



Review Article

Implementation of the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021: A Boon or Challenge for Allied Health Science Students in India?—A Structured Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Act, 2021 was introduced to standardize allied health education and professional regulation in India.

Objective: To systematically evaluate the impact of the NCAHP Act on allied health science students, identifying whether it functions as a boon or a challenge.

Methods: A structured review was conducted using databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, and official government sources. Studies and policy documents from 2010–2025 were analyzed using thematic synthesis.

Results: The Act provides significant advantages such as curriculum standardization, professional recognition, and enhanced employability. However, implementation challenges, financial burden, and transitional uncertainty affect current students.

Conclusion: The NCAHP Act represents a long-term benefit but poses short-term challenges. Strategic implementation is crucial to maximize student benefit.

Keywords: NCAHP Act 2021, Allied Health Education, Policy Impact, India, Students, Healthcare Regulation.

Introduction:

Allied health professionals constitute a vital and often underrecognized component of healthcare systems worldwide, contributing significantly to patient care across diagnostic, therapeutic, rehabilitative, and preventive domains. These professionals—including medical laboratory technologists, radiographers, physiotherapists, and operation theatre technologists—play a crucial role in supporting clinical decision-making and ensuring the efficiency of healthcare delivery. Globally, allied and mid-level healthcare providers form a substantial proportion of the health workforce and are essential for achieving universal health coverage and strengthening health systems [1,2].

In India, the demand for allied health professionals has increased significantly over the past two decades due to rapid population growth, epidemiological transition, and the rising burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. The expansion of healthcare infrastructure, including tertiary care hospitals and diagnostic centers, has further amplified the need for skilled allied health personnel [3,4]. Despite this increasing demand, the allied healthcare sector in India has historically faced several challenges, particularly due to the absence of a centralized regulatory framework governing education, training, and professional practice.

Prior to 2021, allied health education in India was characterized by considerable heterogeneity in curriculum design, duration of training, and assessment methods across institutions. Programs were offered by universities, private colleges, and paramedical boards with varying standards, resulting in inconsistencies in the competencies of graduates [5,6]. This lack of uniformity not only affected the quality of healthcare services but also limited the professional recognition and career mobility of allied health graduates at both national and international levels. Furthermore, the absence of a statutory regulatory body contributed to unclear scopes of practice and the proliferation of unregulated training institutions [6].

To address these longstanding gaps, the Government of India enacted the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021, a landmark reform aimed at standardizing and regulating allied healthcare professions.

The Act provides for the establishment of a National Commission, State Councils, and a Central Register of professionals, thereby creating a structured framework for governance and accountability [7]. It encompasses more than 50 allied and healthcare professions and emphasizes competency-based education, uniform curriculum standards, accreditation of institutions, and ethical professional practice.

The introduction of the Act aligns with broader national and global health policy frameworks, including the National Health Policy 2017 and the WHO Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, both of which emphasize the need for a well-trained, regulated, and adequately distributed healthcare workforce [1,8]. By addressing gaps in regulation and standardization, the Act aims to improve healthcare quality, enhance workforce efficiency, and promote patient safety.

From an academic perspective, the NCAHP Act introduces significant reforms that directly impact allied health science students. These include standardized curricula, competency-based training, structured career pathways, and mandatory registration for professional practice. While these reforms are expected to enhance educational quality and professional outcomes, they also present challenges, particularly during the transition phase. Students currently enrolled in allied health programs may face uncertainty regarding curriculum changes, accreditation status of institutions, and professional registration requirements.

Additionally, disparities in institutional readiness present further concerns. Well-established institutions, particularly in urban areas, may be better equipped to adapt to the new standards, whereas smaller and rural institutions may struggle with infrastructure limitations, faculty shortages, and resource constraints [6].

This uneven adaptation may lead to disparities in educational quality and student outcomes. Moreover, the financial burden associated with compliance to regulatory standards may result in increased tuition fees, thereby affecting accessibility for students from economically weaker backgrounds.

Another significant challenge is the lack of awareness and understanding of the provisions of the Act among students and educators. Limited dissemination of information regarding the implementation process has led to confusion and apprehension, potentially affecting student confidence and academic progression.

Given these multifactorial implications, it is essential to critically evaluate the impact of the NCAHP Act on allied health science students, who represent the future healthcare workforce of the nation. While the Act has the potential to transform allied healthcare education in India, its success depends largely on effective implementation, stakeholder awareness, and institutional preparedness.

Therefore, this structured review aims to comprehensively analyze the benefits and challenges associated with the NCAHP Act, 2021 from the perspective of allied health science students. By synthesizing available literature and policy frameworks, this review seeks to provide a balanced and evidence-based understanding of whether the Act serves as a boon or a challenge in the evolving landscape of allied healthcare education in India.

