

STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RURAL COLLEGES OF DISTRICT LUDHIANA

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Abstract

Higher Education is a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of the country. Indian higher education system is the third largest system in the world. There has been huge quantitative increase in the number of institutions and enrolments. This has lead to deterioration of higher education system. But the condition is even worse in rural areas. So, to study the status of higher education in rural areas, present study was undertaken. Findings of the study revealed a dismissal picture of infrastructure in rural colleges, outdated curriculum which has no relevance according to market needs and finally graduates passing out from rural colleges do not possess necessary practical and soft skills in getting job.

Keywords: higher education, rural, infrastructure, curriculum, college-industry interface, employment.

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1. Introduction

Higher Education is the most powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society for the future. Higher Education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills ^[1]. Higher Education is a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of the country. Indian higher education system is one of the largest in the world. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges with 0.1 million students at the time India attained independence ^[2]. According to AISHE (2015-16) ^[3], there are 799 Universities, 39071 colleges and 11923 Stand Alone Institutions. Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 34.6 million with 18.6 million boys and 16 million girls. So, there has been 40 times increase in the number of universities and 78 times increase in the number of colleges since independence. Such a tremendous increase both in terms of number of institutions and enrolment has led to the deterioration of standard of higher education in the country. Today our higher education system is suffering from numerous challenges. ‘Undergraduate education, which accounts for about 85 per cent of the enrolled students, is the largest component of our higher education system. It is imparted through colleges where students enrol themselves for getting graduate degrees in Arts, Science or Commerce’ courses ^[4]

Like rest of the country, higher education sector in Punjab too has experienced the proliferation of higher education institutions. ‘Its rapid expansion is due to a higher pressure on enrolment in colleges and universities without proportionate expansion of essential infrastructure facilities’ ^[5]. This has resulted in the deterioration of quality of higher education in the state. The quantitative expansion of higher education in the state has been unplanned and unbalanced. Though there has been exorbitant rise in the number of institutions and enrolments but ‘the facilities they provide, however, appear to be inadequate to meet the present requirement, especially for the population of rural areas, as these are all located in urban areas’ ^[6]. ‘A number of problems such as imbalanced and unplanned institutional growth, lack of infrastructural facilities, financial constraints, placement of students, irrelevant course content’ etc. are being faced by higher education institutions ^[7]. Higher education is basically an urban phenomenon in Punjab. Good

quality colleges and universities having adequate infrastructure, well qualified faculty etc. are mostly located in urban areas. Majority of the colleges located in rural areas are 'housed in inferior buildings structures, have poor libraries and labs, do not have adequate number of teachers, there is paucity of funds etc. all these factors together account for a lower quality of education ^[8]. Students passing out from these colleges are not able to compete with their urban counterparts due to various reasons. One of the major reasons is the lack of proficiency in English.

To study the status of higher education in rural colleges, District Ludhiana has been chosen to study the status of higher education in rural areas. District Ludhiana has been chosen because it is the largest district of Punjab and is thickly populated and a big industrial hub with ample amount of employment opportunities available for youth. It also has the maximum number of higher education institutions. But for the purpose of this study only general education colleges or arts and science colleges have been taken.

Objectives:

- I. To study the status of infrastructure facilities available in rural colleges of district Ludhiana.
- II. To study the relevance of curriculum of general education courses being taught in rural colleges of district Ludhiana.
- III. To study the employment opportunities available for rural students studying in colleges located in rural areas.

Delimitation of the study:

- I. The study was delimited only to government and government aided (general education colleges) located in rural areas of district Ludhiana only.
- II. Sample included only the teachers teaching in these rural colleges located in district Ludhiana.

2. Research method: Descriptive–survey technique was used in the present study.

Tools used:

A self-constructed questionnaire was prepared and administered to teachers of different colleges. Other than primary sources of data, secondary sources of data were also used to collect data.

Sample: Random sampling technique was used in the present study. The sample consisted of 60 respondents i.e. teachers teaching in rural colleges of District Ludhiana. A sample of 30 teachers was taken from Government College and another sample of 30 teachers was taken from government aided college.

3. Analysis and interpretation

Percentage analysis was applied in order present the results of the present study. Objective wise analysis and interpretation of results are as follows:

Objective I: To study the status of infrastructure facilities available in rural colleges of district Ludhiana.

