

## Assessing ICCR's Assistance to Afghan Students Stuck in India Post the Collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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**ABSTRACT:** The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has been awarding scholarships to Afghan national students under its Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals (SSSAN). This process is being done under the supervision of the Ministry of External Affairs of India. With the takeover of the country by the Taliban on August 15, 2021, many students got stuck in India even after completing their studies. Observing this situation, the ICCR started extending scholarships to these students to enable them to continue their education at higher levels.

This paper intends to examine the process involved in extending the scholarships and the challenges being faced by Afghan students during their stay in India, the level of awareness of students about the procedure for applying for the extension and the adequacy of the scholarships and facilities, and their engagement in cultural activities organized by the ICCR in collaboration with their respective educational institutions. This paper is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data has been based on the information collected through a questionnaire or online survey of 103 students studying at different universities in India, and the secondary data has been collected from various related documents. The findings of the paper will help in analyzing the success of the scheme (SSSNA) in providing opportunities for continuing their education and maintaining and enhancing socio-cultural ties between the two nations.

**KEYWORDS:** ICCR, Stuck Students, Scholarship, SSSAN, Afghanistan.

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### INTRODUCTION

India and Afghanistan's bilateral relationship dates back to immemorial times. From civilization to the current century, the two nations played an essential role in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. This was tightened post-Taliban regime (2001). India assisted Afghanistan in different aspects, especially capacity building and education. During the official visit of the Prime Minister of India to Afghanistan on August 5, 2005 (Ministry of External Affairs, 2006), he announced the grant of 500 scholarships under the administration of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

ICCR is an autonomous organization founded on April 09, 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, which functions under the Ministry of External Affairs of India with the following aims: "a. to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs relating to India's cultural relations with other countries; b. to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and peoples and c. to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture" (Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2022).

Since 2005, ICCR has awarded scholarships to Afghan students under its Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals (SSSAN). The number of scholarships raised to 1,000 from 500 in the academic year 2012–13 (Bose, 2021). A new scheme on Scholarship Scheme for Children and Dependents of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) was announced during the visit of the Prime Minister to Afghanistan in December 2015, offering 500 slots for undergraduate courses to the children and dependents of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces martyrs for the academic year 2018–19 onward (Admission).

Generally, the scholarships are announced by the Embassy and General Consulates of India in Afghanistan in February of every year. As usual in February 2021, the program started in Afghanistan and many students filled online form for scholarship and students had to reach their respective universities by commencement of academic year 2021-22. Unfortunately, with the political collapse of Afghanistan's government in the hands of the Taliban on August 15, 2021, relation between the two countries came on-hold with the closure of the Indian Embassy and its General Consulates in Afghanistan. With this issue, inflow of the new

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students paused. Moreover, the newly graduated (ex-ICCR and self-financed) students got stuck and facing uncertainty of their future here in India.

Hence, ICCR by a notification on 08 October 2021, announced its final decision to grant scholarships to those newly graduated students for a higher level who were physically present in India (Flash News, 2021). And then it awarded 450 scholarships to Afghan students for academic year 2021-22 (Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Meeting with ICCR President, 2021). This year ICCR has awarded more than 950 scholarships to Afghan students for the academic year 2022-23 (Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Meeting with ICCR President, 2022).

### **PURPOSE**

The paper focuses on the way ICCR handled the situation from students' perspectives. The outcomes of this study will further help respective organization for the better distribution and extension of scholarships to students.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the process involved in extending the scholarships
2. To evaluate the level of awareness of students about the procedure for applying for the extension and the adequacy of the scholarships and facilities.
3. Assessing the level of engagement and participation of students in cultural activities organized by the ICCR in collaboration with their respective educational institutions.
4. Analyzing the success of the scheme (SSSNA) in providing opportunities for continuing their education, maintaining and enhancing socio-cultural ties between the two nations.
5. Findings of this study will help drivers to facilitate more students

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study of this paper will answer to the following questions

1. What is the process of extending scholarships post 2021?
2. What barriers students faced for getting scholarship?
3. What challenges did the students encounter most before being awarded or extended their scholarships?
4. Whether the facilities/stipends are satisfactory to students?
5. What activities are the students engaged in?

