indian HEIs can adopt frameworks that emphasize:



Agility: Flexibility in adapting to changing educational landscapes and student needs.



Adaptability: Capacity to modify curricula and teaching methods to align with international standards.



Alignment: Ensuring that partnership goals are in sync with institutional missions and national educational objectives.

Additionally, focusing on equitable models of collaboration ensures mutual benefit, fostering long-term, sustainable partnerships

Policy Support and Regulatory Environment

The Indian government's initiatives, such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, have created a conducive environment for TNE by:

- **Simplifying regulatory processes for foreign collaborations.**
- **Encouraging the establishment of foreign university campuses in India.**
- **Promoting dual-degree and joint-degree programs.**

These reforms aim to integrate global educational standards with India's diverse academic landscape. By strategically engaging in TNE partnerships, Indian HEIs can enhance their educational offerings, contribute to national development goals, and position themselves as leaders in the global education arena.

Challenges in building sustainable TNE partnerships



Regulatory compliance & bureaucracy

Different approval pathways (UGC, AICTE, state rules) can create friction; clarity upfront on approvals, fees and local norms is critical. Recent UGC advisories on unapproved partnerships underline the risk of reputational and legal problems.



Quality assurance & accreditation

Ensuring parity of standards (home vs host) is a long-term governance issue. International QA agencies (QAA, ENQA) and OECD/UNESCO guidelines remain central references; host-country QA involvement is necessary to protect students.



Intellectual property & curriculum ownership

Joint programs must have explicit contracts on IP rights, revenue-sharing for commercialised research, and authorship — failure to do so creates disputes and stalls collaborations. Comparative studies show institutions need clear IP policies before scaling partnerships.



Cultural misalignment & academic autonomy

Exported curricula that ignore local labour markets and cultural context suffer low uptake; partnerships should co-design curricula (reciprocity) and protect academic freedom.



Financial viability & cost sharing

Branch campuses and joint R&D centres need long-term funding plans (capital, OPEX, scholarships). Fee expectations (e.g., LOI communications about costs 25% lower than overseas for campus students) must be realistic against operating costs.



