


Workforce online conference **March 29, 2011**

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Feature: Recruiters in India Put Out the Call to American Workers

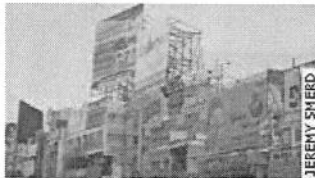
Future Shock

India's college system is suffering from a deficit in instructors with Ph.D.s, which threatens to derail the country's plan for a higher-tech outsourcing future. 'What has happened in Indian education is that everybody is busy plucking the fruit off the trees and no one is planting the trees,' one expert says.

By **Jeremy Smerd**

India is a country with 1.1 billion people—480 million are under the age of 18 and nearly 3 million graduate college each year. But come 2010, experts are predicting a shortfall of a half-million employable IT workers.

Nasscom, the Indian software industry lobby group, has predicted that unless significant changes are made to India's educational infrastructure, the country will not be able to adequately fill the estimated 2.3 million jobs that will have been generated by the start of the millennium's second decade.



Billboards like these in the city of Hyderabad are everywhere in India, advertising for schools that offer courses in accent reduction, English speaking, computer programming and medical transcription.

This deficit underscores a larger concern shared by Indian executives, academics and consultants about the need to improve India's education system in order to attract more Ph.D.-level teachers to academia in a time of unparalleled economic boom.

Schools pop up daily to train workers to speak English like an American or transcribe a British doctor's notes. But in the rush to meet that demand, the quality of teaching has decreased, says Anita Belani, the country head of Watson Wyatt India.

"Now there are MBAs coming out of the woodwork," she says. "Every school is offering an MBA. But what skills have you really acquired? I think that is something everybody wants to talk about: the quality of our education. We have lots of engineers and MBAs, but are they really ready to take on the issues?"

India's biggest educational challenge is its paucity of Ph.D.-level college instructors, experts say. The abundance of high-paying jobs has diminished the allure of a career in higher education. With few Ph.D.s left to teach, India had to reduce new technical college admissions in order to maintain the prescribed student-teacher ratio of around 15-to-1, according to the All India Council of Technical Education, the federal regulator that controls India's technical education.

"What has happened in Indian education is that everybody is busy plucking the fruit off the trees and no one is planting the trees," says Shyam Sunder, a professor of economics and finance at the Yale School of Management. "In a country of 1.1 billion, it's not very hard to get 100,000 smart kids a year. But whether you can get 2 million a year without good education, that is my question; that is my concern."

Sunder worries that at a time when Indian companies are becoming increasingly competitive globally, not enough is being done by corporations to invest in the academic institutions, foundations and think tanks that produce innovative ideas, products and people.

"The most executives can see is 'We can pick up the smart kids and give them two months of training so they can do a job in a cubicle,' " he says. "But unless they recognize the need to invest in the educational system, that is not going to last."