Methodology:

This structured review was conducted using a comprehensive search of electronic databases, including PubMed and Google Scholar, along with official documents from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the National Health Systems Resource Centre (NHSRC). The search strategy included keywords such as “NCAHP Act 2021,” “allied health education India,” “healthcare workforce regulation,” and “student impact.” Articles published between 2010 and 2025 were considered.

Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and reports addressing allied healthcare education, workforce regulation, and student outcomes. Exclusion criteria included non-English publications, editorials without empirical or policy relevance, and studies unrelated to allied health education. A thematic analysis approach was employed to synthesize findings into categories of benefits, challenges, and implementation-related issues.

Overview of the NCAHP Act, 2021:

The NCAHP Act, 2021 was introduced to bring comprehensive reform to the allied healthcare sector in India. The Act provides for the establishment of a National Commission, State Councils, and a Central Register for allied and healthcare professionals. It encompasses more than 50 professions and aims to standardize education, regulate training institutions, and ensure ethical practice [1].

A key feature of the Act is the emphasis on competency-based education and uniform curriculum frameworks across institutions. Additionally, it defines the scope of practice for various professions, thereby enhancing accountability and professional clarity. These measures are expected to improve the quality of healthcare services and strengthen the healthcare workforce in India [2,3].

Benefits of the NCAHP Act for Students:

One of the most significant advantages of the NCAHP Act is the standardization of allied health education. Prior to its implementation, considerable variation existed in curricula across institutions, leading to disparities in knowledge and skills among graduates. The Act mandates uniform educational standards, ensuring that students receive consistent training regardless of their institution. This enhances the credibility of allied health programs and improves the overall quality of education [2].

Another important benefit is the improvement in professional recognition. Allied health professionals have historically been underrecognized compared to other healthcare providers. The Act provides legal recognition and defines clear roles and responsibilities for each profession, thereby strengthening professional identity. For students, this translates into increased confidence, better career prospects, and greater societal respect [4].

The Act also enhances employability by ensuring that graduates meet standardized competency requirements. Employers can rely on the qualifications of registered professionals, leading to improved job opportunities in both public and private sectors. Furthermore, alignment with international standards facilitates global mobility, allowing students to pursue higher education and employment opportunities abroad [3,5].

In addition, the Act promotes research and academic advancement by encouraging structured postgraduate education and evidence-based practice. This is particularly beneficial for students interested in academic and research careers, as it fosters a culture of scientific inquiry and innovation.

Challenges Associated with the NCAHP Act

Despite its numerous advantages, the implementation of the NCAHP Act presents several challenges for students. One of the primary concerns is the gap between policy formulation and execution. Delays in the establishment of state councils and inconsistencies in implementation across regions create uncertainty for students regarding registration and licensing processes [1].

Institutional readiness is another major challenge. Many educational institutions, particularly in rural areas, lack the infrastructure and trained faculty required to meet the standards prescribed by the Act. This may affect the quality of education and limit the ability of institutions to comply with accreditation requirements [6].

The financial implications of compliance also pose a concern. Institutions may incur additional costs to upgrade infrastructure and meet regulatory standards, which can be passed on to students in the form of increased tuition fees. This may restrict access to education for economically disadvantaged students and widen existing inequalities.

Transitional uncertainty is particularly significant for students currently enrolled in programs. Changes in curriculum, assessment methods, and registration requirements can create confusion and anxiety. Students may face difficulties in understanding how the new regulations affect their academic progression and career pathways.

Furthermore, there is a notable lack of awareness about the provisions of the Act among students and faculty. This awareness deficit can hinder effective implementation and lead to misinterpretation of guidelines, thereby affecting student outcomes as shown in figure 1.

