The room is full, but the learning is empty: pedagogy for the disengaged generation in Indian education

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Abstract

Purpose – Student disengagement in Indian higher education has reached a critical threshold. This article examines the nature, dimensions and structural roots of disengagement in Indian commerce and business classrooms, arguing that the crisis stems not from student apathy but from a pedagogical model misaligned with the cognitive, social and motivational realities of contemporary learners.

Design/methodology/approach – This viewpoint article draws on a critical synthesis of established educational research, cognitive science and the author's decade of pedagogical practice in Indian commerce education, using frameworks from Freire (1970), Fredricks *et al.* (2004), Bloom *et al.* (1956) and Mark (2023), among others, to diagnose the conditions producing disengagement and propose a principled pedagogical response.

Findings – Three observable patterns characterise disengagement – selective wakefulness, the comprehension-performance paradox and the disappearance of curiosity – traced to five failures: the transmission model, examination-driven curricula, inadequate teacher preparation, unabsorbed digital disruption and an institutional accountability vacuum. The article proposes the ARC Model of Responsible Pedagogy – Activation, Relevance and Connection – as a theoretically grounded and practically implementable response.

Practical implications – The ARC Model provides faculty and policymakers with an immediately actionable framework for addressing student disengagement in Indian commerce education, applicable within existing institutional constraints.

Originality/value – This article makes an original contribution by theorising compliant disengagement as a distinctive Indian higher education phenomenon and advancing the ARC Model as a structured pedagogical framework with direct implications for faculty, institutional leaders and policymakers.

Keywords Student disengagement, Pedagogy, Indian higher education, Commerce education, Active learning, ARC model, Responsible enterprise

Paper type Viewpoint

1. Introduction

Walk into any commerce classroom in an affiliated Indian university on a weekday morning. The benches are occupied. The attendance has been taken vigorously. The lecture has started covering the syllabus. By every institutional metric, education is happening. And yet, ask the students what they learnt an hour later, and the silence that follows is louder than any lecture delivered that day.

This is the central paradox of Indian higher education today. Full rooms, empty learning. Enrolment figures have never looked better. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education rose to 28.4% in 2021–22 (Ministry of Education, 2022), with the government targeting 50% by 2035 under the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020). Commerce and business programmes, in particular, have witnessed a surge in student numbers across public and private universities, affiliated colleges and autonomous institutions alike. Yet, faculty across institutions quietly acknowledge what the data does not capture: students are physically present but mentally absent.

This is not a portrait of every Indian classroom. Elite central universities, well-funded autonomous colleges and internationally ranked institutions tell a different story. The concern here is with the majority experience. The vast network of affiliated colleges and mid-tier institutions where most of India's commerce students spend their undergraduate years is where the patterns described in this article are most consistently and persistently observed.

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The explanations vary and none of them fully satisfies. Some point to smartphones and short-form content that have rewired attention. Research by Dr Gloria Mark of the University of California, Irvine, shows that the average human attention span on a digital screen has collapsed from two and a half minutes in 2004 to just 47 seconds today, a fall of over 66% in two decades (Mark, 2023).

While Mark's findings are grounded in digital screen behaviour rather than classroom settings specifically, the relevance to teaching is direct. Students who spend hours each day training their attention on fast-moving digital content do not arrive at a lecture hall with a different nervous system. The habits of attention formed outside the classroom are the same ones students bring in with them.

The author's recent classroom experience makes this concrete. During a Corporate Accounting session, while the author was explaining an accounting concept, a student stood up and asked to be excused. The author paused, assuming a question was coming. The student asked permission to step out to take a phone call. The first reaction was frustration. But the same thing happened in the next class, and the class after that. It was not one student being rude. It was a pattern. Students no longer experience a class session as a space where outside life is temporarily set aside. The boundary simply does not exist for them.

Mobile phones ringing during class was something the author never encountered five years ago. Today, it happens in at least one class every single day. Students are not switching phones to silent mode before entering the room. This is not deliberate disrespect. Most of them do not even think to do it. Perhaps the most telling observation involves textbooks. In the author's institution, accounting textbooks are distributed before the semester begins. Students stopped bringing them to class. When asked why, the answer was practical: they scan the relevant pages into PDF format and keep them on their phones. During the class discussion of the very problems they scanned, students were observed not reading the PDF but checking social media notifications on the same device. The textbook was on the phone. So was everything competing with it. The phone won.

Others point to curricula that feel disconnected from the labour market, leaving students unmotivated by content they see as irrelevant. Still others blame examination cultures that reward memorisation over understanding. Each explanation captures something real. But none of them gets to the root of it. The root, this article argues, is pedagogy.

Each explanation captures something real and deserves serious attention. Curriculum misalignment with labour market realities is a genuine structural problem that curriculum designers, industry bodies and regulators must confront. Socioeconomic pressures on first-generation learners shape how students experience and prioritise education in ways that no single classroom change can fully address. These are systemic issues in their own right. They sit alongside pedagogy as co-contributors to disengagement, not beneath it as lesser concerns.