A total of five questions related to the availability of various infrastructural facilities were asked from the teachers of different colleges. A question regarding the availability of Wi-Fi facility in their college was asked to the teachers. Majority of them i.e. 83.3% responded in negative stating that Wi-Fi facility was not available in their college. While 16.67% of them responded positively stating the availability of Wi-Fi facility in their college. Though state government claims to start Wi-Fi facilities in all the government colleges across the state. But nothing seems to be happening at the ground level.

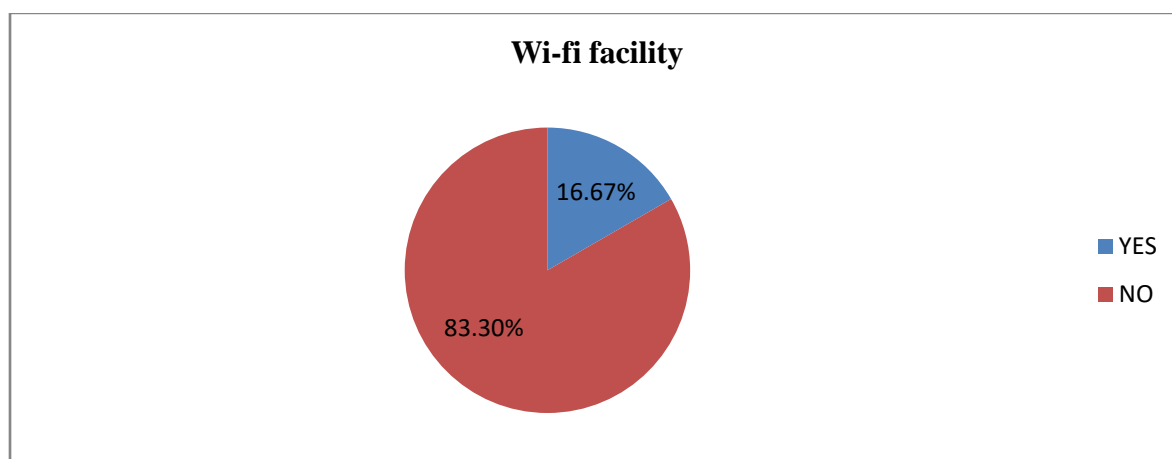


Fig.1: showing opinions of teachers regarding availability of Wi-Fi facility in their college.

- Another question was asked to inquire about the availability of sufficient number of classrooms in their department. Majority of them i.e. 63.33% responded negatively stating that

their department lacks sufficient number of classrooms. As a result there is overcrowding of the classrooms in which the student-teacher ratio goes up to 70:1. During an informal conversation with the teachers, it was found that the main reason behind the dearth of classrooms was lack of sufficient funds. It was also found that in one of the government colleges, class eleven and twelfth had to be stopped to make way for starting new post graduate courses as the college did not had sufficient funds to construct new classrooms or new building. Hence, it's a total loss for poor students who take admission in these colleges due to their nominal fee structure.

- While 36.67% were assure regarding the presence of sufficient number of classrooms in their department.

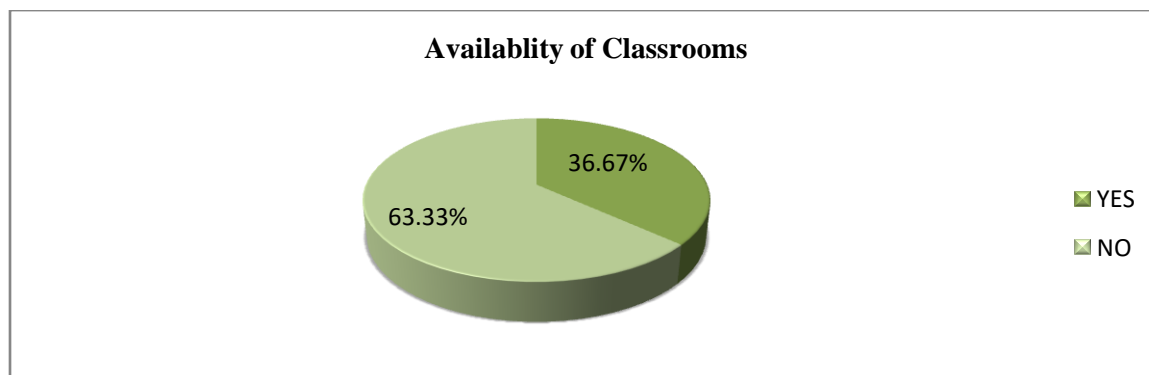


Fig.2: Showing opinions of teachers regarding availability of sufficient number of classrooms in their department

- A question regarding the number of laboratories in the department was asked from the teachers of various departments. Majority of them i.e. 60% responded in negative stating that there weren't adequate numbers of laboratories in their department and 40% were positive about number of laboratories in the department. However, in this question view of teachers from different departments varied from each other. The science faculty responded positively stating that there were adequate numbers of laboratories in their department. On the other hand, teachers belonging to language departments responded by saying that laboratories were not applicable in their case.

