

Emerging Global Education Trends

From funding to technology, take a look at some key factors that have the potential to revolutionise the international education scenario in 2013

Nearly 2,00,000 Indian students are studying abroad at present. This reflects the aspirations of Indian students to gain a foreign education. However, new trends indicate that they might have to face several hurdles in realising their dreams in the future.



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International higher education by its very nature sits at an intersection of socio-cultural, economic and geopolitical variables. Over the years, we have seen the complex interaction of the factors that influence patterns of student mobility, institutional strategies and national policies. At present governments in many countries are facing fiscal challenges which will continue to trickle down to funding cuts in the higher education sector, resulting in greater interest of universities to recruit higher fee-paying international students. But tighter immigration policies could hinder their ability to attract students. In this scenario, technological innovations like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are offering alternative pathways to international students. In 2013, MOOCs will continue to confront many barriers. However, they will also mature from an irrational exuberance to a more viable alternative for earning academic credits. They are unlikely to completely stop international students from going abroad. But the unique confluence of content, delivery, quality and cost could transform expectations of a particular segment of 'glocal' students.

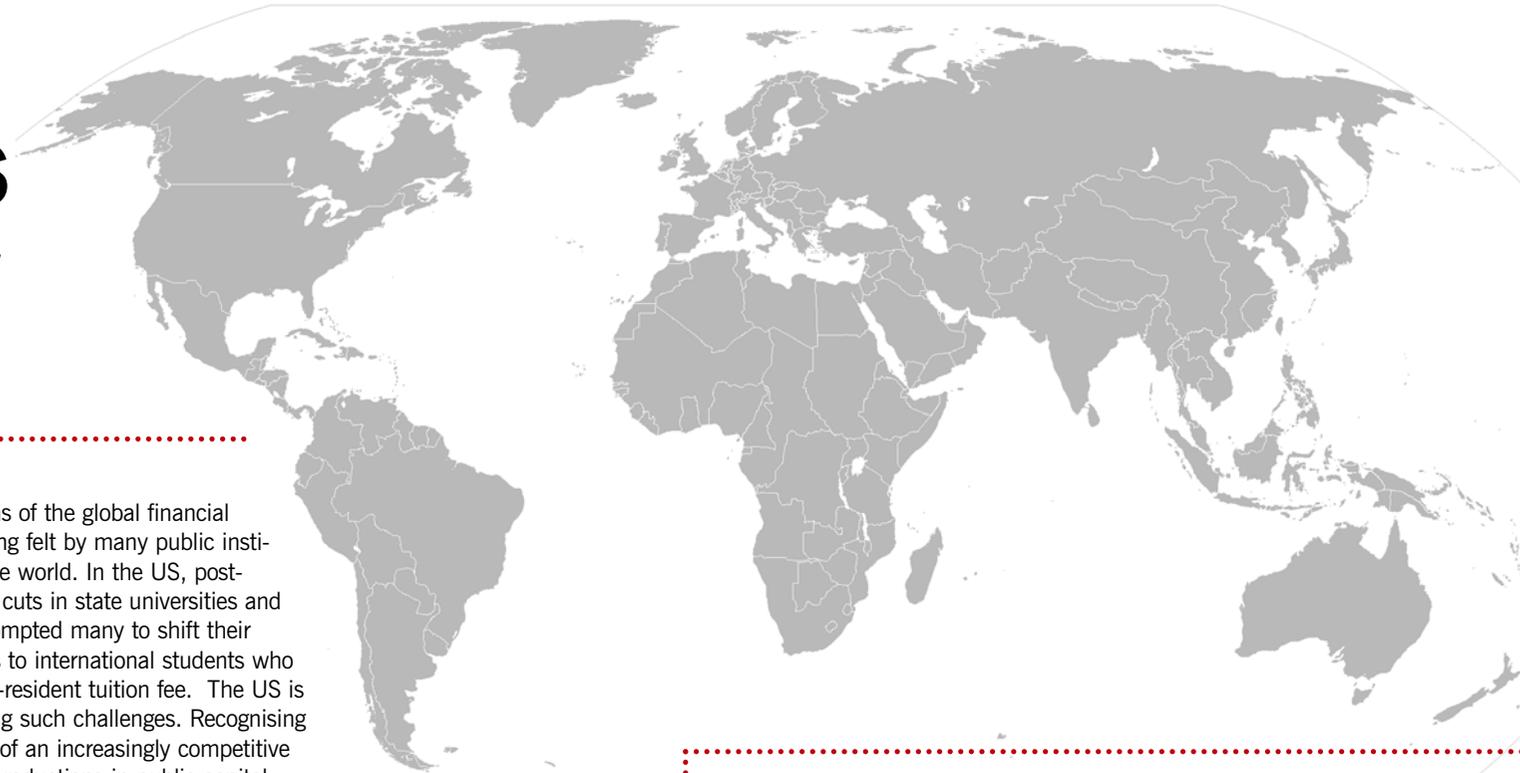
In my opinion, 2013 will be a year in which the higher education sector, under increasing pressure to justify its value, will face more regulations and greater expectations to become self-sufficient. At the same time, it will see the opportunities and challenges presented by technology-enabled models like MOOCs. Indian students should be aware of these global trends to maximise the opportunities and better adapt their preferences and priorities for studying abroad. Adaptability to do more with less will be the hallmark of success in the coming years.

