

Review of: "Selection of an engineering institution: Students' perceptions of choice characteristics and suitability under the COVID-19 pandemic"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review comments on the paper entitled "Selection of an engineering institution: Students' perceptions of choice characteristics and suitability under the COVID-19 pandemic"

1. India today has a large number of engineering colleges with a total capacity of approx. 1.1 million students as per the AICTE statistics. While there are a lot of concerns expressed by different stakeholders on the quality of engineering education, there is very little scholarly research and publications on engineering education in India. In this context, this paper is a welcome attempt. However, the authors may take into consideration the following suggestions to improve and position the paper effectively.
2. The paper makes sweeping generalizations in many places. For instance, in page 1 (abstract / background) the statement "COVID-19 has impacted Indian engineering institutions (EIs) enormously. It has tightened its knot around EIs that forced their previous half-shut shades completely down to prevent the risk of spreading COVID-19". As per the AICTE statistics, there has been a decline in the number of engineering colleges since 2015 due to reasons other than COVID (it may not be due to lack of demand). It will be useful if the authors can use AICTE statistics to point out if there has been any acceleration in the closure of engineering institutes during the COVID period, and if so in which parts of the country, and whether in urban or rural areas or whether institutions with PG or only UG. In the same abstract the paper claims that institutions have struggled to rebound after crisis. There is no reference to support this argument in the Indian context. Which crisis has affected growth of engineering institutes, and whether COVID is going to follow a similar path?
3. While understanding student preferences in institute selection is a useful piece of research, the paper makes claims on the selection of engineering institutes without clarifying the type of institutions that have been surveyed. In India the choices are affected by the admission process of different types of engineering institutions. All the centrally funded and state government funded institutions have a centralized admission process where students can put in their preferences, but the seat allocation is driven by several other applicants and their choices. The paper needs to specify if the focus is on private deemed / autonomous universities etc. It will be useful if the authors provide details on what type of institutions, the ranking as per NIRF, and what is the ranking of students, if any. In addition, institute selection may also be driven by parents. The paper gives an impression as if students make the choices entirely by themselves or through information received from the website, alumni, etc. The choice to take computer science may not be due to covid. It may be based on a perception of market demand from parents and students.

4. It would be more useful if the paper can compare the choice under COVID with choices post COVID in the same institutions. Are the choices permanently altered, with students preferring local institutions of slightly lesser quality or branch compared to farther institutions? It will be useful if the paper can look at the impact of student choices in the wake of National Education Policy 2020.
5. Some sentences such as “COVID-19 pandemic situation, which repositions themselves to govern student-centric strategies instituted for the overall suitability of EI under pandemic conditions” may be revised to improve readability. Also, it will be useful if the paper clearly defines what is meant by “inclusion diversity”. Similarly, “making an upswing for interest itself is a challenge”.
6. Some references cited could not be found in the reference list - Kamokoty et al., 2015; Lakal et al., 2018. Not sure about the difference between two references - Regan & DeWitt, 2015a and b. Some statements are being made without support. For instance, “Despite the fact that demand for engineers remains relatively high, few students are willing to pursue engineering education”.
7. The authors may clarify what is meant by inconsistent set in “It is associated with a multifaceted and inconsistent set of characteristics belonging to students and institutions (Obermeit, 2012) (D. Chapman, 1981)”.
8. Some adjectives could be avoided such as “vilest positions” in the statement “Today, most engineering institutions (EIs) in India with lower enrollments are in the vilest positions...”
9. In several cases, general literature on higher education is being cited to substantiate points on Engineering Education in India. It is important to specify if there is similarity in the context to make such claims.
10. In the statement “This drift is reflected in engineering enrollments, where the percentage appearing in undergraduate engineering studies was relatively very small (17% for the academic year 2019-2020) (AICTE New Delhi, 2021).” It is not clear if the number refers to final exam or entrance exam.