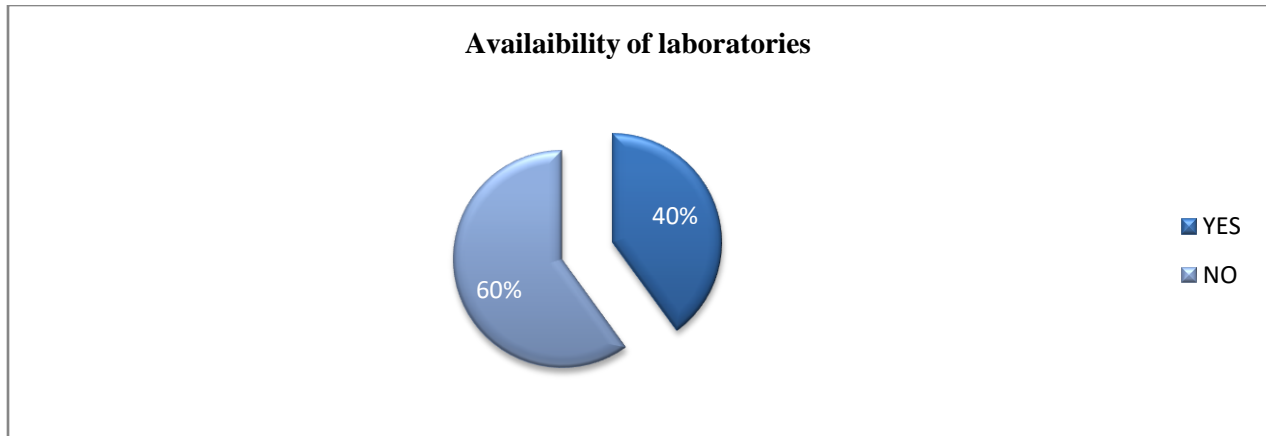


Fig.3: showing opinions of teachers regarding number of laboratories in the department

- If they responded positively to the above question, another question was asked to enquire about whether materials, chemicals and apparatus present in the laboratories were regularly upgraded or not. Exactly half of them i.e. 50% responded positively stating that materials, chemicals and apparatus were present in the laboratories but on the contrary 50% of the respondents responded in negative stating that most of the materials and apparatus in the laboratories have become obsolete and is of no use and needs immediate up gradation. As a result, this is seriously hampering the whole teaching-learning process because practical part of the course takes a backseat in the absence of sufficient apparatus and chemicals in the laboratories. So, views of respondents seem to be equally divided on this issue.

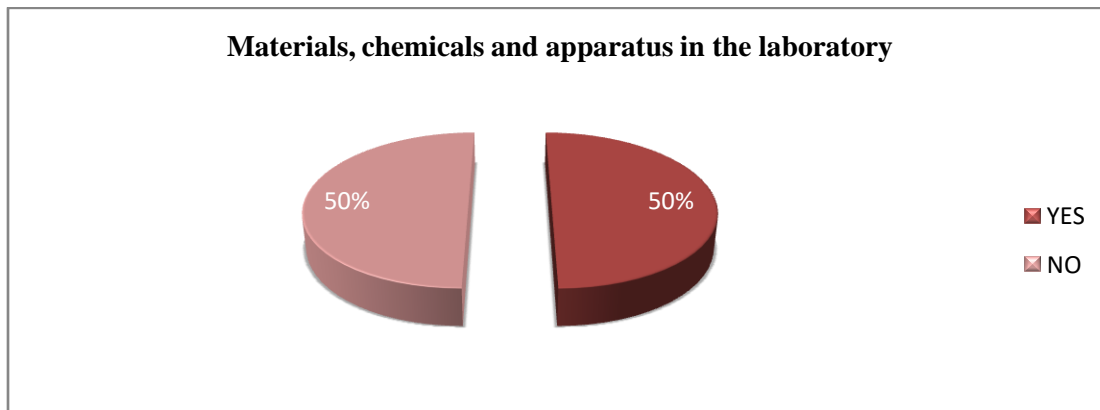


Fig.4: showing opinions of teachers regarding availability of materials, chemicals and apparatus present in the laboratories

