

Alumni as Catalysts of Institutional Development within the Framework of Indian Knowledge Systems

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of alumni engagement in higher education with a particular focus on its relevance to institutional development and the promotion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). A notable gap persists between the recognized importance of alumni engagement and its systematic implementation, especially in relation to IKS. Adopting a qualitative, conceptual research design, the study synthesizes existing literature to analyse the multidimensional contributions of alumni and their potential in integrating traditional knowledge within modern academic frameworks. The findings indicate that alumni significantly enhance academic quality, employability, and institutional visibility through mentoring, networking, and resource support. The study further reveals that alumni can serve as key agents in preserving indigenous knowledge, enriching curricula, and fostering culturally grounded innovation. The paper concludes that a more structured and strategic alignment of alumni engagement with IKS principles can contribute to holistic, sustainable, and contextually relevant higher education systems.

Keywords: Alumni Engagement, Higher Education; Institutional Development, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Cultural Sustainability, Curriculum Enrichment, Knowledge Co-creation

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic and intellectual development of a nation. It serves as a foundation for knowledge creation, innovation, skill development, and the preparation of responsible citizens capable of addressing complex global challenges (Khanfar et al., 2011). In the 21st century, higher education institutions are expected not only to impart academic knowledge but also to contribute to sustainable development, cultural preservation, and national progress. However, these institutions are increasingly facing challenges such as globalization, resource constraints, employability concerns, and the need to remain socially relevant in a rapidly changing world (Chao Mei et al., 2025).

In response to these challenges, there has been a growing emphasis on the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education. IKS encompasses a rich and diverse body of indigenous knowledge rooted in Indian traditions, including philosophy, science, medicine, art, and spirituality (Begum & Sankar, 2025). These systems offer a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to learning, emphasizing ethical values, sustainability, and harmony between human beings and nature (Maheshwari, 2024). Recognizing the significance of this indigenous knowledge, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates for the incorporation of IKS into the curriculum to promote culturally relevant, value-based, and holistic education. The policy highlights the need to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern scientific approaches, thereby fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and a deeper connection with cultural heritage (Ministry of

Education, 2020). Alongside this paradigm shift, the role of alumni in higher education has undergone a significant transformation. Traditionally viewed as passive contributors or donors, alumni are now recognized as key stakeholders who actively participate in institutional development. Contemporary research highlights that alumni contribute not only financially but also through mentorship, knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration with industry, thereby enhancing institutional performance and student outcomes (Sundaram et al., 2026). From a stakeholder perspective, alumni represent a vital link between institutions and society, acting as co-creators of value who support governance, innovation, and long-term sustainability (Mei et al., 2025). Their experiential knowledge and professional expertise position them uniquely to contribute to curriculum development, research initiatives, and the integration of practical and cultural perspectives within higher education.

Despite the increasing recognition of both Indian Knowledge Systems and alumni engagement in higher education, there exists a significant research gap at their intersection. While existing studies have extensively explored alumni contributions in terms of institutional growth, employability, and financial sustainability, they rarely examine how alumni can support the integration and promotion of IKS within academic institutions. Similarly, research on IKS has largely focused on curriculum reform and philosophical relevance, with limited attention to the role of stakeholders such as alumni in facilitating its implementation. This gap is particularly evident in the Indian context, where the potential of alumni as cultural ambassadors and knowledge carriers remains underutilized.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by exploring alumni contributions to institutional development within the framework of Indian Knowledge Systems. By integrating these two emerging domains, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how higher education institutions can leverage alumni engagement to promote culturally grounded, holistic, and sustainable development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alumni engagement has evolved from a peripheral institutional activity to a strategically significant component of higher education governance and development. Contemporary literature conceptualizes alumni not merely as beneficiaries of education but as active stakeholders who contribute to institutional growth through financial support, mentorship, networking, and knowledge exchange. (Dr. Amol Gawande et al., 2023) For instance, recent studies emphasize that alumni networks function as underutilized yet transformative resources capable of enhancing academic quality, innovation, and institutional sustainability (Sundaram et al., 2026). However, much of this literature tends to adopt a functionalist perspective, focusing predominantly on measurable contributions such as funding and employability outcomes, thereby limiting a deeper understanding of alumni engagement as a socio-cultural and intellectual process.

