



# The Role of Commercial Diplomacy in Promoting India as a Destination for Higher Education: A Case Study of Sudan

B.S. Mubarak<sup>1</sup> and Manish Sinha<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

There are several studies on internationalization of higher Education in India. However, most of these studies are based on initiatives that have been taken up by private universities in India. Indian Embassies and Consulates (Indian Missions) around the world play an important role in promoting India as a destination for higher education among foreign students. Indian Missions become the first interface for foreign students travelling to India.

Sudan is the third largest African country, with a population of over 45 million. India is one of the preferred destinations for Sudanese students travelling abroad for higher studies. Annually about 1500 students travel to India for higher studies, mainly to Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bangalore. A study was conducted on students who have completed University education in India to understand the role of Commercial Diplomacy and Indian Missions in promoting India as a destination for higher education.

The outcome of the study provides insights into the importance of Commercial Diplomacy and the role of Indian Missions in promoting India as a destination for Higher Education. Outreach events to promote India as a destination for Higher Education and facilitation of Student visas play a major role in students choosing India as a destination for higher education.

*JEL classification:* I25, O53, Z32

*Keywords:* Commercial Diplomacy, Internationalization of Education, Indian Missions abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Faculty of Management, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India.

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding Author, Associate Professor, Symbiosis Centre for Management and Human Resource Development, Pune, India.

## Introduction

There is an unprecedented scale of mobility among international students looking for universities and colleges outside their home countries. Asia has gained popularity as a host region for international students from around the world. India is also becoming popular among foreign students as a destination for higher education. The Indian education system is several millennia old. Premier education institutions of ancient India, such as Takshashila and Nalanda, set very high standards for education and hosted scholars and students from across various parts of the world.

Education has been accorded a very high priority in post-independence India. In the twenty first century, India has become home to some of the finest educational institutions. With a network of over 42,000 colleges and over 1000 universities, India has become an attractive education hub for international students, especially from Africa. (*Source: Study in India*)

One of the focus areas of India's New Education Policy 2020 is to promote India as a global study destination, providing premium education at affordable costs and thereby helping to restore its role as a 'Vishwa Guru'. (*Source: National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of HRD, Government of India*).

There are several studies on internationalization of higher Education in India. However, most of these studies are based on initiatives that have been taken up by private universities in India and by institutions like Association of Indian Universities (AIU). AIU has been conducting annual surveys on internationalization of higher Education in India since 1995.

Indian Embassies and Consulates (Indian Missions) around the world play an important role in promoting India as a destination for higher education among foreign students. In most cases, Indian Missions abroad become the first interface for foreign students who identify India as the destination for higher education. This aspect has hardly been covered in any research study. The Indian Mission in Sudan is a good case study to understand the role of commercial diplomacy in promoting India as a destination for higher education.

Sudan is the third largest African country, with a population of over 45 million. The diplomatic relationship between India and Sudan is deep-rooted and strong. The bilateral relationships between the two countries are very extensive and cordial. India is a preferred destination for Sudanese students for higher studies. Annually about 1500 students travel to India for higher studies, mainly to Chennai, Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi and Bangalore. Presently, there are over 9000 Sudanese students undergoing studies in India. An estimated 100,000 Sudanese have completed their higher Education in India and have carved a niche for themselves in their chosen fields and some of them hold senior positions in Government, and many are successful entrepreneurs. The number of Student visas issued by the Mission is increasing every year. The Indian Mission issued 1775 student visas in 2019 before the Covid pandemic. (*Source: Embassy of India Khartoum*).

There are several factors that influence the decision of students who opt for India as a destination for higher education. The government of India offers long-term scholarships for students around the world, especially in developing countries and least-developed countries in Africa and Southeast Asia. These scholarships are provided through Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) which is an autonomous organisation of the Government of India. ICCR is mandated to promote India's global cultural outreach. To achieve this ICCR organizes cultural exchange events with other countries and their people. ICCR works closely with Indian Missions abroad to achieve its objectives. Scholarships offered by ICCR have been the foundation for exposure of India as a destination for higher education. ICCR offers various

scholarship programmes and annually awards over 3000 scholarships under 26 different schemes to foreign students from about 140 countries. (*Source: Indian Council for Cultural Relations*).

Students who have completed Education through ICCR scholarships occupy key positions in their respective Governments, thereby contributing to the growth and development of their respective countries. These students who have successfully completed their higher studies in India become a source of motivation for youth who aspire to go abroad for higher education. Students in developing countries aspire to obtain scholarships to India through ICCR, failing which, they look for alternative means, including obtaining admissions in reputed private institutions for higher education. Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Scholarships have also recently become very popular among international students who come to India for short-term courses offered by the Ministry of External Affairs. Students who are successful in ITEC courses look upon India as a destination for their post-graduate and doctoral studies.

Several Indian Missions also organize road shows to promote India as a destination for higher studies. With EdCIL now playing an important role in promoting India as a destination of higher Education, Indian Missions abroad partner with EdCIL and receive delegations of Indian universities in foreign countries. Students get the opportunity to interact directly with representatives of Indian universities and hence become aware of the standing of the institutions. This gives them confidence while applying for admission at private institutions in India.