The distance between curriculum content and student reality is not always abstract. While teaching Corporate Accounting to second-year undergraduate students, covering share issue, company acquisition and capital restructuring, the author noticed that semester after semester, a handful of students were absent from the examination hall. When asked why they had missed the paper, the answer was not illness, not travel, not indifference. They had not paid the examination fee. They could not afford it. These were students sitting through lectures on raising share capital and acquiring companies who did not have the money to sit the very examination meant to certify their understanding of those concepts. No curriculum reform fully addresses that gap. No pedagogy eliminates it entirely. But a teacher who acknowledges that reality, who builds bridges between the content on the board and the lives in the room, at least makes the classroom feel like it belongs to the students sitting in it.

And yet, this article focuses on pedagogy for a specific reason: it is the one lever that a classroom teacher can actually pull. A faculty member cannot redesign the university examination system before Monday's lecture. They cannot restructure the labour market or eliminate the financial anxieties their students carry. But they can change what happens in the room. That is a modest claim. It is also a practical one. Pedagogy is not the only problem here,

but it may be the most immediately addressable. That is the argument this article makes, and the scope it deliberately holds to.

This viewpoint article draws on the author's decade of classroom experience in commerce and business education in India to examine the structural and pedagogical roots of student disengagement. It argues that rethinking pedagogy is not merely about new technologies or adding activities at the edges of existing practice. It demands something harder: a rethinking of what teachers do, how learning is designed and what institutional conditions allow any of it to work. The article maps disengagement first, then examines why conventional pedagogy has failed and ends with a call for responsible, student-centred reform.

2. The nature of disengagement in Indian classrooms

Student disengagement is not a new phenomenon, but its contemporary form in Indian classrooms carries a distinctive quality worth careful examination. It is not the disengagement of rebellion. Students are not boycotting lectures or challenging the system. It is quieter than that, and more insidious: compliant disengagement. Students attend to maintaining adequate attendance. They copy notes when told to. They nod when the teacher makes eye contact. They submit assignments for marks, mostly copied from AI tools nowadays (Welding, 2023; Sullivan *et al.*, 2023). And yet, the cognitive and emotional investment that turns classroom exposure into genuine learning is almost entirely absent.

This distinction matters. Fredricks *et al.* (2004), in their influential framework, identify three dimensions of student engagement. Behavioural engagement is participation and compliance; cognitive engagement is the investment of mental effort in understanding; emotional engagement is the sense of belonging, interest, and value a student finds in learning. What Indian commerce classrooms typically secure is behavioural engagement alone. Students are present and compliant, but cognitively switched off and emotionally disconnected, a pattern consistent with what Kuh *et al.* (2008) describe as the disengagement compact in higher education, where students and institutions tacitly agree to minimal demands in exchange for passing grades. The attendance register confirms presence. It says nothing about learning.

Three patterns keep showing up across institutions and years, observed consistently by the author across nearly a decade of teaching and corroborated informally through conversations with faculty colleagues across affiliated institutions in Tamil Nadu. First, selective wakefulness. Students stay alert during exams and assessment periods but drift away during conceptual discussions, case analyses and reflective work. Students have done the maths. Engage with what gets marked. Ignore what does not. This instrumental orientation toward assessment has been well documented in higher education research. Biggs (1987) termed it surface learning: strategic engagement driven by external reward rather than genuine interest or understanding. In a system that rewards end-of-semester recall over continuous, applied assessment, where internal marks go to students for copied assignments, poorly delivered seminars and going through the motions of class participation, this is a rational response to a poorly designed incentive structure.

Second, the comprehension-performance paradox. Students in commerce programmes frequently score well, sometimes distinction-level grades, without any meaningful ability to apply what they have studied. A student reproduces definitions of elasticity of demand, foreign exchange risk, or marginal costing accurately in an exam hall, but cannot connect any of it to a real scenario. Learning has stayed at the surface level of recall, never reaching the application, analysis, or evaluation that Bloom's taxonomy marks as genuine intellectual achievement (Bloom *et al.*, 1956).

Third, and perhaps most telling, is the disappearance of curiosity. Faculty with a decade or more of teaching experience consistently notice that students today ask fewer questions than earlier batches. They will not even walk up after class to clarify a doubt. The room that should be intellectually restless has become carefully quiet. This is not about intelligence. It reflects an

environment that has systematically punished questioning through time-pressured syllabi, exams that reward reproduction and classroom cultures that position the teacher as the only legitimate source of knowledge.

The author's experience teaching undergraduate commerce students brings this into sharp relief. In nearly a decade of classroom practice, the silence that greets an open question is rarely the silence of ignorance. It is the silence of calculated risk.

Undergraduate students stay quiet for at least three compounding reasons. First, peer ridicule. In tightly bonded classroom groups, a student who asks a question and gets it wrong risks mockery from friends, a social cost that, for most young people, far outweighs the academic benefit of asking. So they do not ask. Second, institutional fear. Internal assessment marks sit entirely in the hands of the teaching faculty. Students know this. A wrong answer, or worse, a question that appears to challenge the teacher's working method, might be remembered at the time of gradation. The classroom is not a safe space for intellectual risk. It is a space where silence is the rational survival strategy.