- Lastly, a question was asked to find out whether full time lab assistant/technician was available in the lab or not. In response to this question, majority of them i.e. 66.67% assured the

presence of full time lab assistant/technician in the lab. For the efficient working of the lab, full time lab assistant has to be present at all times in the lab for successful conducting of practical's because only the lab assistant knows where all the apparatus, chemicals and other materials are kept in the laboratory. Whereas 33.33% responded in negative stating that there was absence of full time lab assistant/technician in the lab.

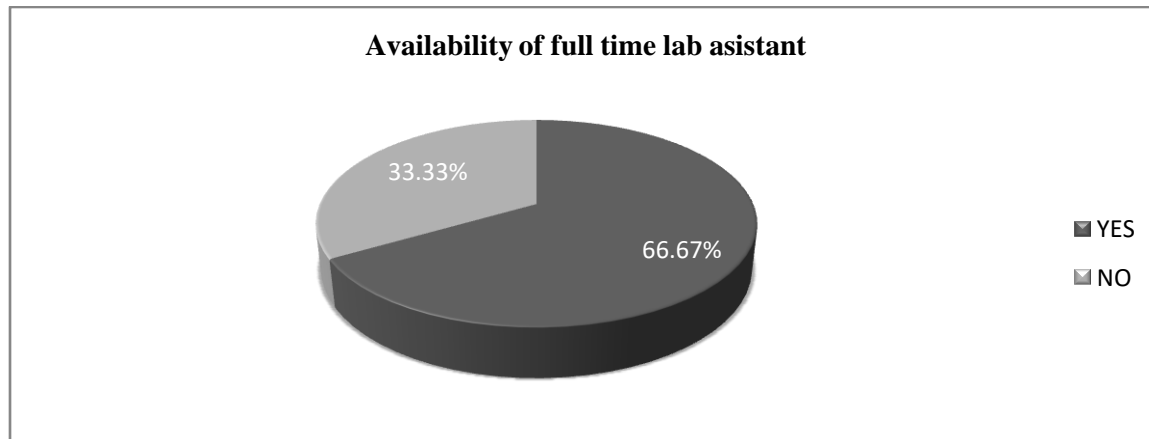


Fig.5: showing opinions of teachers regarding availability of full time lab assistant/technician was available in the lab.

From the above findings, it is very clear that rural colleges lack sufficient infrastructure facilities which are adversely affecting the standard of higher education in these colleges. It is a well known fact that majority of country's youth resides in rural areas. It is also well known that if our country wants to make progress and make it to the list of developed countries, our higher education system needs to be strengthened and its quality needs to be improved so that it becomes at par with the global standards. For that the foremost thing which our government needs to do is to strengthen or raise the standard of higher education in rural areas. Standard of higher education cannot be raised unless and until there is sufficient infrastructure available in rural colleges. It was observed and found out by the investigator during her study that there was insufficient number of classrooms in rural colleges as a result existing classrooms become overloaded with students which hampers the overall teaching learning process and deteriorates the standard of higher education in the colleges. There is no facility of Wi-Fi in colleges. In this technologically driven world how one can think without computer technology. So, it has become utmost essential to provide Wi-Fi facility in rural colleges so they can keep themselves abreast with the latest developments all across the world. Laboratories should be kept up to date. Materials, apparatus, chemicals and other lab wares should be regularly up graded. Strengthen

basic infrastructure and meet their basic needs like books and journals, scientific equipment, staff, campus development, teaching aids etc. required for proper functioning ^[9]. Today, 'classroom lectures are pre-recorded and uploaded to be accessed by students at their comfort. Class time is instead utilised for creating more in-depth learning experiences through group activities, problem solving and interactive learning' ^[10]

'Develop adequate bandwidth to ensure fast and uninterrupted connectivity for higher education institutions across geographies. Build computer labs and increase availability of laptops and low-cost access devices' ^[11]. It is imperative that universities provide broadband connectivity to all students and teachers in campuses.

Objective II: To study the relevance of curriculum of general education courses being taught in rural colleges of district Ludhiana.

Following questions were asked from the teachers of different colleges related to the relevance of curriculum of various courses being taught in rural colleges.