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Funding

The reverberations of the global financial crisis are still being felt by many public institutions around the world. In the US, post-recession budget cuts in state universities and colleges have prompted many to shift their recruitment focus to international students who pay a higher non-resident tuition fee. The US is not alone in facing such challenges. Recognising the "background of an increasingly competitive environment and reductions in public capital funding", the Higher Education Funding Council for England warned about the financial health of British universities and said they may need to increase their surpluses. Australia also adopted a 'demand-driven' model by abolishing the enrolment quota system and replacing it with Student Entitlement Funding. This scenario has spurred more competition among universities for government-funded students, because increased intake of

students can bring in additional revenue. Moreover, Australian universities is set to face \$500 million in cuts in research funds. These budgetary issues will continue to trickle down to the higher education sector in 2013, resulting in a scenario of greater expectations of self-sufficiency from institutions and a high interest in recruiting foreign students.



Technology

This year the evolution of MOOCs will offer cost-effective academic pathways. The most talked-about educational innovation of 2012 was Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. Coursera, which started in April 2012, already has two million student signed up for its courses.

At the beginning of 2012, MOOCs were virtually unknown. By the end of the year, they had compelled many leading universities worldwide to voluntarily or involuntarily integrate them in their academic strategies. The most recent entrant in this frenzy is Future Learn — a partnership of 12 UK universities led by the Open University (OU). With more than 2,50,000 students, the OU is the largest academic institution in the UK and a pioneer in distance learning. Even an established player like the OU could not remain immune to the competitive threat from MOOCs and had to find a way to respond.

Going forward, MOOCs are likely to mature towards an alternative for earning academic credits. This could be especially valuable for many Indian students who want to save on the cost of an international higher education degree or for those who simply want to experiment with different academic courses before applying to a foreign university.



Visa Regulations

Another consequence of the global financial crisis has been the increase in unemployment. At the same time, there have been multiple cases of visa frauds by international students. This has led leading destinations for international education to respond with more stringent immigration and visa regulations.

For example, in an effort to prevent 'bogus students' from entering the country, the UK plans to interview nearly 1,00,000 prospective foreign students and Canada intends to tighten its regulations on acceptance of foreign students by career colleges. In the US, a previous announcement about the accreditation of intensive English programmes and conditional admission requirements also indicate intentions to mitigate immigration-related risks.

Overall, the student visa-related scandals have created immigration dilemmas for some countries in protecting the integrity of their immigration system without tarnishing the welcoming image for genuine international students.

In 2013, regulatory environments are not expected to loosen due to an increasing demand from stakeholders to justify the costs and benefits of higher education. This will result in an increase in the expectations around quality assurance and risk management of students and the immigration system.