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

India as largest and most suitable market of higher education for Afghanistan, it hosted thousands of students during last two decades. As per the reports of All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20, India had the inflow of 49,348 international students from 168 countries across the globe. Highest number of students coming from neighboring countries from which Nepal with 28.1%, Afghanistan 9.1% /4504 students (Male 3896 & 608 Female), Bangladesh 4.6% and Bhutan 3.85% of the total (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2019-20). In addition to this, India's aid during last two decades is well-acknowledged by Afghan government, public and globally from, education, construction of Herat Dam, Parliament building in Kabul, Chabahar port and capacity building in various sectors is everlasting and has played a constructive role to this nation (Bhat, 2019).

Moreover, India did not forget Afghanistan during Covid-19, when itself was combating this unprecedented crisis. It helped Afghanistan by 75,000 MT of wheat on 04, 11, 2020 via Chabahar Port for augmenting its food security during Covid-19 (Release, 2020). It also continued its assistance to Afghanistan post collapse of the democratic government on 15 august 2021, as it supplied 45 tons of medical assistance which including 500,000 covid vaccines along with 40,000 MTs of wheat (Press Releases, 2022).

However, by confessing India's assistance to Afghanistan from education, construction, medical to wheat helps, since the political changes in Kabul and on-hold of the diplomatic relations of the two countries, around 2,500 Afghan students who could not get visa to come and continue their ongoing classes in their respective universities in India (Siddiqui, 2022). From the mentioned quantity of students, 442 of them were under the ICCR sponsorship who continued their studies online mode (Hashimy).

### **METHODOLOGY**

To conduct this study, the paper is based on the primary as well as secondary data. The primary data has been based on the information collected through online survey which was distributed among 103 students whose scholarship is awarded/extended

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in different universities in India, Online data collection has been selected for its several benefits such as time and cost saving, efficiency and convenience and safety, simplicity for analysis and transferring to database (Samúel Lefever, Michael Dal and Ásrún Matthíasdóttir, 2007). The link for Online Survey was shared to WhatsApp Groups of Afghan students pursuing their higher education in India post the political changes in Kabul, Afghanistan. The secondary data has been collected from various related documents, reports and papers.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The online survey focused on different factors which are as follows:

#### I. Profile of the Respondents

Out of 103 respondents there were 80 (77.7%) male and 23 (22.3%) female. The respondents with different age ranges from 19-23 there are 11(10.7%), from 24-28 there are 60 (58.8%), from 29-33 there are 27 (26.4%) and above 34 years there are 4 (3.9%). Table 1.

They were categorized on the basis of their previous educational sponsorship and it was found that 31 (30.1%) were falling in the category of self-financed and 72 (69.9%) fall in the category of ICCR scholarship. Table 1.

The respondents are from different universities/institutions pursuing their studies in various subjects and courses: 8 (7.8%) Undergraduate, 53 (51.5%) Postgraduate and 42 (40.8%) PhD. Table 1.

Researchers only focused on two academic years for the award/extension of their scholarships. It was found out that 62 (60.2%) for academic year 2021-22, and academic year 2022-23 with 41 (39.8%). Table 1.

Table 1.

