

# Aadhaar uncovers around 130,000 ghost teachers in colleges

BY PRASHANT K. NANDA  
prashant.n@livemint.com

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The decision to use Aadhaar as proof of identity in the annual collation of data on teachers employed in higher education has led to an uncomfortable discovery: nearly a tenth of them turned out to be ghost teachers.

Around 130,000 teachers were found to be fake, two people familiar with the details of the study said on condition of anonymity. India has about 1.4 million teachers in colleges

and universities.

While the good news is that this will lead to a focus on improving the quality of teaching, the bad news is that the country has just found out that understaffing in higher education institutes is far greater than what has been estimated so far.

The human resource development (HRD) ministry in 2017 told colleges and universities across India that while furnishing data they need to give the 12-digit unique identification number or Aadhaar number of the faculty members to authenticate their pres-

ence, after education regulators received several complaints about bogus teachers across the education sector.

The key concern is that institutions are duplicating teachers' data while seeking regulatory approval for courses or expansion of institutions and not recruiting fresh teachers, said one of the two officials, requesting anonymity. The details of the study will be unveiled sometime later this month.

"Aadhaar linkage was not made mandatory but we asked them to furnish it. Some reputed universities have not

given Aadhaar data but whatever data has come, the faculty strength has gone down by around 10% in 2017," said the second official.

This is the second instance, after the midday-meal scheme, when the HRD ministry has tried to reduce bogus enrolment, either of students or teachers, through Aadhaar linkage and reduce pilferage.

The second official said the discovery of bogus teachers puts the spotlight on the problem of adverse teacher-student ratio. As of 2015-16, the teacher-student ratio, a parameter of teaching quality in higher

educational institutes, was 1:21, less than the ideal 1:10. This ratio, after the discovery of bogus teachers, will worsen.

Raju Davis Parepadan, chairman of Kerala-based Holygrace Academy, which runs a chain of professional colleges, said the problem of bogus teachers is widespread.

"Institutions show names of professors on paper or on their website but actually they are not their employees. They get young contract teachers to take classes and bring those names written on the prospectus only when there is an inspection. You find a floating

group of teachers who are on the fake rolls of several colleges," said Parepadan.

He said linking Aadhaar is a "necessary evil" for many, if not the top-rung colleges.

"When you link Aadhaar, you only have real teachers on rolls and that's good for students. But to get quality teachers some institutes struggle as it increases their cost. For that, authorities also need to allow schools to hike fees, which often is not allowed," said Parepadan, adding that in Kerala, school students are mandated to link Aadhaar to keep a tab on teachers' requirement.