Further, the emerging body of research positions alumni as co-creators in institutional development, highlighting their role in curriculum enrichment, industry-academia collaboration, and policy influence (Mei et al., 2025). While this perspective broadens the scope of alumni engagement, it remains largely grounded in Western institutional models and market-oriented frameworks. Consequently, there is limited attention to context-specific dimensions, particularly in non-Western educational systems such as India, where historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions significantly shape educational practices and institutional priorities. (Chao Mei et al., 2025)

In the Indian context, higher education is increasingly influenced by the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which emphasize holistic learning, ethical values, cultural continuity, and indigenous epistemologies. (Rubina Begum, Prof. C. Siva Sankar, 2020) The literature on IKS underscores its potential to transform higher education by fostering value-based and contextually relevant learning environments. However, existing studies primarily focus on curriculum integration, pedagogical reforms, and policy frameworks, with minimal exploration of stakeholder roles beyond faculty and institutions. (Thapliyal, 2023) The potential of alumni as carriers and transmitters of indigenous knowledge traditions remains largely under-theorized and empirically unexplored.

Moreover, while alumni are uniquely positioned to bridge traditional knowledge systems and contemporary institutional practices, current research fails to adequately examine how their experiential knowledge and socio-cultural capital can contribute to the promotion and sustenance of IKS within higher education. The absence of such analysis reflects a broader

gap in the literature, where alumni engagement is rarely linked with cultural preservation, value-based education, or indigenous knowledge frameworks. This indicates a conceptual disconnect between alumni studies and IKS discourse.

Another critical limitation lies in the lack of integrative frameworks that connect alumni engagement with institutional development through the lens of IKS. Existing models of alumni engagement are largely instrumental and transactional, emphasizing outcomes such as fundraising and institutional branding (Ciobanu, 2013). In contrast, IKS advocates a holistic and relational approach to knowledge and development. The absence of a unified conceptual framework that synthesizes these perspectives highlights a significant theoretical gap.

Additionally, the literature inadequately addresses the structural and institutional challenges that hinder meaningful alumni engagement in the Indian context. Issues such as weak alumni networks, lack of policy support, limited digital infrastructure, and absence of culturally aligned engagement strategies are often mentioned but not critically analysed. There is also a lack of strategic discourse on how institutions can systematically align alumni engagement practices with IKS principles to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

2.1 Objective of the Study

1. To explore the of alumni engagement in higher education and its relevance to institutional development.
2. To examine the potential roles of alumni in promoting and sustaining Indian Knowledge Systems within institutions.
3. To highlight challenges and suggest strategies for strengthening alumni involvement in alignment with IKS principles.

2.2 Research question

1. How to explore the concept of alumni engagement in higher education and its relevant to institutional development?
2. What potential roles can alumni play in promoting and sustaining Indian Knowledge Systems within higher education institutions?
3. What challenges hinder effective alumni involvement in institutional development aligned with IKS principles?
4. What strategies can be adopted to strengthen alumni engagement in support of Indian Knowledge Systems?

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study employs a qualitative, conceptual research design to examine alumni contributions to institutional development within the framework of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The study is based on secondary data collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy documents, and institutional reports focusing on alumni engagement, higher education development, and IKS. A narrative and conceptual synthesis approach was employed to review and interpret the selected literature. The analysis is structured in accordance with the stated objectives to develop a conceptual framework and to propose strategies for enhancing alumni involvement in supporting institutional development through IKS.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

4.1 Objective-1: To explore the concept of alumni engagement in higher education and its relevance to institutional development:

The analysis of the selected studies clearly indicates that alumni engagement is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset in higher education, yet remains underutilized in many institutional contexts. Alumni are not merely former students; rather, they function as key stakeholders who contribute to institutional growth through mentorship, funding, networking, and knowledge exchange. For instance (Sharma et al., 2026) conceptualize alumni networks as growth engines that support institutional transformation by addressing employability gaps, fostering innovation, and strengthening academic industry linkages. This aligns with earlier findings by (Joshi, 2022), who emphasizes that successful alumni associations rely on structured engagement practices such as communication strategies, career development initiatives, and sustained relationship-building mechanisms.

However, the empirical evidence suggests a significant gap between potential and practice. (Thapliyal, 2023) reveal that although many institutions recognize the importance of alumni, only a limited number maintain active alumni associations,

and even fewer leverage them effectively for institutional development. This highlights a structural weakness in higher education governance, where alumni engagement is often treated as peripheral rather than integral to institutional strategy. The analysis of the selected studies highlights that alumni engagement is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond traditional networking and fundraising roles.