The Study in India (SII) programme of the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India, was started with the aim of promoting India as a hub for international students. This programme has further strengthened India's attractiveness as a destination for higher education. Through its various schemes, SII programme invites international students to pursue their higher Education in India. Scholarships are provided for international students through SII in private institutions also.

## Review of Literature

**Dasic Diplomatija (2013)** states that diplomacy is the main instrument through which countries implement foreign policy through peaceful means. The origins of diplomacy have their foundation in international commerce and trade. Commercial diplomacy is one of the oldest forms of diplomacy and can be dated back to ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. British economist Ricardo in his work (principals of political economy and taxation) in the year 1817, brings out the clear link between politics and economy in the context of international trade. Trade has been the key motivation for interactions among kingdoms and states. The spread of colonialism in Asia was primarily to pursue the economic and business motives of European countries.

**Bayne (2011)** notes that in contemporary times, commercial diplomacy emerged after World War II, when governments started to focus on external economic relations.

**Moons (2013)** conveys that commercial diplomacy is a relatively new academic discipline, and in the last two decades, numerous research studies have been published in international journals.

**Ruel (2013)** emphasizes that when globalization opened new economic opportunities for trade and investments, diplomacy has become a powerful tool for countries to achieve their economic goals. Doing business with countries around the world demands a professional diplomatic team, which can protect the economic interests of a country. Diplomats with a commercial mandate, facilitate access to new markets and help expand business opportunities

for their home country and promote inward investments for their country. The branch of diplomacy that deals with trade promotion, investments and business, in general, is called commercial diplomacy.

**PDAA (Public Diplomacy Association of America)** states that the use of commercial diplomacy to promote one's country as a destination for higher education is a relatively new phenomenon. Higher education has become an instrument of U.S. foreign policy to promote diplomatic relations, economic engagements, social linkages, and various other objectives. German foreign policy aims at promoting German research and innovation goals through its international students. Germany also believes that the students who return to their home country will become unofficial ambassadors for Germany. Several Western countries use various approaches to reach and attract overseas students. Some countries market higher education to the international community much as a business would promote a product. Many countries have branded their higher education using logos and taglines, such as Australia's "Study in Australia" and the United Kingdom's "Education U.K." campaigns. These countries also take several steps to improve the experience of students during their stay in the host countries.

**Mazzarol and Souter (2002)** have studied the factors that contribute to the mobility of students to a foreign land and had categorized them as 'push' and 'pull' factors. The push factors include limited access to higher education, political instability, and discriminatory actions in home country. The pull factors include career progression, better opportunities for employment and upgrading of social and economic profile. Knowledge and awareness of students about a particular host country also influence a student's decision to select a country for higher education. Climate, lifestyle, and culture has a major role in selecting a country for higher education. Some of the factors that influence students who travel abroad for higher education are the Institute's reputation, the quality of the faculty members, the alumni base and the opinion of students who are presently studying or have completed their studies in the institution from their home country.

**Subrata Kumar Mitra (2010)** has suggested that private education institutions in India will have to play a major role in creating quality higher education institutions to cater for the growing need for accommodating foreign students as institutions supported by the Government of India will have limited resources to accommodate the growing mobility of foreign students coming to India.

**Ming Yu Cheng and et al. (2013)**, in their study have stated that the trend of internationalization of higher education has been in existence for several decades. Students around the world have been pursuing higher studies in education institutions outside their home countries.

**Vidya Rajiv Yeravdekar and Gauri Tiwari (2014)** shares in her study that the Indian higher education system has become a hub for regional capacity building. India is being perceived as a country which can provide quality higher education. Indian institutions are also able to accommodate students from various cultures without major difficulties and hence has been identified as a hospitable host country. The cultural affinity, usage of English as the medium of instruction and affordable tuition fees and low cost of living has promoted India as a destination for higher education.

**Furqan Qamar and Veena Bhalla (2017)** in their report have stated that there is enormous potential for India to become a major hub to attract international students from all over the world. Universities and colleges can gain a lot by accepting international students. Their campuses can become more diverse and can reflect a confluence of global ideas. This

will also provide a global outlook for the entire student community in the University. It can expose young students from around the world to India and its culture. The majority of international students tend to become connected with India for the rest of their lives, culturally and economically.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The Association of Indian Universities organized a Round Table Conference on 'Internationalization of Indian Higher Education' at the University of Mysore. Ideas to promote internationalization of Indian Higher Education were deliberated at the conference and the 'Mysore Statement' was adopted. One of the recommendations to the Government that emanated from the conference is that Indian Embassies and High Commissions abroad must play a key role in providing information about higher education opportunities in India. The statement also recommended that Embassies and High Commissions should assist in outreach programmes and collaborate in organizing fairs, entrance examinations and student recruitment. (*Source: International Association of Universities Newsletter July 2001 Volume 7, No. 3*)

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) published a report titled Higher Education in India- Moving towards global relevance and competitiveness during the *FICCI Higher Education Summit (2014)*. One of the recommendations of this report was to motivate Government institutions to promote the intake of foreign students in targeted foreign countries.

The objectives of this study have been framed keeping in mind the above two recommendations. Sudanese students were approached to understand the role of commercial diplomacy in promoting India as a destination for higher education.