But perhaps the most uncomfortable observation is a third one. Silence that originates not with students, but with teachers. It is not uncommon for faculty to deliberately quieten a classroom when a Head of Department, Dean, or senior colleague walks in on rounds. A still, attentive-looking room signals control and professional seriousness. What it does not reveal, and what those conducting rounds rarely stop to ask, is whether anyone is actually learning anything. The performance of teaching, in this way, quietly replaces the reality of it.

The Indian context makes all of this harder. A significant proportion of commerce students are first-generation learners, navigating higher education without the cultural capital that more privileged peers inherit (Desai and Kulkarni, 2008). A curriculum built around Western stock markets and corporate governance structures means little to a student from a semi-urban family running a small trade business. The distance between what is taught and what is lived reinforces one quiet conclusion: education is something to get through, not something to use.

Finally, the post-pandemic classroom added new weight to an already strained situation. COVID-19 disrupted learning for years, accelerated the shift to digital platforms, normalised passive consumption and widened foundational gaps. Students came back to physical classrooms carrying attention habits formed by hours of scrolling and on-demand media consumption – habits fundamentally at odds with the slow, sustained effort that deep learning demands. The classroom, largely unchanged in its design, has struggled to compete.

Put together, these patterns make one thing clear: disengagement is not a student problem. Attendance mandates and motivational posters will not fix it. It runs deeper, into curriculum design, assessment logic, teaching culture and the social realities students carry into the room. The response must be aimed at the system, not the student.

3. Why conventional pedagogy has failed

The persistence of student disengagement in Indian commerce classrooms cannot be laid at the feet of student apathy alone. It is, in large measure, a failure of pedagogy, specifically of a model built for a different era, a different student and a different idea of what education is for. This failure is not simply about syllabi not keeping pace with industry, a real concern, but one that addresses only the content of education rather than the conditions under which learning is made possible (Joy and Bairagya, 2022). To understand the failure, we need to look in two places: at the theory behind the model and at the structures that keep it alive.

3.1 The transmission model and its limits

At the heart of conventional pedagogy in Indian higher education lies what Freire (1970) famously called the banking concept of education, a model in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the passive minds of students, who receive, memorise and regurgitate it in the examination. Three assumptions sit underneath this model. All three are wrong, or at least, no

longer defensible. First, that the teacher is the primary, if not only, custodian of knowledge. Second, that listening is learning. Third, that exam performance reliably reflects understanding. Cognitive science, a generation of educational research and the internet have, between them, made each of these assumptions look increasingly fragile (Vygotsky, 1978; Biggs and Tang, 2011).

When students sit through lectures without being asked to process, question, connect, or apply what they hear, information entering their working memory is rarely consolidated into long-term understanding. Sweller's (1988) cognitive load theory shows that the brain has limited capacity for processing new information simultaneously; lectures that push large volumes of content through without pauses for retrieval and reflection routinely exceed that capacity. The result is not learning. It is temporary retention, sufficient to survive an exam, followed by rapid forgetting.

The author's own experience offers a small but telling window into how this has shifted. Teaching began in 2016, after NET and SET qualifications and PhD submission. The subject was Financial Accounting. The tool was a chalkboard. The method was simple: explain a problem, then step back. In those early years, leaving five to ten minutes unstructured at the end of a session produced something specific: students would look up, lean forward and ask. The shy ones, the ones who said nothing in front of the group, would quietly come forward with notebooks open. The silence of the lecture would break into something more useful, actual doubt-clearing, actual thinking aloud.

That same five to ten minutes, in today's classroom, produces a completely different scene. The moment formal instruction pauses, phones appear. Not tentatively, eagerly, as though the free minutes were the only ones worth waiting for. In institutions that proudly advertise Wi-Fi-enabled campuses as a sign of modernity, the infrastructure built to support learning has become, in practice, the most efficient way to interrupt it. In friendlier classrooms, students have been found loading games, not alone, but together, in small groups, a shared escape from a room they are still physically sitting in. What changed between 2016 and now was not the students' capacity for curiosity. It was the competition.

3.2 Structural entrenchment in Indian higher education

Yet the transmission model persists not from ignorance but because powerful structural forces actively keep it in place. The most significant is the examination system. Indian university exams, at the undergraduate level especially, continue to reward the accurate (not always) reproduction of definitions and procedures over any demonstration of analytical reasoning or applied competence. When the terminal assessment rewards recall, both teacher and student rationally optimise for recall. Innovative pedagogy becomes not just unrewarded but penalising. It uses time that could have gone to syllabus coverage.