| No.   | University/College                      | No. of Respondents | Percentage % |
|-------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1.    | Andhra University                       | 6                  | 5.8          |
| 2.    | Bangalore University                    | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 3.    | Central University of Haryana           | 4                  | 3.8          |
| 4.    | DAV College Sector 10 Chandigarh        | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 5.    | Delhi University                        | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 6.    | Doon University                         | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 7.    | Fergusson College, Pune                 | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 8.    | GGDSD College -32 Chandigarh            | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 9.    | Gujarat Technical University            | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 10.   | Gujarat University                      | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 11.   | ITM University Gwalior                  | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 12.   | Jain University                         | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 13.   | Kerala University                       | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 14.   | Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra      | 8                  | 7.7          |
| 15.   | Maharaja Sayajirau University of Baroda | 3                  | 2.9          |
| 16.   | Mangalore University                    | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 17.   | MSU                                     | 3                  | 2.9          |
| 18.   | Mysore University                       | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 19.   | NFSU                                    | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 20.   | Osmania University                      | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 21.   | Panjab University Chandigarh            | 18                 | 17.4         |
| 22.   | PJTSAU                                  | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 23.   | Punjabi University, Patiala             | 28                 | 27.1         |
| 24.   | Savitribai Phule Pune University        | 2                  | 1.9          |
| 25.   | SGGS COLLEGE 26 Chandigarh              | 1                  | 0.9          |
| 26.   | University of Lucknow                   | 4                  | 3.8          |
| 27.   | Veer Narmad South Gujarat University    | 4                  | 3.8          |
| Total |                                         | 102                | 100          |

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In the bellow table the number of respondents is shown who are from different universities/ colleges.

**Table 2.**

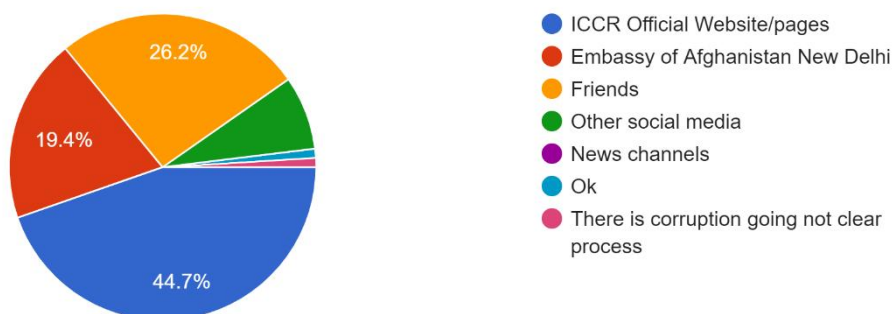
| Gender          |        | Age             |       |       |              | Sponsorship background |       | Courses         |       |       |
|-----------------|--------|-----------------|-------|-------|--------------|------------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Male            | Female | 19-24           | 25-28 | 29-33 | 34 and above | ICCR                   | Self  | UG              | PG    | PhD   |
| 80              | 23     | 11              | 60    | 27    | 4            | 72                     | 31    | 8               | 53    | 42    |
| 77.7%           | 22.3%  | 10.7%           | 58.8% | 26.4% | 3.9%         | 69.9%                  | 30.1% | 7.8%            | 51.5% | 40.8% |
| Total=103, 100% |        | Total=103, 100% |       |       |              | Total=103,100%         |       | Total=103, 100% |       |       |

### II. Awareness about the Scholarship

For the purpose of awareness of the respondents regarding the scholarship announcement by the ICCR and the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan New Delhi, certain questions were asked. From which the respondents had to choose the source of information from which they got to know about the awarding/extension of scholarship. They are: by the ICCR Official Website/pages 46 (44.7%), Embassy of Afghanistan New Delhi 20 (19.4%), Friends 27 (26.2%), Other social media 8 (7.8%), News channels 0(0%) and Other 2 (1.9%). **Figure 1.**