The objectives of this research are:

1. To determine if higher Education in India has helped students in their employment.
2. To evaluate the role of the Embassy in promoting India as a destination for Higher Education.
3. To understand if the outreach activities (Commercial Diplomacy) undertaken by the Embassy has helped promote India as a destination for Higher Education.
4. To find if the process of student's visa has an impact on the student's decision to choose India for Higher Education
5. To understand the role of Friendship associations and Alumni associations in promoting India as a destination for higher education.
6. To evaluate the role of scholarships in promoting India as a destination for higher education.
7. To ascertain if 'Brand India' in Sudan has helped students choose India as a destination for higher education.

### **Research Methodology:**

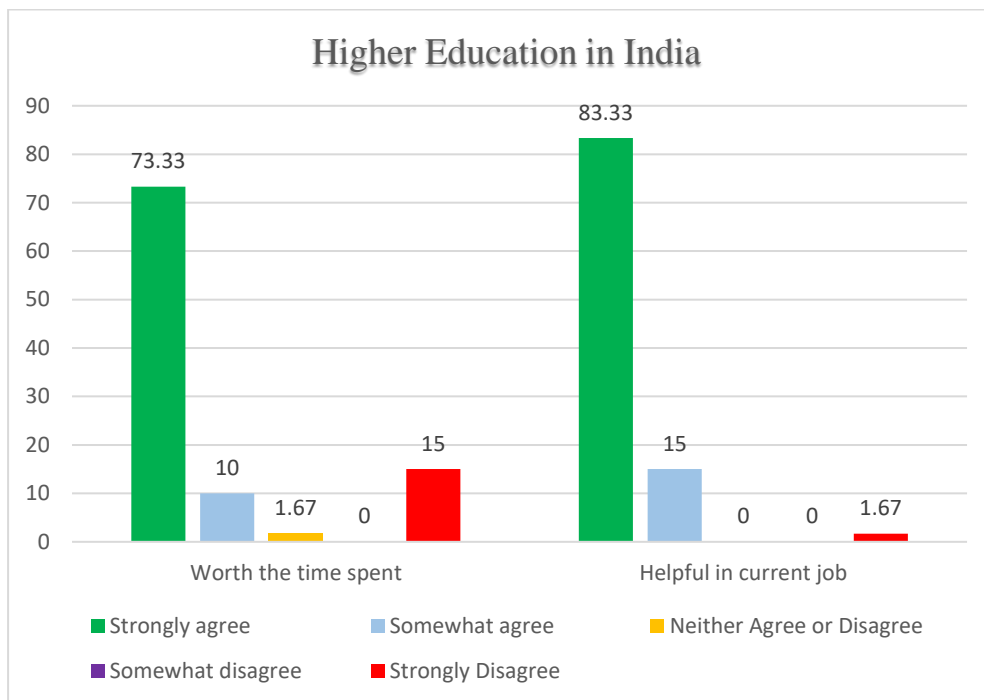
Fifty questions were formulated with the intent of obtaining a response to the objectives identified. These questions were circulated to Sudanese students who have completed higher Education in India.

The questions were circulated through various individuals without any kind of sensitization. The intention, source and objectives were not revealed. 'Purposeful Sampling' method was adopted. Questions had responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a five-point scale. Some of the questions were negatively framed to avoid respondents going for

a single answer for all questions. The questionnaire was circulated to more than a hundred Sudanese nationals who have completed their higher education from various institutions in India. Sixty responses were received, and the findings are as follows.