'Are you satisfied with the curriculum being followed by you in your classroom?' To this 80% said 'no' whereas 20% said 'yes'. So, majority of them responded negatively stating that they were not at all satisfied with the curriculum being taught by them.

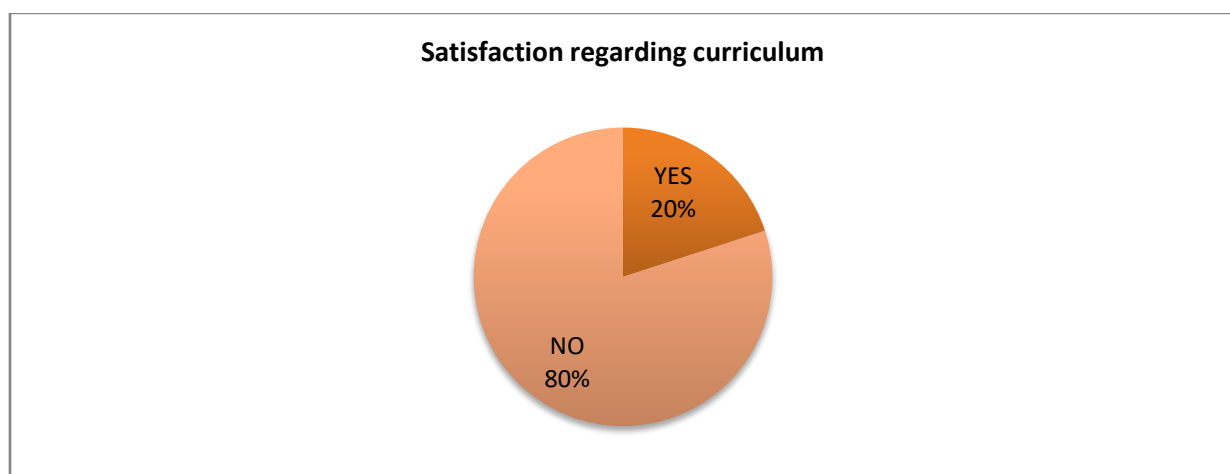


Fig.6: showing opinions of teachers regarding satisfaction of curriculum being taught in classrooms.

Another question ‘Do you update curriculum from time to time to suit the present needs of the society?’ Majority of them i.e. 75% said ‘no’ and 25% said ‘yes’ stating that they were not in a position to update curriculum on their own as they have to follow the syllabi as such as it is prescribed by the university to which the college is affiliated. This is because colleges are not autonomous bodies who can revise curriculum on their own. As a result, college teachers cannot update the curriculum or make any changes on their own. They also said that they are not consulted while framing of the curriculum. They have no say in the syllabi formation.

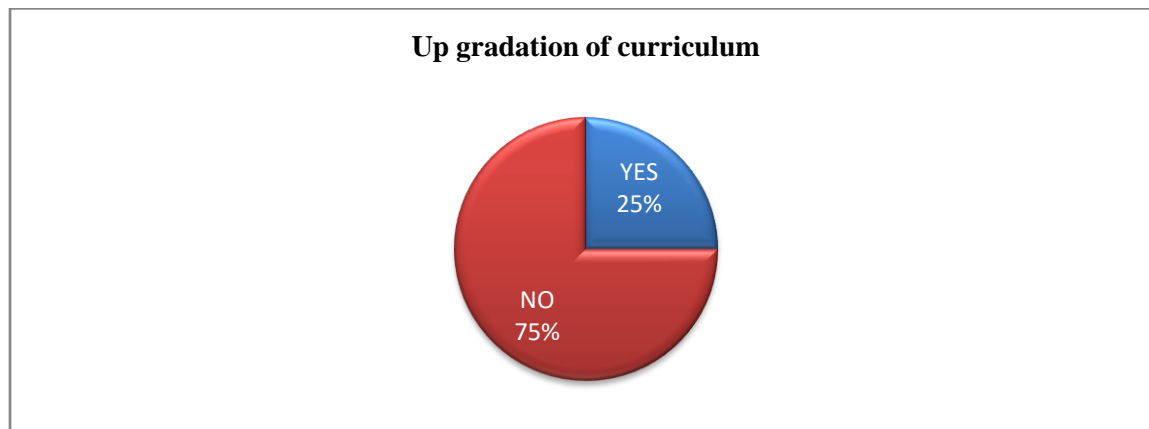


Fig.7: showing opinions of teachers regarding up gradation of curriculum from time to time.