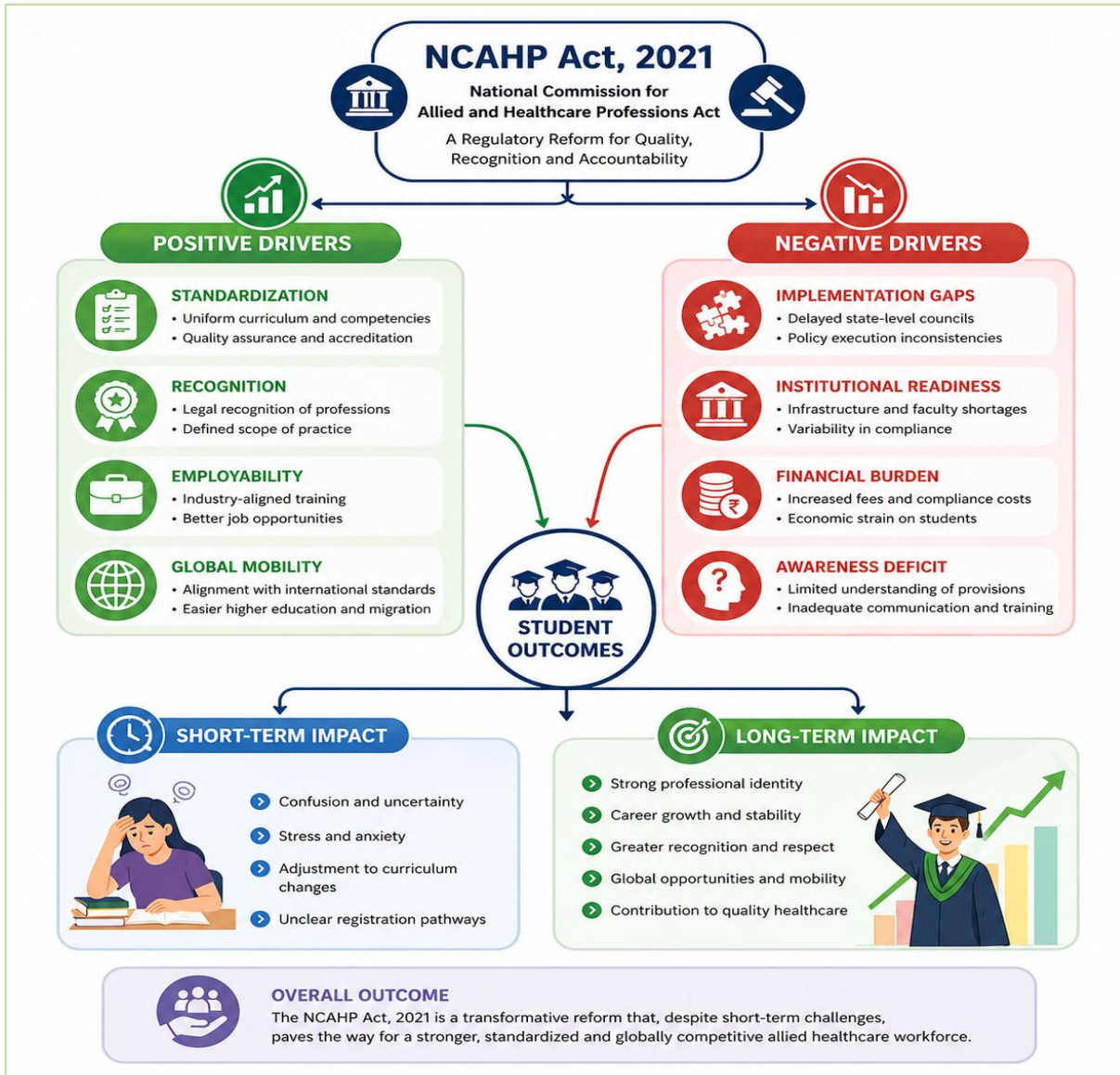


Figure-1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Impact of the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Act, 2021 on Student Outcomes in Allied Health Education

Discussion:

The NCAHP Act represents a critical step toward strengthening allied healthcare education and workforce regulation in India. The findings of this review indicate that while the Act offers substantial long-term benefits, its short-term impact is characterized by implementation challenges and transitional issues.

A key observation is the disparity in adaptation between urban and rural institutions. Urban institutions are more likely to have the resources required to comply with the new standards, whereas rural institutions may struggle, potentially leading to inequities in educational quality. Similarly, private institutions may face financial challenges in meeting regulatory requirements, which could indirectly affect students through increased fees.

The challenges identified are largely operational and transitional rather than structural. This suggests that with effective implementation strategies, stakeholder engagement, and adequate resource allocation, these issues can be mitigated. Comparisons with global healthcare systems indicate that standardized regulation of allied health professions leads to improved workforce efficiency and better patient outcomes [7,8, 12, 13].

Limitations and Future Research Directions:

To ensure the successful implementation of the NCAHP Act, several measures are recommended. These include phased implementation to allow institutions time to adapt, increased awareness programs for students and faculty, and financial support for infrastructure development. The integration of digital technologies, such as centralized registries and online accreditation systems, can further enhance transparency and efficiency.

Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the Act's impact on students will be essential to identify areas for improvement. Collaboration between policymakers, educational institutions, and students can facilitate a more inclusive and effective implementation process.

Conclusion

The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021 is a transformative reform aimed at improving the quality and regulation of allied healthcare education in India. While the Act offers significant long-term benefits, including standardized education, enhanced professional recognition, and improved employability, its implementation poses short-term challenges for students. These challenges, primarily related to institutional readiness, financial burden, and transitional uncertainty, must be addressed through strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. Overall, the Act should be viewed as a progressive initiative that, with effective implementation, has the potential to significantly enhance the educational and professional landscape for allied health science students in India.

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