**Findings of the Study:**

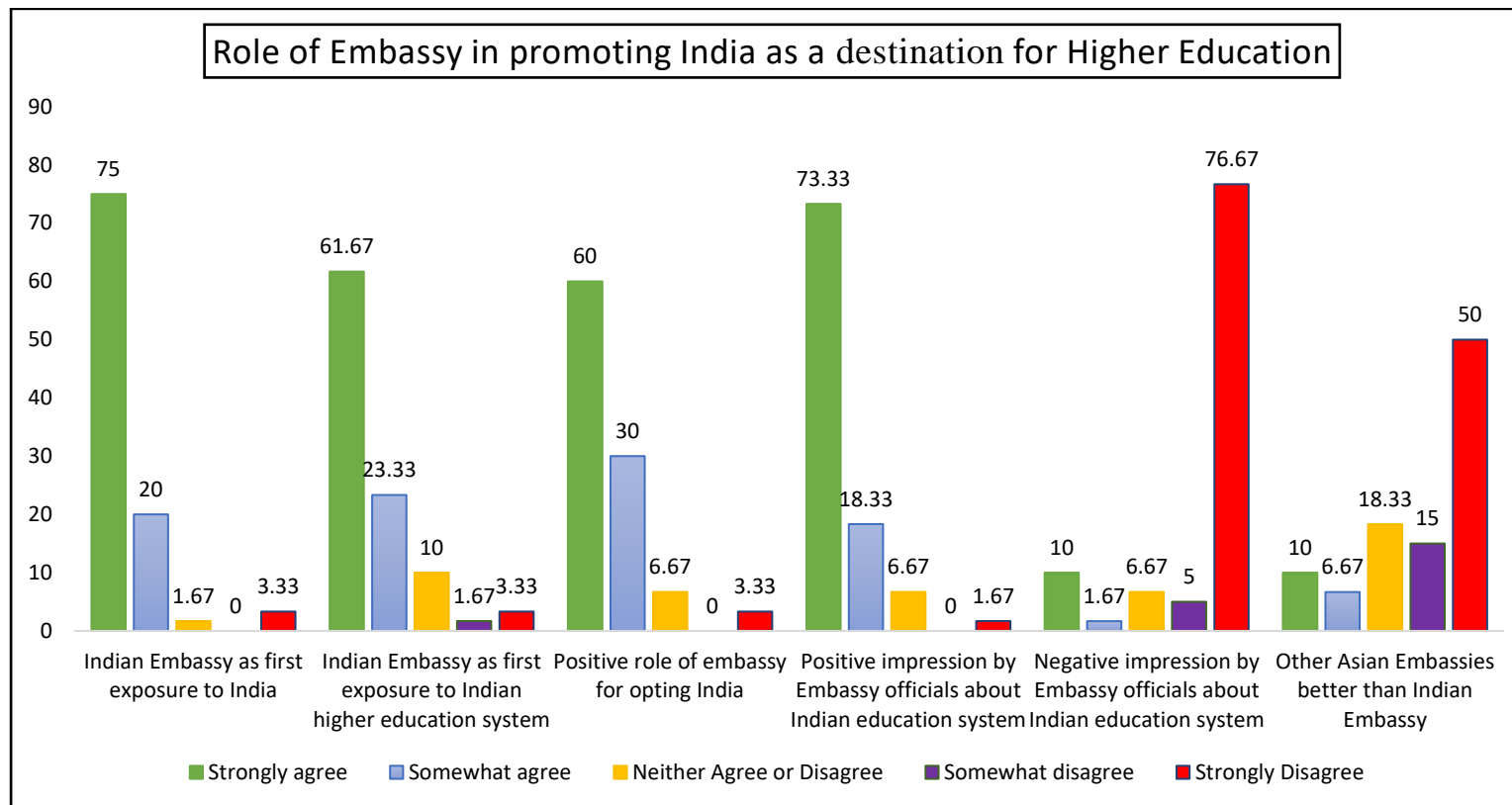
- ✓ More than 75 % of the respondents agree that the higher education they have acquired in India helps them in their present job. Some of the key findings related to objective 1 could be seen in the graph below.
  - ✓ **Objective 1. To find if higher Education in India has helped students in their employment.**



**Fig. 1. Impressions of higher Education in India**

- ✓ Majority of the respondents agree that the Embassy has played a role in exposing the Indian Higher Education system to the students. Some of the key findings related to objective 2 could be seen in the graph below.

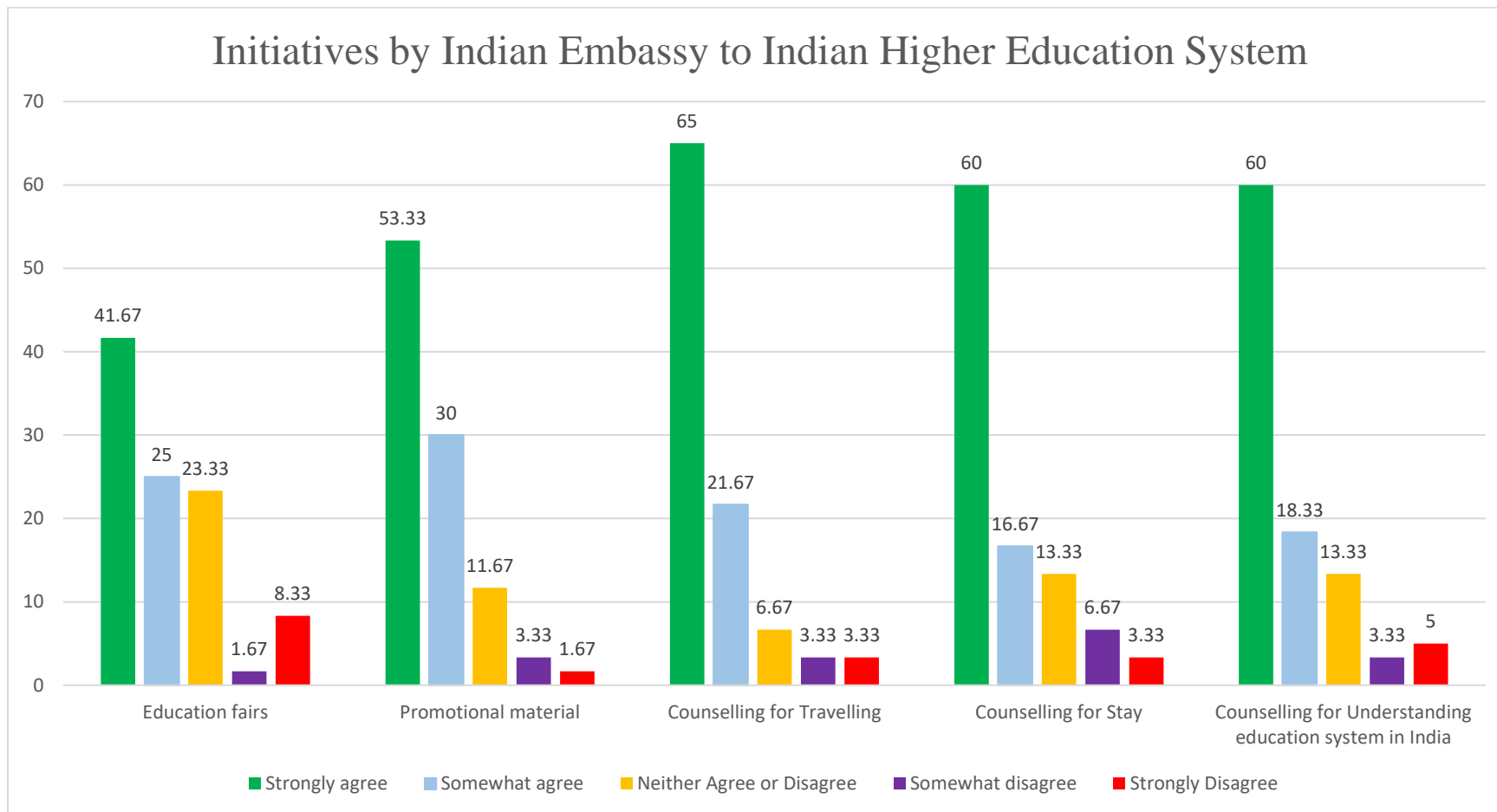
**Objective 2. To ascertain the role of the Embassy in promoting India as a destination for Higher Education.**