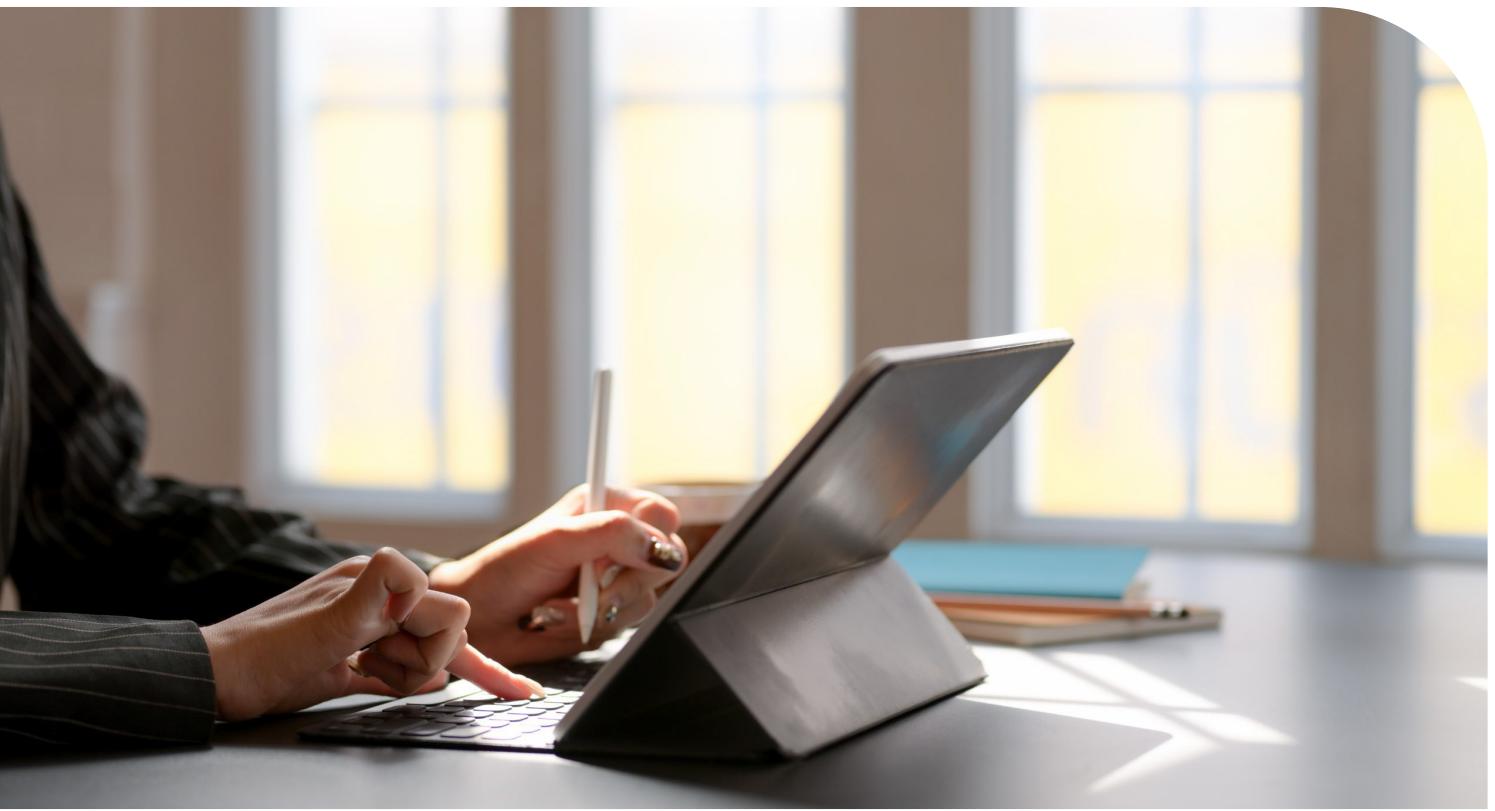
International study experience

Replicating the overseas immersion within TNE models remains difficult. Students might expect comparable global exposure, internships, industry links, and short-term mobility



Experiencing diverse campus life

A key attraction of studying abroad is exposure to multicultural peer groups and inclusive campus environments. TNE campuses will be an attractive proposition once a mix of international students, visiting faculty, and embedded global student engagement practices are offered.



Role of technology and digital delivery

- **Hybrid & online models after COVID**

COVID accelerated acceptance of online/blended TNE; universities and edtech now offer stackable digital credentials, career-facing short courses, and blended pathways that lower the marginal cost of scaling.

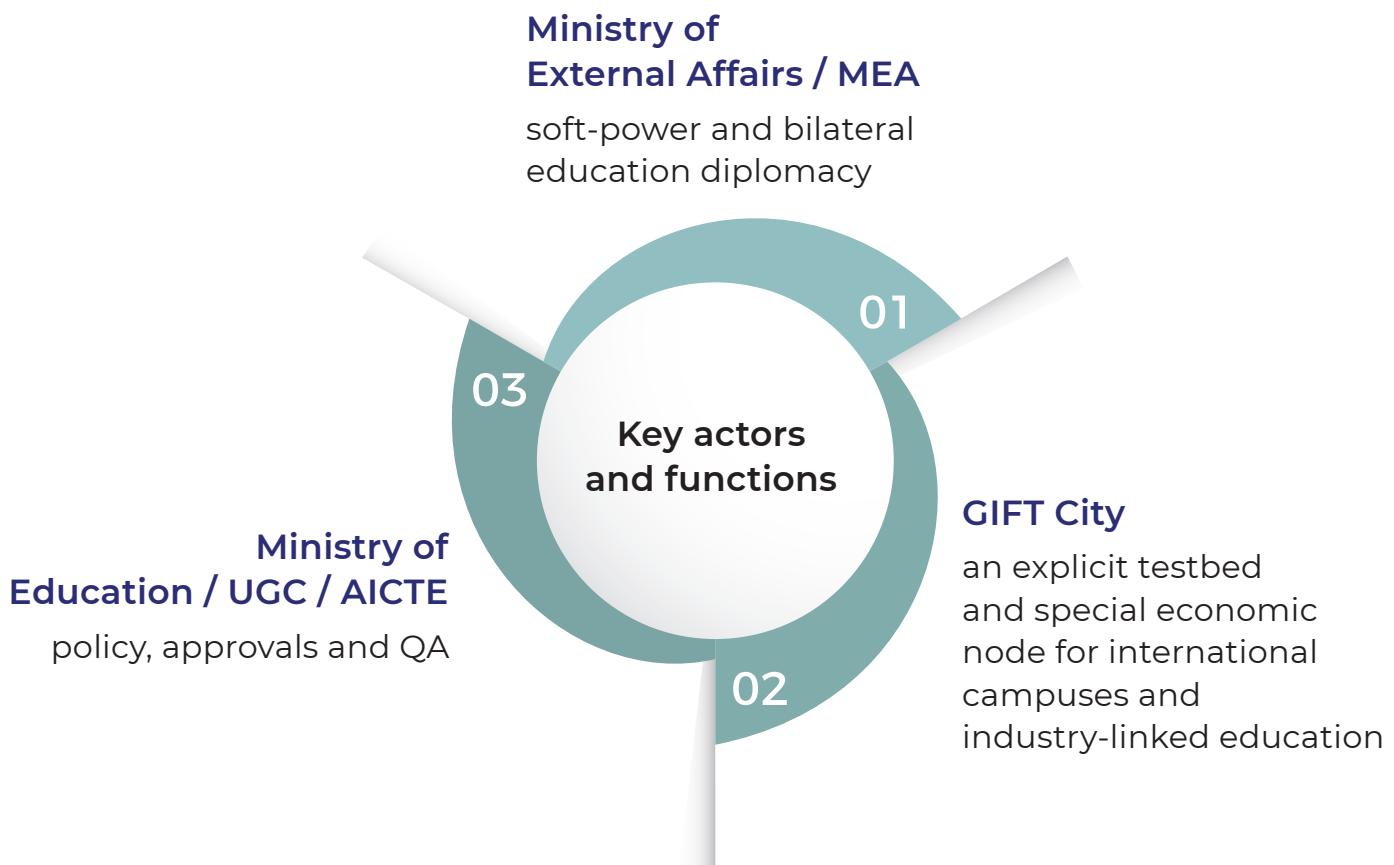
- **India's digital infrastructure and the National Digital University (NDU) / ABC**

Mechanisms like the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and the NDU hub-and-spoke concept create an architecture for recognition, portability and stackability of credits — a major enabler for cross-institution pathways and digital TNE.