How did you get to know about ICCR Scholarship?  
103 responses

**Figure 1.**

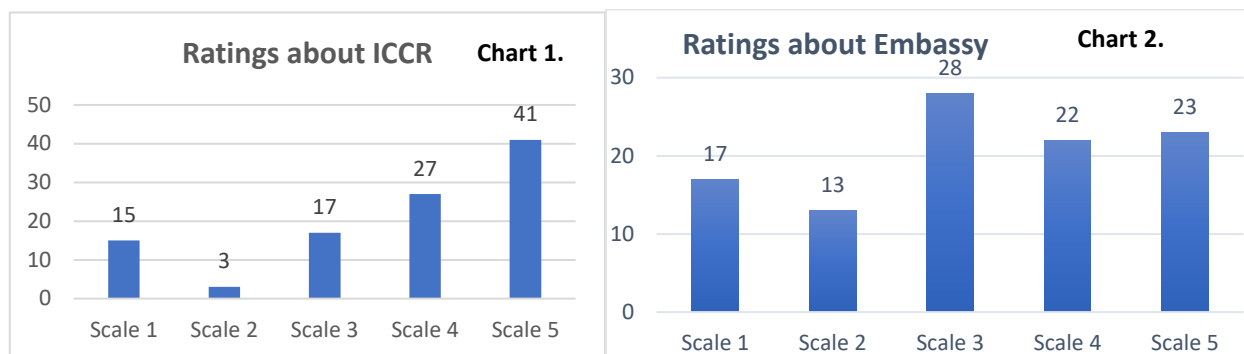


The rating system is designed on numbering basis, from 1 which is the lowest and 5 is the highest level of satisfaction about the two. Out of 103 respondents regarding ICCR, 15 (14.6%) rated 1, 3 (2.9%) rated 2, 17 (16.5%) rated 3, 27 (26.2%) rated 4 and 41 (39.8%) rated 5. On the other hand, the rating for the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: 17 (16.5%) respondents rated 1, 13 (12.6%) rated 2, 28 (27.2%) rated 3, 22 (21.4%) rated 4 and 23 (22.3%) rated 5. Table 3. Charts 1 & 2.

**Table 3.**

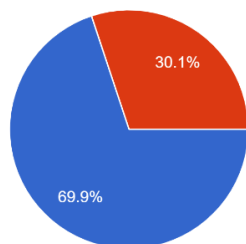
| ICCR                 | Scale        | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5     |
|----------------------|--------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
|                      | Respondents  | 15   | 3    | 17   | 27   | 41    |
|                      | Percentage % | 14.6 | 2.9  | 16.5 | 26.2 | 39.8  |
| Embassy of I.R. Afg. | Scale        | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5     |
|                      | Respondents  | 17   | 13   | 28   | 22   | 23    |
|                      | Percentage % | 16.5 | 12.6 | 27.2 | 21.4 | 22.3% |

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The question regarding the involvement of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the process of the ICCR scholarship was answered “Yes” by 72 persons (69.9%) and the “No” with responses of 31 (30.1%). The major disagreement responses of the 30.1% are indicating the corruption, distrust, lack of transparency and complication of the process for applicants. **Figure 2.**

According to you, should the Embassy of Afghanistan play a role in the scholarship process or not?  
103 responses



**Figure 2.**

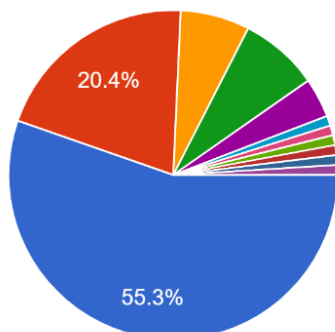
● Yes  
● No

### III. Challenges

Respondents were asked about the most challenges they faced right after their graduation. Following are the answers: 57 (55.3%) respondents faced financial problem, Legal stay /Visa issues 21 (20.4%), Admission and availability of seats with 8 (7.8%), Depression/Isolation with 7 (6.8%), Document processing 4 (3.9%) and other 6 (5.8%). **Figure 3.**

Which of the following challenges did you face the most before being awarded or having your scholarship extended?

103 responses



**Figure 3.**

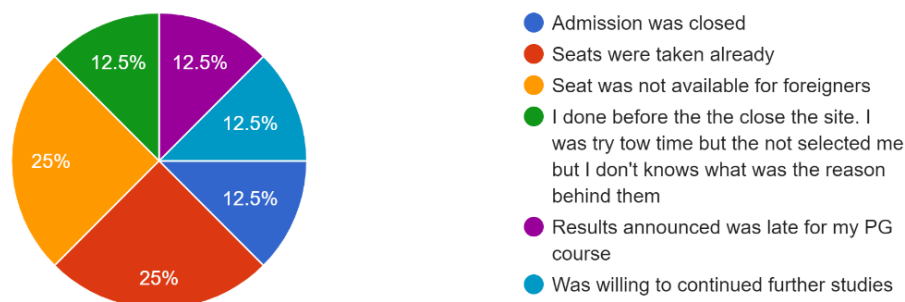
● Financial  
● Legal stay / Visa issues  
● Depression / Isolation  
● Admission and availability of seats  
● Documents' processing  
● NA  
● Financial and I am eager to continue f...  
● I didn't face any challenges regarding...  
▲ 1/2 ▼