**Fig. 2 Role of the Embassy in Higher Education in India**

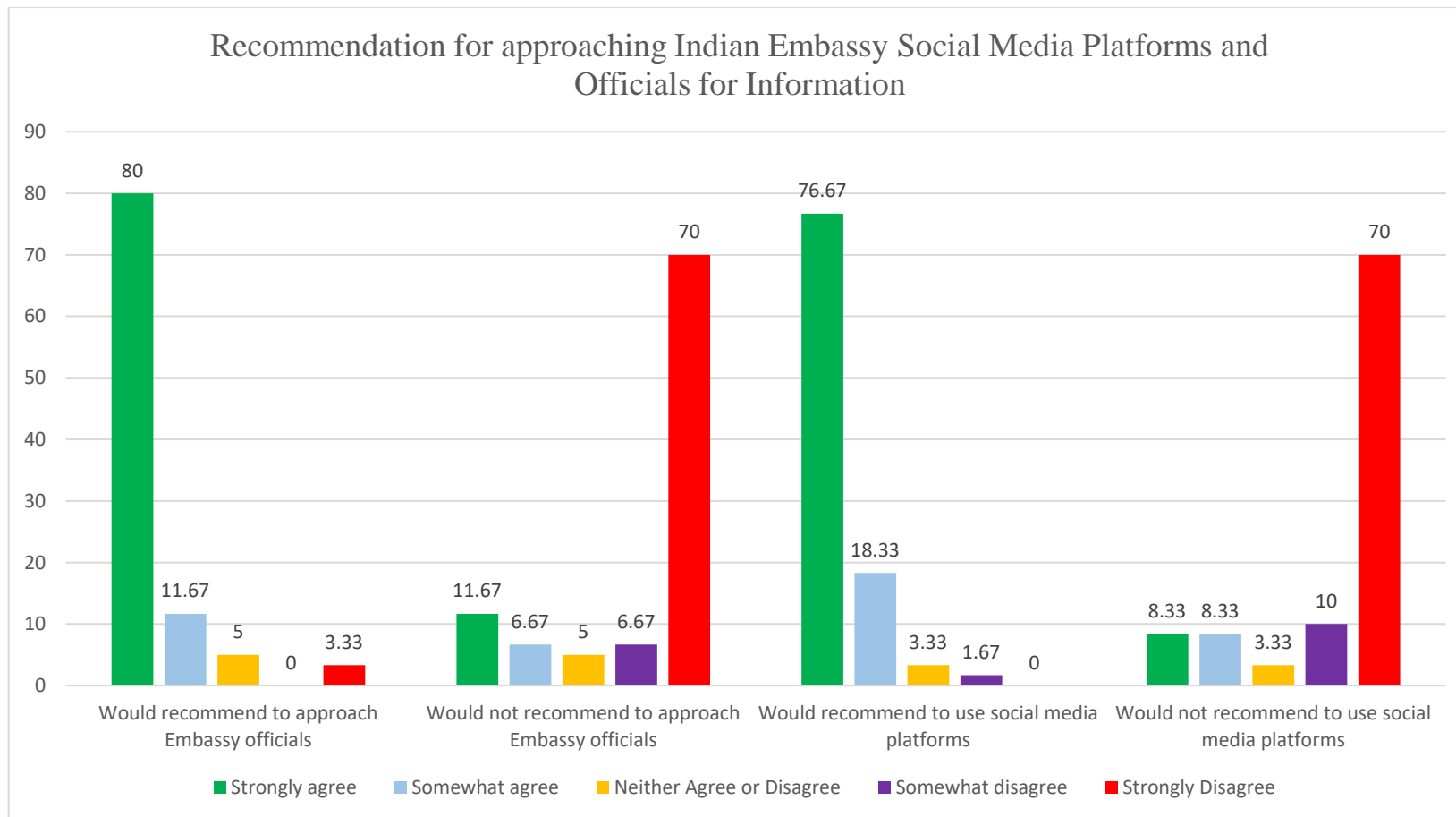
- ✓ Outreach activities of the Embassy have played a positive role in promoting India as a destination for higher education. Some of the key findings related to objective 3 could be seen in the graph below.
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✓ **Objective 3. To figure out if outreach activities undertaken by the Embassy has helped promote India as a destination for Higher Education.**