- **Alumni as Strategic Stakeholders:** Alumni are increasingly viewed as long-term institutional partners who contribute to teaching, research, mentoring, and governance (Toglia & Harris, 2014). Their experiential knowledge strengthens the academic ecosystem.
- **Contribution to Institutional Development:** Alumni contribute significantly to institutional development by enhancing academic quality, strengthening industry linkages, and supporting student progression. Through mentoring, guest lectures, and curriculum input, they bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, thereby improving employability outcomes (Toglia & Harris, 2014). Additionally, alumni networks expand institutional visibility and reputation by creating professional connections and collaborative opportunities. Their financial contributions, including donations and scholarships, further support infrastructure and student welfare. Collectively, these roles position alumni as strategic partners in fostering innovation, sustainability, and long-term institutional growth (Sundaram et al., 2026; Thapa et al., 2025).
- **Social Capital and Networking:** Alumni networks generate valuable social capital by connecting students, faculty, and professionals across diverse fields. These relationships facilitate knowledge sharing, career opportunities, and collaborative ventures, thereby strengthening institutional reach and relevance. Through mentorship and professional linkages, alumni enhance students' access to industry insights and employment pathways. Such networking not only benefits individuals but also reinforces the institution's reputation and influence in broader academic and professional communities (Thapliyal, 2023).
- **Cover the gap Between Potential and Practice:** Despite the recognized importance of alumni engagement, a clear gap exists between its potential and actual implementation. Many institutions lack structured policies, active alumni associations, and sustained engagement strategies (Sawai et al., 2024). As a result, alumni contributions remain sporadic and underutilized. Weak communication systems and limited institutional commitment further restrict meaningful participation, preventing alumni from fully contributing to institutional development and long-term strategic growth (Sharma et al., 2026).

From a conceptual standpoint, alumni engagement contributes to institutional development in three key dimensions: academic enrichment, financial sustainability, and social capital formation. These dimensions are particularly relevant in the contemporary higher education landscape, where institutions are expected to operate as dynamic ecosystems rather than isolated entities. Thus, alumni engagement should be repositioned as a core component of institutional development frameworks rather than an auxiliary function.

4.2 Objective-2: To examine the potential roles of alumni in promoting and sustaining Indian Knowledge Systems within institutions.

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education provides a unique opportunity to redefine alumni roles beyond conventional contributions. (Thapliyal, 2023) emphasizes that IKS encompasses diverse domains such as philosophy, ecology, mathematics, and medicine, and its integration into higher education is essential for cultural preservation and intellectual diversification. In this context, alumni can serve as crucial mediators between traditional knowledge and modern academic systems. The reviewed literature suggests that alumni particularly those rooted in local communities or traditional practices can play a vital role in revitalizing IKS through knowledge sharing, curriculum enrichment, and community engagement. (Maheshwari, 2024) indirectly support this perspective by highlighting alumni contributions to innovation and entrepreneurship, which can be extended to culturally grounded knowledge systems. Alumni working in fields such as Ayurveda, agriculture, or indigenous technologies can contribute experiential insights that formal curricula often lack.

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into higher education introduces new dimensions to alumni engagement.

- **Alumni as Knowledge Carriers of IKS**

Alumni serve as vital carriers of Indian Knowledge Systems by preserving, practicing, and transmitting indigenous knowledge across generations. Drawing from their lived experiences and community connections, they bring authentic insights into traditional practices, values, and epistemologies. Their engagement with institutions enables the integration of this knowledge into academic spaces, thereby strengthening cultural continuity and enhancing the relevance of higher education in local and national contexts.

- **Curriculum Enrichment**

Alumni contribute to curriculum enrichment by integrating practical experience and indigenous perspectives into academic content. Through guest lectures, workshops, and collaborative teaching, they help bridge theoretical knowledge with real world applications. Their insights, especially in areas related to Indian Knowledge Systems, make the curriculum more contextual, interdisciplinary, and relevant. This not only enhances students' learning outcomes but also aligns education with cultural and societal needs.