Lastly, a question was asked to find out whether there college has started any specific vocational courses especially meant for rural students. To this, majority of them i.e. 86.67% responded negatively saying that there are no such courses available for rural students. While a meagre 13.33% affirmed that there college had started specific vocational courses especially meant for rural students

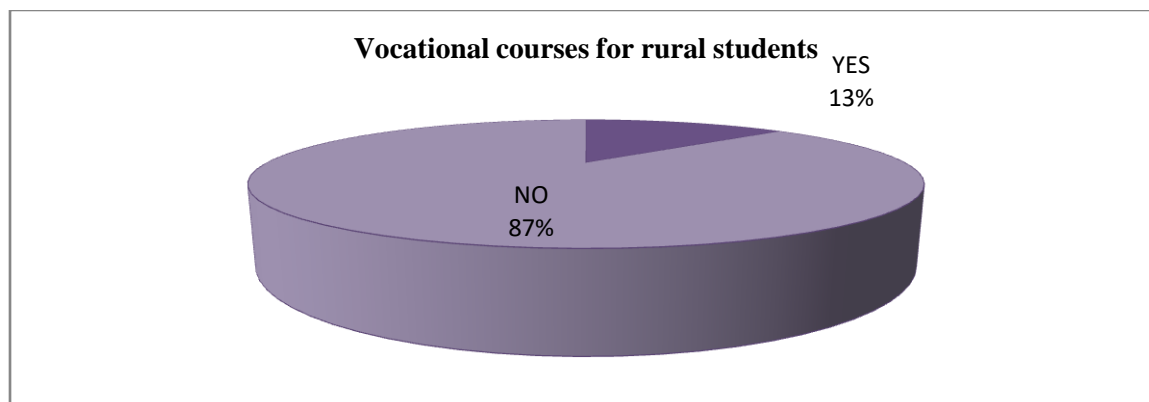


Fig.8: showing opinions of teachers regarding starting of any specific vocational courses especially meant for rural students.

Hence from the above discussion, it is quite clear that, the curriculum of most of the courses being followed in the rural colleges has become outdated, irrelevant and totally meaningless keeping in mind today's market needs. So, it needs immediate up gradation.

Those courses should be introduced which are according to market needs. Curriculum should be designed in consultation with industry experts. There should be appropriate combination of theory and practical methods in pedagogy. Provision for compulsory internship should be made before the final year while designing curriculum. Pedagogy should be such that it 'focuses on developing critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills, while emphasizing student learning outcomes' ^[12]. Short term courses, certificate course or one year diploma those are vocational centred should be introduced in field of agriculture in rural colleges so that our youth can take the maximum benefit of these courses so that they can generate an employment of themselves.

Objective III: To study the employment opportunities available for rural students studying in colleges located in rural areas.

Following questions were asked from the teachers related to the employment opportunities available for rural students studying in rural colleges.

'Do you think that the graduates who pass out from the colleges of Punjab have sufficient practical knowledge for placement in different jobs?' Majority of them i.e. 65% responded in negative stating that graduates who pass out from the colleges generally do not have sufficient practical knowledge for placement in different jobs. There were various reasons cited by them. Some of them were the absence of soft skills i.e. poor communicating in English, lack of problem solving skills etc. needed to get into the job, curriculum being taught in the classrooms is mostly theoretical in nature with negligible practical training, no workshop or practical sessions by industry experts are organised in the colleges, curriculum is not aligned according to market needs, complete absence of college-industry partnership, absence of any placement cell in the college etc. But 35% of the teacher's gave a positive opinion regarding the graduates who

pass out from the colleges of Punjab have sufficient practical knowledge for placement in different jobs.