The second force is the pressure to complete the syllabus. Faculty work against tight academic calendars, inspection schedules and exam timetables. The author's own experience of organising and accompanying industrial visits over nearly a decade suggests that their educational value is frequently limited by poor pre-visit preparation, absence of structured learning objectives and minimal post-visit reflection or assessment. What is nominally an industry exposure exercise can, in practice, function primarily as a social outing, enjoyable for students, but disconnected from the pedagogical goals it is meant to serve. This observation is consistent with broader concerns in the Indian higher education literature about the gap between stated and actual outcomes of industry-institute interaction, concerns that, if anything, apply more acutely to affiliated colleges than to the elite institutions where such interactions have been most formally studied (Natarajan, 1998). Between syllabus pressure and these competing demands, the time for anything experimental quietly disappears. The lecture survives not because anyone believes it works best, but because it covers ground fastest.

Third is the question of teacher preparation. Knowing Financial Accounting deeply and knowing how to teach it are, as Shulman (1986) long ago pointed out, two entirely different

things. The Indian system has consistently confused them. Doctoral training equips faculty with disciplinary expertise. It almost never equips them with pedagogical competence. Yet the system assumes that subject mastery is a sufficient qualification for teaching. The persistent gap between knowing a subject and making it learnable for others is one of the most underacknowledged drivers of disengagement in Indian higher education.

3.3 The digital disruption that pedagogy has not absorbed

A fourth failure is the inability of conventional teaching to seriously reckon with the digital transformation of student life. Today's commerce students grew up in an information environment of extraordinary speed, one that rewards searching, delivers answers in seconds and competes aggressively for attention. The classroom that asks them to sit quietly for an hour while a single voice delivers content they could access on their phone in moments is not merely uninspiring. From the student's perspective, it is genuinely puzzling in its inefficiency.

This is not an argument for unguided digital exploration. Research is clear that minimal guidance produces inferior learning outcomes compared to well-structured instruction (Kirschner *et al.*, 2006). The point is different: the digital world has raised students' expectations of interactivity, and conventional pedagogy has not moved to meet them. The mismatch between the responsive, on-demand world outside the classroom and the passive, one-directional world inside it creates a motivational disconnect that no attendance policy can close.

3.4 The accountability vacuum

Finally, conventional pedagogy survives in part because no one is measuring what it costs. Accreditation processes attend to research output, infrastructure and procedural compliance. Appraisal systems count publications and administrative contributions. Teaching quality, the one thing that directly touches students every day, rarely appears on the scorecard. Without incentives for change and consequences for failure, the status quo simply reproduces itself.

These forces together, a bankrupt transmission model, exam-driven curricula, inadequate teacher preparation, unabsorbed digital disruption and an accountability vacuum, explain not just that conventional pedagogy has failed the disengaged generation, but why the failure was perhaps inevitable. The real question is not whether something needs to change. That much is clear. It is what that change should look like, and whether the system has the will to make it.

4. Rethinking pedagogy: a responsible framework

This article proposes the ARC Model of Responsible Pedagogy, three interconnected principles: Activation, Relevance and Connection. Each responds directly to one of the three dimensions of disengagement identified earlier. Each is grounded in established educational research and in a decade of teaching practice in Indian commerce education.

A clarification on originality is warranted here. The individual components of the ARC Model draw on well-established educational traditions. Active learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991), contextual relevance (Dewey, 1938; Ausubel, 1968) and relational pedagogy (Noddings, 1992) each have deep roots in educational theory. The ARC Model does not claim to have invented these principles. What it claims is something more modest and more useful: it brings these traditions together into a single framework built specifically for the institutional realities of Indian commerce education.

Those realities look nothing like the classrooms for which most pedagogical frameworks were designed. A typical commerce theory class in an affiliated Indian institution has between 60 and 65 students. Many subjects are purely theoretical, with few practical or applied components to break the monotony. Afternoon sessions run from 1.30pm to 6pm. Students in these sessions frequently arrive having slept past 2am the previous night. When the author began asking students directly why they looked so dull and unfocused in afternoon classes, the

answer came back consistently: they had not slept. This is not laziness. It is the reality of how a large proportion of Indian commerce students live.

In this context, a conventional 50-minute lecture is not merely ineffective. After 15–20 minutes, students begin yawning openly. Some eventually request that the lecture to be stopped. The author's shift toward active learning tools like Mentimeter and role-play activities was not driven by a reading of educational theory. It was driven by the simple observation that engagement was possible even in the last hour of a Friday afternoon session, but only when students were asked to do something rather than simply sit and listen. The ARC Model is the formalisation of what worked in that room, in those conditions, with those students. That is what makes it contextually grounded in a way that imported frameworks are not.

Figure 1 illustrates the three interconnected principles of the ARC Model and their direct correspondence to the three dimensions of disengagement identified in Section 2.

4.1 Principle 1 — activation: from passive reception to active engagement

Activation targets the core failure of the transmission model: treating students as passive receivers rather than active constructors of knowledge. In plain terms: students must do something with what they are learning. Not just sit and receive it.

The research behind this is unambiguous. Bonwell and Eison (1991) define active learning as any activity where students are doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Prince (2004), reviewing two decades of evidence, finds that active learning consistently produces better outcomes in engagement, retention and higher-order thinking than passive lecture formats. Freeman *et al*. (2014), in a meta-analysis of 225 studies, found students in active learning classrooms 1.5 times less likely to fail than those in traditional courses, findings replicated across business and social science contexts.