**Fig. 3. Outreach by Embassy to promote Higher Education in India**

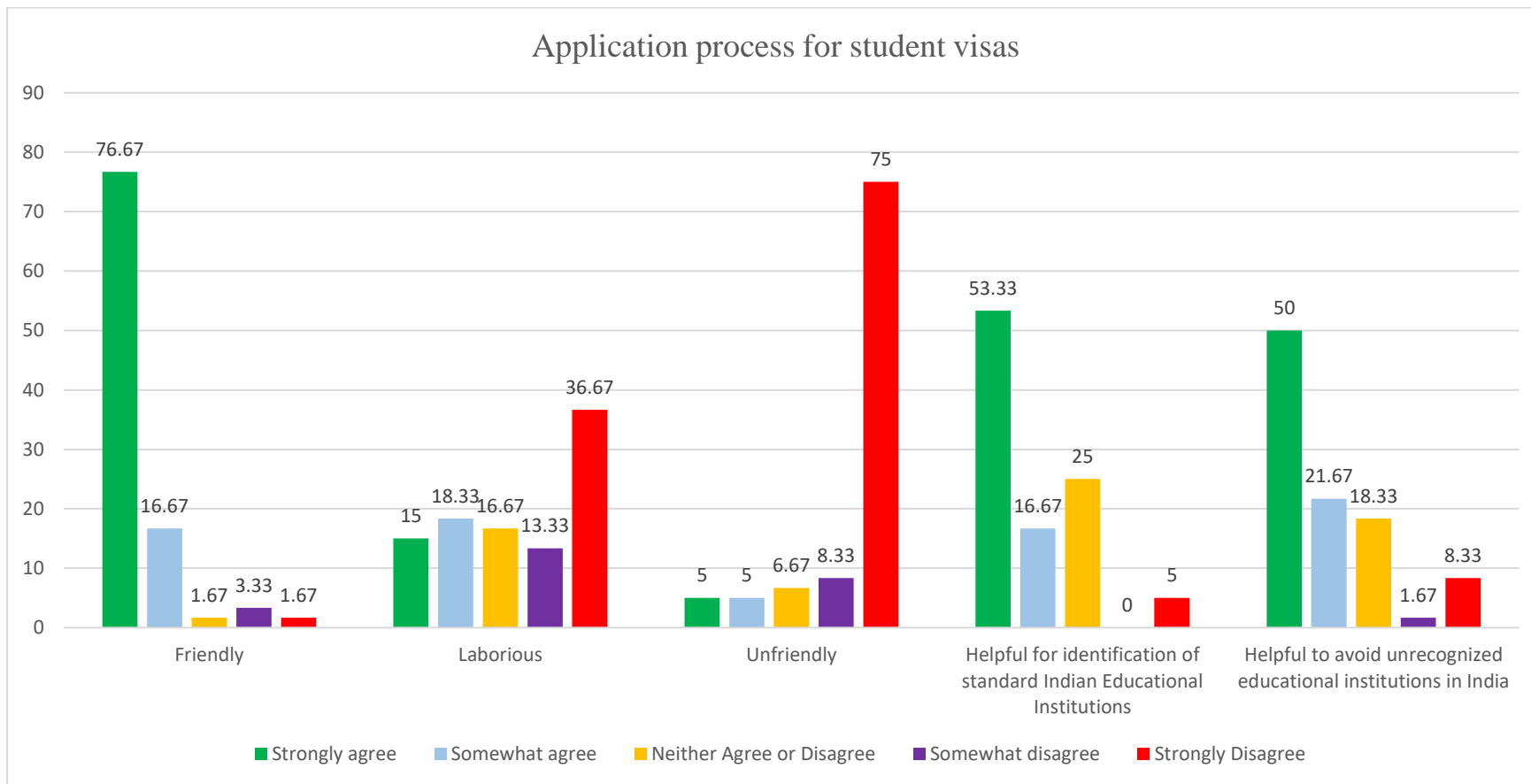




**Fig. 4. Usefulness of Embassy's social media platforms and interactions**

- ✓ The findings on Student's visa have given interesting results. While the results indicate that the process of applying for student's visa is laborious, it also points out that the process helped students identify recognized institutions in India. Some of the key findings related to objective 4 could be seen in the graph below.