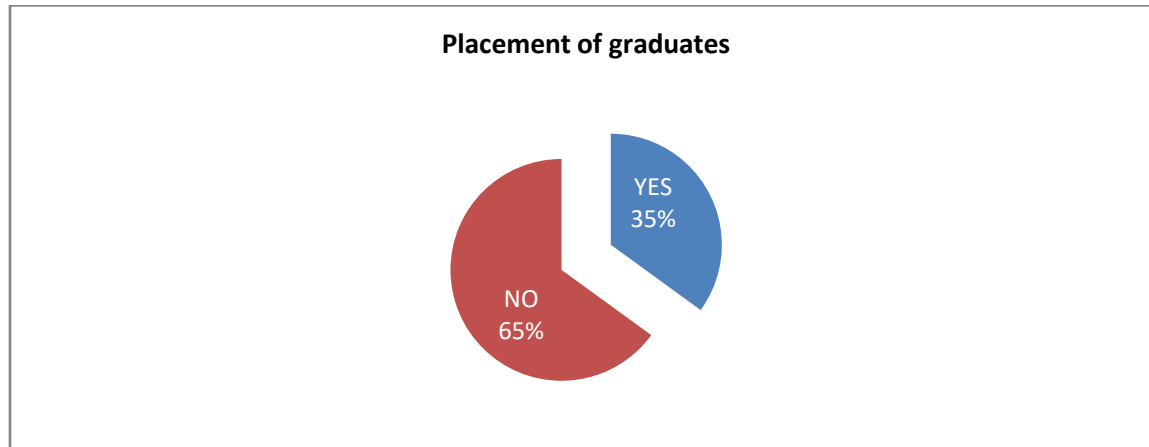


Fig. 9: showing opinions of teachers regarding graduates who pass out from the colleges of Punjab have sufficient practical knowledge for placement in different jobs or not.

Another question ‘Do you think that students passing out from private colleges are better placed than government college students?’ A vast majority of them i.e. 70% responded positively stating that private college pass outs are better placed than government college pass outs. The possible reasons cited by them were: private colleges have better sources in terms of funds than government colleges; existence of placement cell in the private colleges which helps in the on campus placement of students; absence of any such placement cell in the college; private college pass outs possess necessary skills needed in job market; regular workshops and training sessions by industry experts are organised by private colleges; students passing out from government colleges do not possess necessary skills which can help them to secure a job; lack of practical training in the government colleges; curriculum of various courses being taught in the government colleges does not match with the requirements of job market. While only 30% of the respondents disagreed stating that students passing out from private colleges are not better placed than Government College students.

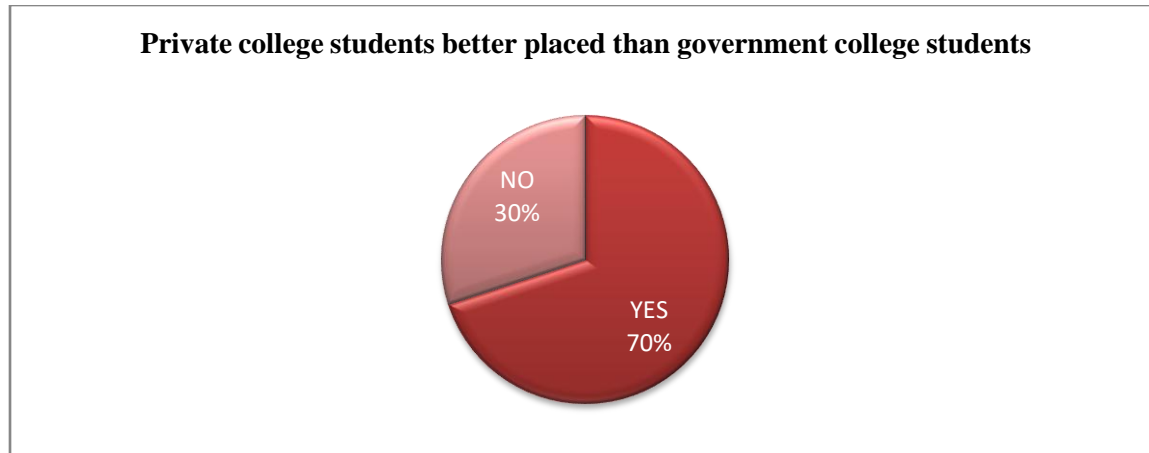


Fig.10: showing opinions of teachers regarding better placement of private college students than government colleges.

Hence, from the above discussion it is quite clear that there is lack of employment opportunities for rural students.

So, from the above discussion it can be said that private colleges impart ‘technical know-how on the one hand and soft skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills on the other to produce well-rounded industry leaders’. This ‘increases access to employment and to a more equitable society’ ^[13].

4. Conclusion:

It is clear from the above discussion that the system of higher education in Punjab is facing serious challenges. It needs a systematic overhaul, so that we can impart good quality higher education to our rural populace without diluting academic standards. ‘This is imperative because the transformation of economy and society in the 21st century would depend, in significant part, on the spread and the quality of education among our people, particularly in the sphere of higher education’ ^[14].

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