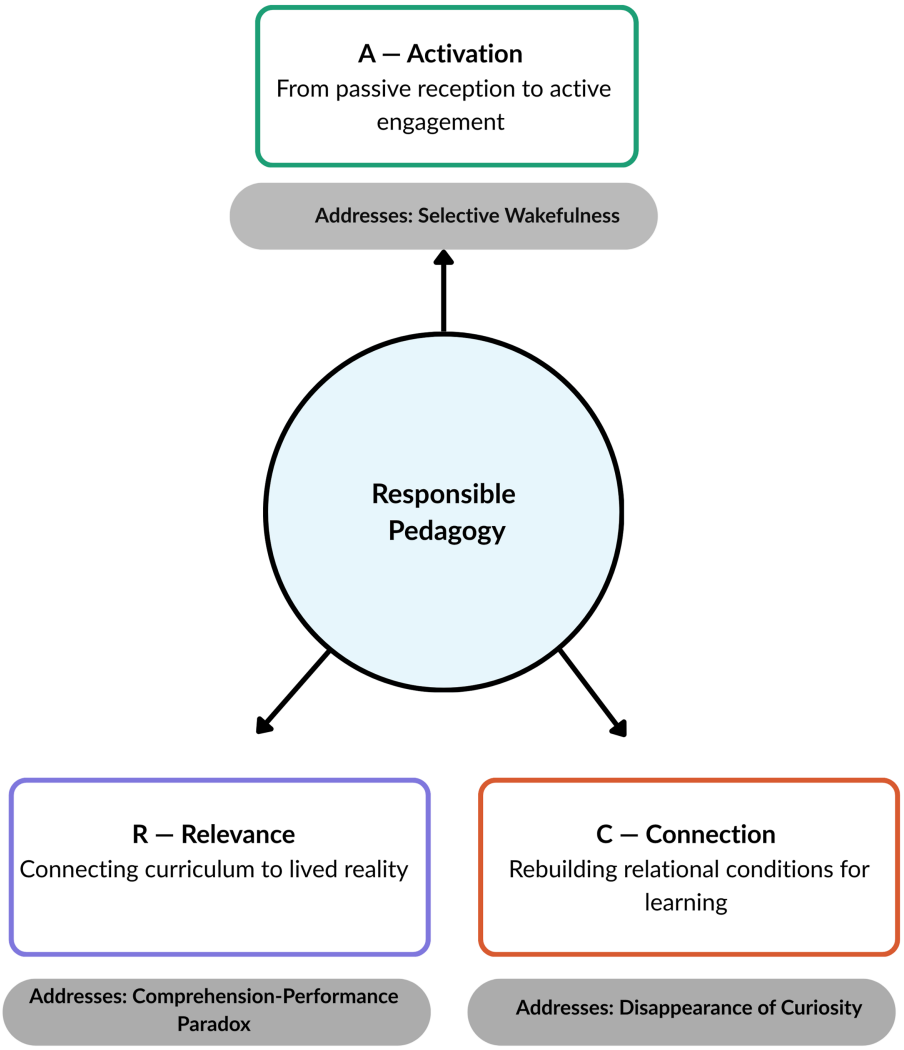
In the Indian classroom, Activation does not mean dismantling the lecture. It means redesigning it. This involves building sessions around what Bain (2004) calls natural critical learning environments, presenting the problem before offering the answer. It means short retrieval exercises at regular intervals, think-pair-share activities, live polling through tools like Mentimeter and case vignettes drawn from the Indian business environment. The aim is to shift the room from a site of monologue to a site of productive intellectual work.

The author's own classroom experiment with active learning produced results that were, frankly, surprising. On one occasion, instead of asking postgraduate students to put their phones away, the usual instruction, the opposite happened: they were asked to take them out. A QR code was displayed. The tool was Mentimeter. The session involved questions, live responses and a leaderboard on screen. A prize of Rs.20 was announced for the top scorer.

What followed was unlike any lecture before it. Students participated throughout, not because they were told to, not because marks depended on it, but because they wanted to win. The Rs.20 was, objectively, not worth competing for. The competition clearly was. The energy that day was qualitatively different from the managed quiet of a normal class.

What happened next week was more revealing. Students did not wait to be told what to do. They asked if we could do the same thing again instead of a regular lecture. When the author explained that Mentimeter's free version had a participant limit and the premium version cost money, one student went and found alternatives. He forwarded a list of free tools with similar features. A student had, unprompted, solved a teacher's logistical problem in order to get a better learning experience. That one moment said more about engagement than any attendance register ever could.

Activation must be embedded in the assessment structure, not tacked on as an extra. As long as the terminal exam rewards passive recall, active learning in the classroom will remain optional. Neither students nor institutions will take it seriously. Faculty who can design continuous assessment components, seminars, case analyses, problem sets, reflective journals,



Source: Author's own work

Figure 1. ARC model of responsible pedagogy

should use that space deliberately to signal that deep engagement, not surface reproduction, is what the course actually values.