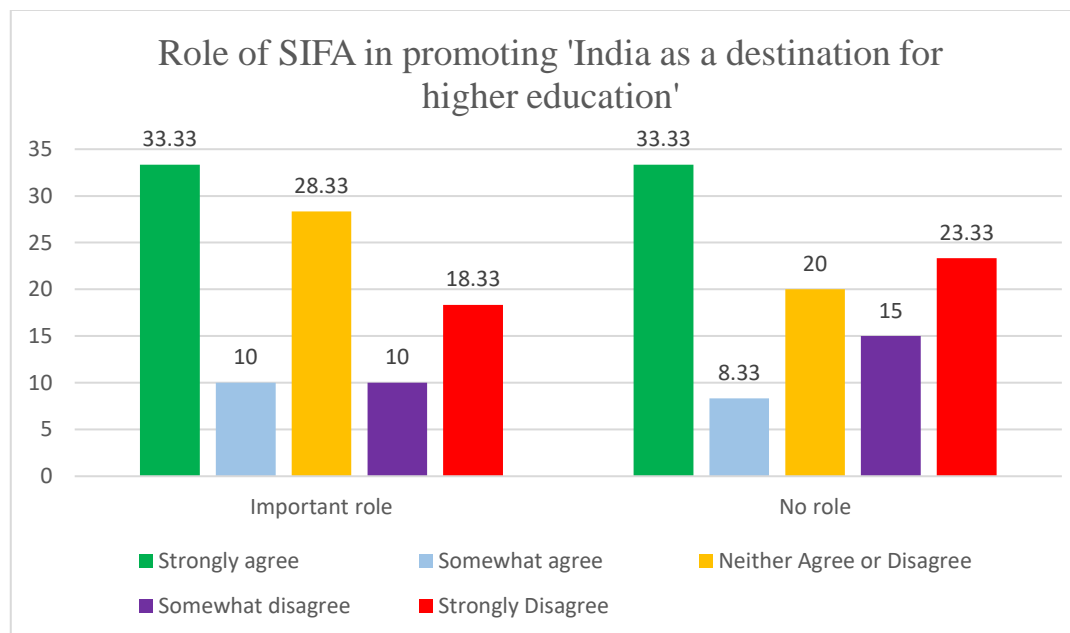
✓ **Objective 4. To find if the process of Student's Visa has an impact on the student's decision on choosing India for Higher Education.**



**Fig. 5. Student's Visa process**

✓ The role of friendship associations has also been mixed. While some segments of the students have gained knowledge on India through friendship associations, others have not. Some of the key findings related to objective 5 can be seen in the graph below.

**Objective 5. To understand the role of Friendship Associations and Alumni associations in promoting India as a destination for higher education.**



**Fig. 6. Friendship associations and their influence**

- ✓ Long term scholarships for under-graduation, post-graduation and doctoral studies offered by ICCR have a major role in students selecting India as a destination for higher education. Over the years ICCR scholarship programme has gained popularity in Sudan. Though only 60 scholarships are provided to Sudan every year, more than 1000 students apply for these visas. The findings of this research indicate that ICCR scholarships have a positive influence on students choosing India for higher education.
- ✓ The findings indicate that the short-term, ITEC scholarships has a limited impact on students who opt for India as a destination for higher education. Some of the key findings related to objective 6 can be seen in the graph below.

✓ Objective 6. Evaluate the role of scholarships in promoting India as a destination for higher education.