- **Virtual exchanges, micro-credentials and AI integration**

Universities and platforms (Coursera, edX, local aggregators) are mainstreaming micro-credentials and employer-aligned certificates. AI can personalise learning and scale assessment, but institutions must embed QA for integrity and learning outcomes.

Strategic role of Indian government and agencies



- **Study in India, Education India & NIRF**

Study in India supports inbound student recruitment (portal, scholarships), while NIRF provides benchmarking — together these instruments support positioning India as both host and exporter of education services.

- **South-South partnerships**

Government diplomacy is encouraging South-South TNE (India with Africa, Southeast Asia, Middle East) — these markets can be high-impact because of cultural/price fit and shared development goals. Recent diplomatic outreach and scholarship targets (e.g., France aiming to scale Indian enrollments via bilateral initiatives) also show demand diversification.



Agent ecosystem and recruitment interface

Role of education agents

Agents remain a major channel for student recruitment, pathway advising, and pre-departure services — but they are a vulnerability if poorly regulated. International jurisdictions (UK, Canada, Australia) emphasise codes of conduct, training and accreditation for agents; India must incorporate these lessons when scaling inbound/outbound recruitment.

Need for ethical, transparent practices

Institutions should: require agent training/certification, publish commission models, conduct random audits of leads, and co-brand communications to minimise misinformation. Government/sector bodies could build a national agent registry and complaint redressal.

Case studies of emerging models (short)

Deakin University — GIFT City (India)

Deakin launched a GIFT City campus offering postgraduate programs (e.g., Business Analytics, Cyber Security) as a first-mover branch campus model designed to replicate Australian academic standards locally. This demonstrates an Australia-India campus model anchored by industry proximity.

University of Wollongong (UOW) — GIFT City

UOW India opened a GIFT City operation focusing on fintech and related master's programs — another Australian example showing a cluster approach to branch campuses.

UK-India Education & Research Initiative (UKIERI)

Longstanding cooperation platform that has supported mobility, joint research and capacity building — an example of bilateral TNE and academic diplomacy. (Use such frameworks as scaffolding for deeper institutional partnerships.)

Indo-French Campus Initiative / France outreach

France has set explicit targets to grow Indian student numbers and uses scholarships, language support and institute-level ties as part of education diplomacy — an example of national strategy paired with institutional linkages.

Global examples India can learn from



Malaysia (Monash Malaysia, Nottingham Malaysia) — long experience hosting foreign branch campuses with policy, industry and fee models that achieved scale and local integration.



Singapore — selective, research-oriented host with tight QA and strong industry linkages (useful lessons on governance, city-scale tech clusters and talent pipelines).



UAE (NYU Abu Dhabi, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi) — government-financed international campuses as part of an innovation/knowledge cluster strategy.

Strategic recommendations for sustainable TNE partnerships

Align each partnership with national goals (NEP / Vision 2047). Ensure programs feed local priorities (skills, research areas, economic corridors) and use ABC/NCrF for credit portability.

Prioritise quality & learning outcomes over headline numbers. Insist on transparent QA, local student protections and published equivalence of curricula. Use international QA partners and local accreditation in tandem.

Structured IP & curriculum agreements from day one. Define ownership, commercialization revenue share, and dispute resolution clauses to avoid later breakdowns.

Start digital-first, scale to co-located models. Pilot micro-credentials, stacked articulations and blended masters with robust metrics before committing to capital-intensive campuses

Ethical recruitment & agent governance. Create a national code/registry for agents, require training and disclosure of commissions, and monitor marketing claims.

Diversify partnerships (reciprocal mobility + research). Encourage not just inbound campuses but Indian campuses abroad and research networks with shared leadership & funding.

Financial models that balance access & sustainability. Blend public seed funding, scholarships, industry partnerships and tiered fee models to keep programs affordable while viable.



Conclusion - reimagining India's global education identity

TNE offers India an opportunity to move from being primarily a supplier of talent outward to an integrated provider of regional education — both inbound and outbound — built around quality, reciprocity, and employability. The policy window opened by NEP 2020 and the UGC's regulatory pathways creates a rare chance to design partnerships that are purposeful (research focus, skill outcomes), transparent (QA, agent conduct), and innovative (digital & micro-credential stacks). If India executes a calibrated strategy — protect students, insist on quality, and build institutional reciprocity — TNE can be a catalyst turning India into a global education hub by 2047 rather than just a source of students.



RESEARCH

THANK YOU

We trust this report provides valuable insights to enhance your engagement and refine your strategy for impactful outcomes. Should you have any questions or require additional support, please feel free to reach out to our Research & Advisory team.

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