4.2 Principle 2 — relevance: connecting curriculum to lived reality

Relevance addresses the comprehension-performance paradox. Students who can reproduce knowledge in exams but cannot use it anywhere else. It refers to the sustained effort to connect disciplinary content to the economic, social and professional realities that students actually live in or are heading toward.

This is not about dumbing things down. As Dewey (1938) argued nearly a century ago, education cut off from experience simply fails to educate. The commerce curriculum has

extraordinary potential for relevance. Demand and supply, financial literacy, marketing strategy and international trade are not abstract concepts; they are the operating logic of the world these students will shortly enter. The problem is not in the content but in its presentation: inert, context-free material to be memorised rather than living knowledge to be applied.

Three strategies make Relevance concrete for Indian commerce faculty, regardless of resource constraints. The first is contextualisation, grounding every concept in a locally recognisable example. Teaching working capital management? Start with the cash flow pressures of a kirana store or a textile trader in Tirupur. Teaching foreign exchange risk? Connect it to an IT exporter in Chennai hedging against currency movement. This is not a simplification. It is what Ausubel (1968) identified as the essential precondition for meaningful learning, building a bridge between abstract principle and lived understanding.

The second is a student-generated application, inviting students to find and present real-world instances of course concepts from their own experience. A student whose family runs a small business brings practical economic intelligence into the room that conventional pedagogy never reaches. Inviting that knowledge into the academic conversation enriches the class and sends a clear message to first-generation learners in particular: your experience has academic value.

The third is industry-proximate assessment, tasks that simulate what commerce graduates will actually face: reading published financial statements, analysing a live marketing campaign, writing a structured recommendation for a local business. They will not substitute for actual professional experience. But they close the gap considerably.

4.3 Principle 3 – connection: rebuilding the relational conditions for learning

Connection addresses the most overlooked dimension of the disengagement crisis, the relational and emotional conditions under which learning becomes possible at all. The disappearance of curiosity in Indian classrooms is not just a cognitive problem. It is a relational one. Students do not ask questions in rooms where questions feel dangerous, where the teacher's authority is experienced as intimidating, where getting something wrong in front of peers carries a social cost.

Noddings' (1992) ethic of care provides the theoretical anchor here. Students learn most deeply from teachers who show authentic interest in their development, who build psychological safety in the classroom and who position themselves as fellow inquirers rather than answer-dispensers. In Indian higher education, this does not mean abandoning authority. It means using authority to open intellectual space rather than to close it.

Connection in practice means learning students' names. It means opening a session by asking what confused students last time. It means responding to a wrong answer with curiosity, asking what the student was thinking, rather than simply replacing it with the right one. It means being honest about the edges of one's own knowledge. These are small things. Individually, they seem minor. Cumulatively, over a semester, they rebuild the classroom as a space where it is safe to not know something, which is the minimum condition for any learning to happen.

Connection is not only about teacher behaviour. It has a structural side too. Class sizes routinely exceeding 60 or 80 students in Indian commerce programmes make meaningful individual engagement structurally impossible, regardless of how committed the teacher is. Creating formal space for pedagogical reflection, peer observation, teaching portfolios and faculty learning communities gives teachers somewhere to develop their practice other than alone.

4.4 The ARC model in context

To be clear: the ARC Model is not a weekend fix. Structural problems need structural solutions, and no framework, however carefully reasoned, can change that on its own. What the ARC Model offers is a set of principled starting points that individual faculty can begin applying within whatever room their institution gives them, and a vocabulary for pushing, collectively, for the structural changes that responsible pedagogy ultimately requires.

It would be naive to present the ARC Model without acknowledging the resistance it is likely to encounter. That resistance comes from multiple directions simultaneously, and the author has experienced most of them firsthand.

From institutions, resistance is rarely expressed as outright opposition. It arrives through the process. When the author introduced activity-based sessions, the immediate institutional response was a request for evidence. The Head of Department, during routine one-to-one reviews, asked for geo-tagged photographs of the activity, entries in the log book and records in the MIS portal showing the topics covered. Each of these is a reasonable administrative expectation in isolation. Together, they add enough documentation burden to make a faculty member quietly conclude that returning to conventional lecturing is simply more efficient. A chalk-and-talk session requires no photograph, no special log entry and no explanation to anyone. An activity session requires all three. The system does not prohibit innovation. It just makes innovation more expensive than compliance.

Infrastructure creates a second layer of friction. Many affiliated institutions advertise wifi-enabled campuses as a marker of modernity. In practice, signal quality is inconsistent, coverage is patchy and in the middle of a live Mentimeter session, the connection drops. Students who were engaged thirty seconds ago are now staring at loading screens. The momentum of the session is gone. A teacher who has experienced this more than once learns to hedge, to have a backup plan and eventually, to simply not depend on digital tools at all.