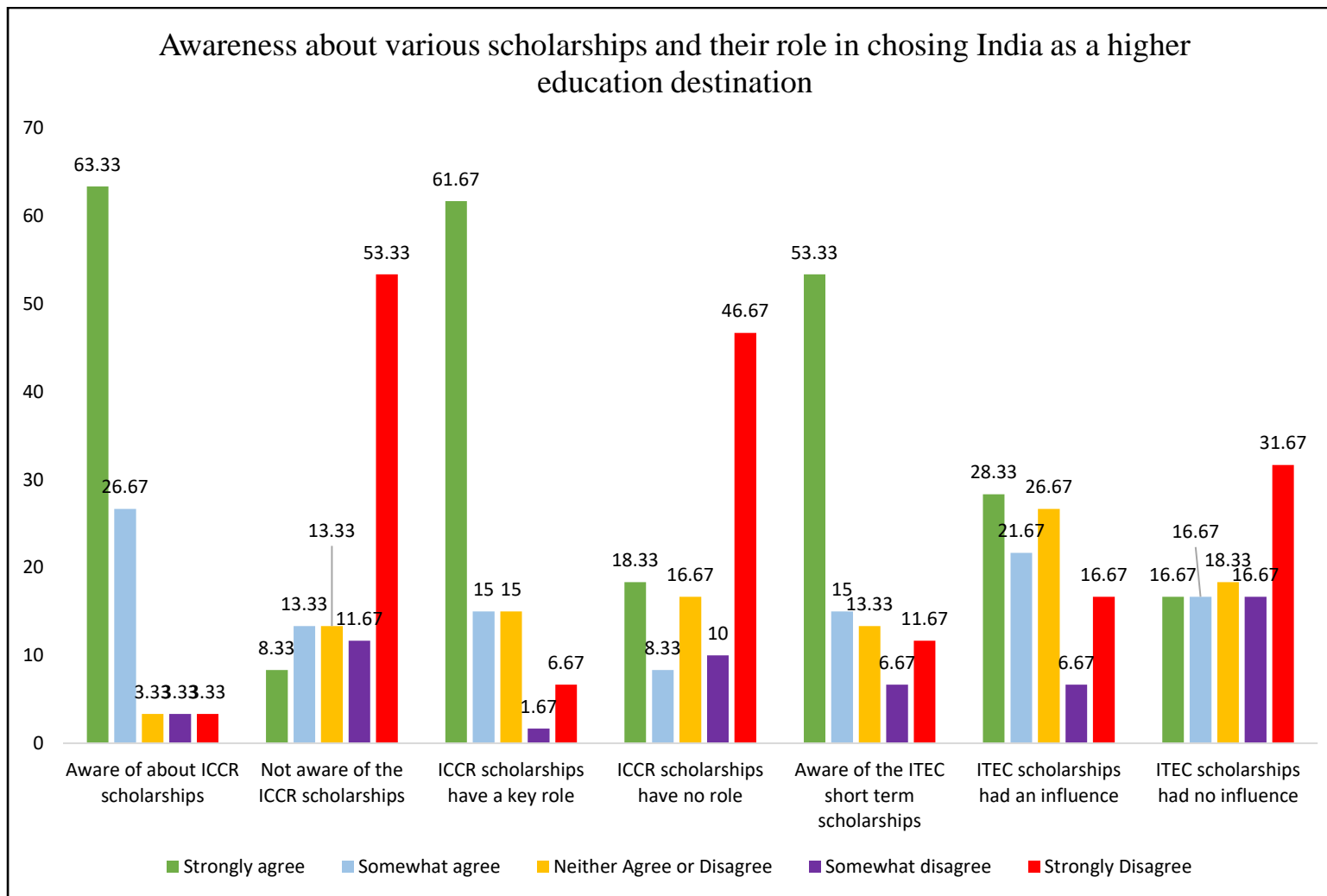
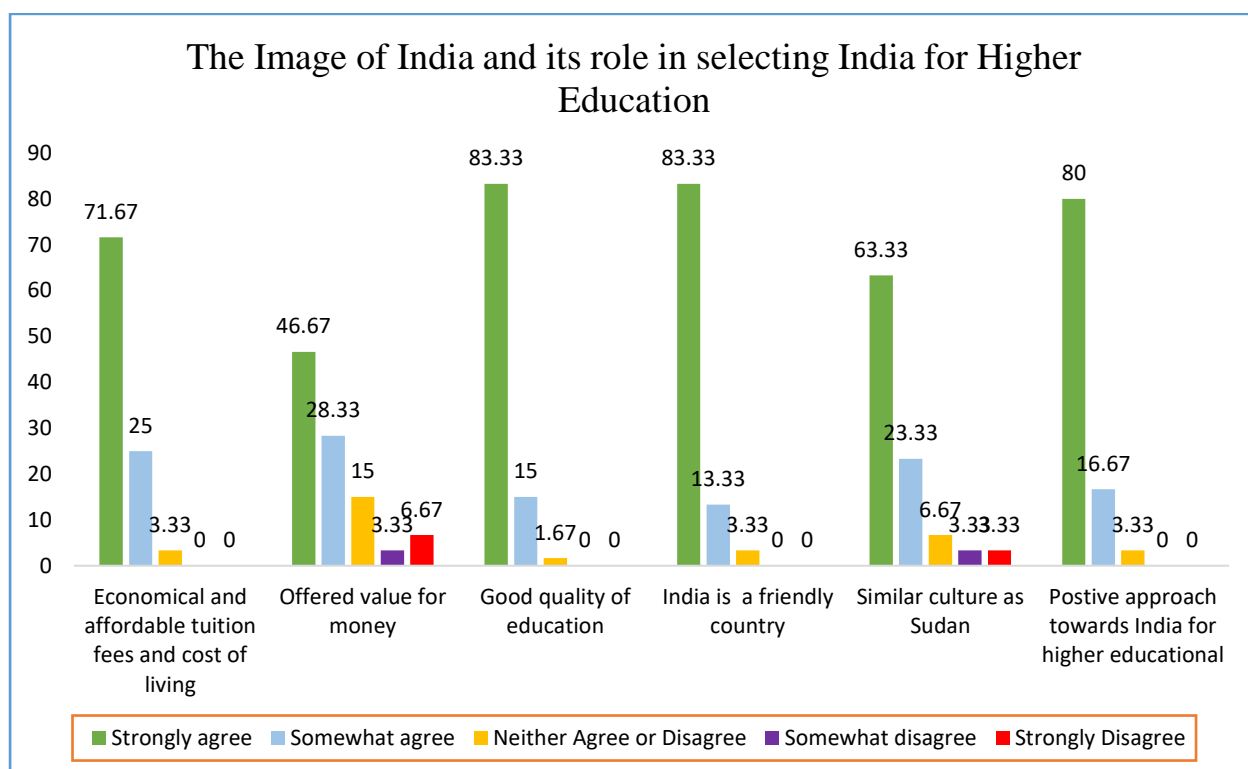


Fig.7. ICCR and ITEC Scholarships awarded by the Government of India

- ✓ Finally, the findings indicate that Sudanese have a strong liking for Indian culture; many travel to India for higher education as they see this as value for money. Most of the students also feel that India is a friendly country with an affordable cost of living. Some of the key findings related to objective 7 can be seen in the graph below.

**Objective 7. To ascertain if 'Brand India' in Sudan has helped the students choose India as a destination for higher education.**



**Fig. 8. Brand India and its role in choosing India for higher education**

### Conclusion

The findings clearly point out that Indian Missions play a key role in promoting India as a destination for higher education. As indicated earlier, in the majority of cases, Indian Missions become the first interface for foreign students who opt for India as their destination for higher education. In the case of Sudan, the findings indicate that the activities linked to the Commercial Diplomacy of the Embassy have a positive role in promoting India as a destination for higher education. Given the commonalities in culture and the strong connection between India and several African countries, these results may also be true for the African region.

The finding also indicates that commercial diplomacy has the potential to further promote the mobility of students to Institutions of Higher Education in India.

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