- **Bridging Traditional and Modern Knowledge**

Alumni play a crucial role in bridging traditional and modern knowledge by integrating indigenous wisdom with contemporary academic and professional practices. Their dual exposure enables them to reinterpret Indian Knowledge Systems in ways that align with current scientific and technological contexts. This connection fosters interdisciplinary learning, enhances innovation, and ensures that traditional knowledge remains relevant and applicable within modern higher education frameworks

- **Role in Cultural Sustainability**

Alumni play a vital role in cultural sustainability by preserving and promoting indigenous traditions, values, and knowledge systems. Through their continued engagement with institutions and communities, they help transmit Indian Knowledge Systems to younger generations. Their involvement in academic and outreach activities ensures that local practices remain relevant, thereby strengthening cultural identity and supporting the long-term continuity of heritage within higher education contexts

Therefore, alumni engagement in the context of IKS should be reconceptualized as a form of knowledge co-creation, where alumni act as custodians and transmitters of indigenous knowledge. Such a role not only strengthens cultural sustainability but also enhances the relevance of higher education institutions in local and global contexts.

4.3 Objective-3: To highlight challenges and suggest strategies for strengthening alumni involvement in alignment with IKS principles.

The findings highlight several structural and operational challenges that hinder effective alumni engagement. A primary issue is the lack of institutional mechanisms to sustain alumni participation. (Sharma et al., 2026) demonstrate that even when alumni associations exist, their activities are often limited and lack strategic direction. Similarly, (Ciobanu, 2013) points out that ineffective communication and lack of engagement opportunities reduce alumni participation over time. Another critical challenge is the absence of alignment between alumni activities and broader institutional goals, particularly in relation to IKS. Most institutions have yet to develop frameworks that integrate alumni contributions with cultural and knowledge-based initiatives. This results in a fragmented approach where alumni engagement is disconnected from academic and cultural priorities.

To address these challenges, several strategies emerge from the analysis:

- **Institutionalization of Alumni Engagement:** Institutions must embed alumni relations within their strategic planning processes, ensuring dedicated resources and governance structures (Sundaram et al., 2026).
- **IKS-Oriented Engagement Platforms:** Creating forums, workshops, and collaborative projects where alumni can contribute to IKS-related teaching, research, and community outreach (Kumar, 2024).
- **Digital and Network Based Engagement:** Leveraging technology to maintain continuous interaction and knowledge exchange between alumni and institutions. Recognition and Incentivization: Acknowledging alumni contributions to encourage sustained involvement, particularly in culturally significant domains.

- **Community Based Collaboration:** Engaging alumni in local knowledge systems and community development initiatives to bridge the gap between academia and society. Importantly, aligning alumni engagement with IKS principles requires a shift from transactional to transformational relationships. Instead of viewing alumni as donors or supporters, institutions must recognize them as co-creators of knowledge and culture (Maheshwari, 2024).

The objective wise analysis reveals that while alumni engagement is widely acknowledged as a driver of institutional development, its integration with Indian Knowledge Systems remains underdeveloped. Existing literature is largely instrumental and economically oriented, neglecting the epistemological and cultural dimensions of alumni contributions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the evolving significance of alumni engagement as a strategic component of institutional development in higher education. The analysis demonstrates that alumni contribute meaningfully to academic enrichment, professional networking, and resource mobilization, while also possessing substantial yet underexplored potential in advancing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). By extending their role beyond conventional contributions, alumni can actively participate in knowledge co-creation, curriculum development, and the preservation of indigenous epistemologies.

The findings also reveal a persistent gap between the recognized importance of alumni engagement and its effective institutionalization. In many cases, the absence of structured frameworks, limited policy integration, and weak alignment with academic and cultural objectives restrict the full utilization of alumni capabilities. This gap is particularly evident in the context of IKS, where alumni involvement remains largely conceptual rather than operational. Importantly, the study highlights that aligning alumni engagement with IKS principles can enhance cultural sustainability, promote interdisciplinary learning, and strengthen the societal relevance of higher education institutions. Such alignment encourages a shift from transactional relationships to more collaborative and transformative partnerships, where alumni serve as co-creators of knowledge and agents of institutional innovation.

In conclusion, integrating alumni engagement with IKS presents a valuable opportunity to reimagine higher education as a more inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable system. Future research may focus on developing comprehensive models, empirical validations, and policy-driven strategies to effectively operationalize this integration, thereby ensuring its long-term impact on institutional and societal development.

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