Institutional authority raises a third concern. When quiz competitions were used as a basis for awarding assignment marks, the question arose from senior colleagues: how can group activity marks be fair when ten students participate but only a few actually answer? The concern is legitimate. In any group of ten, some students engage fully and others position themselves at the back of the group and contribute little. During role-play activities, the author has observed students in the audience taking out their phones not to learn from what is being performed, but to record video for social media. The activity is happening. The learning is not always.

From students, resistance can appear where it is least expected. Students who have spent years copying assignments and sitting quietly through lectures sometimes find active learning genuinely uncomfortable. It asks more of them. It exposes them in front of their peers. Managing this requires patience, consistency and the kind of relational trust that takes a full semester to build, not a single session to establish.

None of this is a reason to abandon the ARC Model. It is a reason to enter it with realistic expectations. Pedagogical change in Indian higher education is not blocked by a single wall. It is slowed by a hundred small frictions, each individually manageable, but cumulatively exhausting. The faculty member who persists through those frictions is not heroic. They are simply stubborn in the right direction.

The model also speaks directly to what responsible enterprise means in an educational setting, not just producing employable graduates, but genuinely developing people capable of thinking critically, acting ethically and contributing meaningfully to the communities they will work in. In Indian commerce education, that obligation is currently unmet. The ARC Model is one principled attempt to begin meeting it.

5. Implications for practice and policy

Rethinking pedagogy for the disengaged generation cannot be left to motivated individual faculty alone. Change is needed at three levels simultaneously: what happens in the room, what institutions decide and what policy mandates.

5.1 For practitioners: what faculty can do now

The ARC Model is not asking for money or infrastructure. Most institutions already have what is needed. What it asks for is harder to supply from outside: a willingness to question long-held assumptions about what teaching is and what it is for.

Faculty can start with Activation, restructuring even one lecture a week around a problem rather than a content outline. The shift from Today I will teach you about ratio analysis to Here is a struggling company's balance sheet, what would you want to know first, costs nothing but changes everything in student orientation. Small retrieval exercises, asking students to recall and apply the previous session's key idea before introducing new material, take five minutes and measurably improve retention (Roediger and Karpicke, 2006).

Relevance can be introduced gradually. Every commerce teacher in India reads the same newspapers, sees the same GST filing challenges and watches the same market movements that their students' families navigate. Connecting a concept to a current headline or a local business situation requires preparation, but not institutional permission. It is a choice available in every session.

Connection is the most immediately actionable principle. Learning thirty names instead of facing sixty anonymous faces. Pausing at the start of class to ask what was confusing last time. Responding to a wrong answer with an interesting, walk me through your thinking, rather than a correction. None of these costs anything. Their cumulative effect on classroom culture, over a semester, is larger than it looks. Students who feel seen by their teacher begin, slowly and tentatively, to show up, not just physically, but intellectually.

For Heads of Department and institutional leaders, the implications are structural. Timetabling, internal assessment design, class size and faculty development budgets are all within institutional control and all directly shape whether engaged pedagogy can survive. A department that genuinely wants to address disengagement must ask honestly whether its assessment structure rewards deep learning or surface compliance and whether its faculty development goes beyond subject workshops to include pedagogical skill-building.

One stakeholder group is conspicuously absent from most discussions of pedagogical reform in Indian higher education: the students themselves. Disengagement is not a passive condition. The student who takes out a phone the moment instruction pauses, who copies an assignment at midnight from another student's submission, who sits through three years of lectures without once being genuinely challenged, is not merely a victim of a broken system. They are also, potentially, its most powerful critic and its most willing collaborator.

The author's classroom experience across several years offers consistent evidence of this. Beyond the Mentimeter experiment described earlier, the author introduced quiz competitions structured into five or six teams of approximately ten students each. The winning team was exempted from submitting the assignment component, which carries 20 marks in the institutional assessment structure. The response was immediate and telling. Students welcomed it not merely because it reduced their workload, but because the alternative, writing pages of copied content from the internet or from another student's submission, was something they found meaningless and exhausting. The quiz gave them a legitimate reason to engage rather than copy.

Word spread quickly. Students from other classes approached the author and asked directly: We heard you conducted a quiz and gave assignment marks to the winners, can you do the same for us? This was not prompted. Nobody asked them to ask. They came because they wanted something different from what they were getting.

Activity-based worksheets introduced in Business Research Methods produced a similar effect. Because the tasks required students to think and respond individually, copying from the internet or from each other was not possible. Students engaged. Feedback scores across these interventions consistently came in above 9 out of 10.

What this experience has taught the author is something that no educational framework fully captures: Fear and knowledge cannot travel on the same track. When students are afraid of a teacher, afraid of getting something wrong, afraid of losing marks, they shut down. Activity-based classroom structures break that fear. They do not just improve learning outcomes. They change the relationship between teacher and student into something warmer, more honest and more productive. Students become more approachable. The teacher feels the

difference too. There is a qualitatively different energy in a room where students are active and interacting compared to one where they are silently waiting for the session to end.

Faculty who wish to shift their practice would do well to make this explicit, telling students what they are trying, why they are trying it and inviting feedback on whether it is working. A simple end-of-session question, what helped you think today and what did not, costs nothing and positions students as co-investigators in the learning process rather than passive recipients of it. Institutions and policymakers, for their part, should ensure that student feedback mechanisms carry genuine weight in evaluating teaching quality, not as a satisfaction survey, but as a structured source of pedagogical intelligence.

5.2 For policy makers: what the system must change

At the policy level, the implications are more demanding and more consequential. Three changes deserve urgent attention.

First, examination reform. The UGC and affiliating universities cannot keep deferring this. Competency-based assessment, testing what students can do, not just what they can recall, must move from policy language into actual practice. NEP 2020 provides the foundation; what is missing is implementation with genuine commitment rather than cosmetic compliance.

Second, pedagogical training is a requirement for faculty appointment. India's regulatory framework demands NET, SET and PhD, but nothing on demonstrated teaching competence. This anomaly cannot be sustained. Mandatory foundational pedagogy training, either before appointment or within the probationary period, would begin to close the persistent gap between content expertise and teaching effectiveness.

Third, accreditation criteria must reflect what students actually experience. NAAC currently emphasises infrastructure, publications and procedural compliance. The quality of teaching, as encountered by students in real classrooms, remains insufficiently weighted. Introducing student learning outcome measures and peer review of teaching into accreditation frameworks would create the institutional incentives for pedagogical investment that currently do not exist. Without them, nothing changes. The vacuum stays.

The author writes this not from a position of having solved the problem, but from inside it. Even with a genuine commitment to engaging pedagogy, two forces push back. The first is time. Designing a Mentimeter session, building a case vignette, or testing a new tool takes hours that conventional teaching does not. A chalk-and-talk lecture needs only a set of subheadings. A slide deck from last semester can be reused with almost no effort. Innovative pedagogy costs time that most Indian faculty, carrying teaching loads, administrative duties, publication targets and PhD supervision simultaneously, simply do not have to spare.

The second force is invisibility. There is no KPI for classroom engagement in Indian higher education. No score, no metric, no accreditation indicator captures whether students left the room thinking more clearly than when they entered. What gets measured, and therefore what gets done, is indexed publication output. Scopus and Web of Science counts appear on appraisal forms. Student feedback, when collected at all, carries negligible weight. A faculty member who spends three hours designing an engaging class and one who spends those same three hours on a journal manuscript are, by every institutional measure, doing equivalent things. The system has already decided which one matters more.

None of this is radical. These are baseline expectations for any system that genuinely cares about the students it enrols, students who arrive with real aspirations, whose disengagement is not a character flaw but a rational response to an environment that has, for too long, asked too little of them in the right ways.

6. Conclusion

The room is still full. That will not change. Indian higher education will keep expanding, enrolment figures will keep rising and commerce classrooms will keep filling with young

people who have made the considerable effort of turning up. The harder question, the one this article has tried to answer, is what happens after they sit down.

For too long, the answer has been: not enough. Not enough intellectual challenge. Not enough connection between what is taught and what matters. Not enough safety to ask a question, admit confusion, or think aloud without embarrassment. Students have responded in the only rational way available to them. They have stayed in their seats and left the room in every other sense that counts.

This is not a generation without curiosity. It is a generation whose curiosity has not been asked for, or, when offered, has not been rewarded. The disengagement that faculty observe every day in Indian commerce classrooms is not a student failure. It is a systemic one. And systemic failures need systemic responses.

The ARC Model, Activation, Relevance and Connection, is offered in that spirit. Not as a prescription that dissolves complexity, but as a principled orientation for faculty who want to teach differently, for departments that want to assess more honestly and for a policy environment that must eventually face the gap between the education system it describes in documents and the one students actually experience. Each principle is individually actionable. Together, they offer a coherent alternative to a transmission model that has run its course.

The stakes deserve to be named plainly. Students in Indian commerce classrooms today will enter a labour market shaped by automation, globalisation and rapid technological change. What protects them in that world is not the ability to reproduce a definition of comparative advantage from memory. Education either builds these capacities or quietly kills them. The current model, in too many classrooms, is doing the latter.

Rethinking pedagogy is, in the end, about remembering why the room was built in the first place. Students are not enrolment numbers. They are the entire point. When the room is full and the learning is empty, the failure belongs not to those sitting in the benches, but to those of us who designed the experience they are sitting through. That honest acknowledgement, uncomfortable as it is, is exactly where responsible pedagogy has to start.

Responsible enterprise cannot stay silent here either. What happens inside a commerce classroom in Chennai or Coimbatore eventually walks out into a business, a community, an economy. A graduate who spent three years learning to sit quietly, copy correctly and reproduce on demand is not a thinking professional. They are a compliance machine. That is not what the enterprise needs. That is not what society needs. Responsible enterprise pedagogy, the very concern this journal was built around, asks us to look honestly at what our classrooms are actually producing and to take ownership of the answer. The ARC Model is one attempt to make that answer better.

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