The answer options for “Admission and availability of seats” with 8 (7.8%) were: seats were taken already 2 (25%), Seats were not available for foreigners 2 (25%) and other reasons 3 (37.5%). **Figure 4.**

What type of challenges you faced while applied for admission?

Figure 4.

8 responses

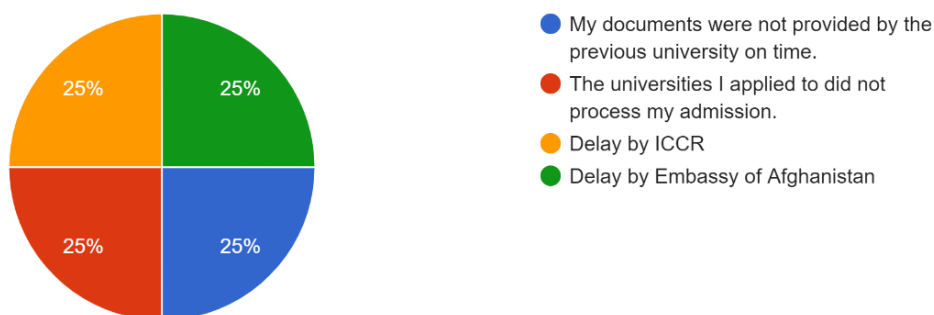


There were also options for the “Documents’ processing” processing answers: 1. My documents were not provided by the previous university on time, 2. The universities I applied to did not process my admission. 3. Delay by ICCR, 4. Delay by Embassy of Afghanistan. The 4 options came with equal answers 1 (25%) each. **Figure 5.**

What kind of challenges you faced regarding your documents processing?

Figure 5.

4 responses



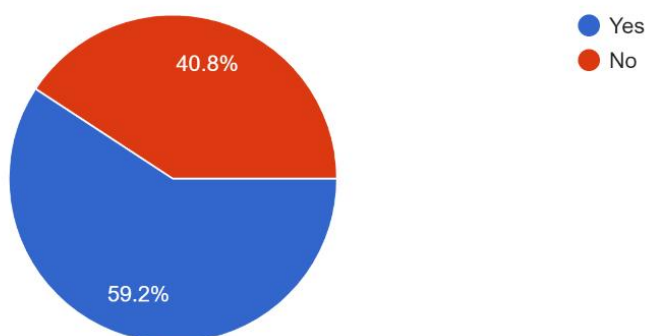
## IV. Efficiency of Scholarship

The question on sufficiency of the stipend is answered “Yes” by 61 (59.2%) and “No” by 42 (40.8%) of the respondents. **Figure 6.**

The stipend you recieve monthly, Is it sufficient?

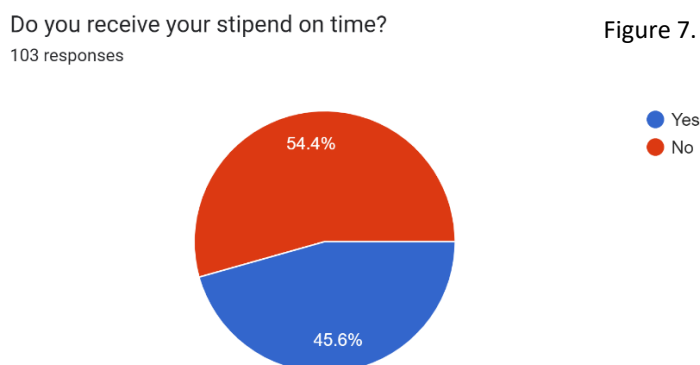
Figure 6.

103 responses



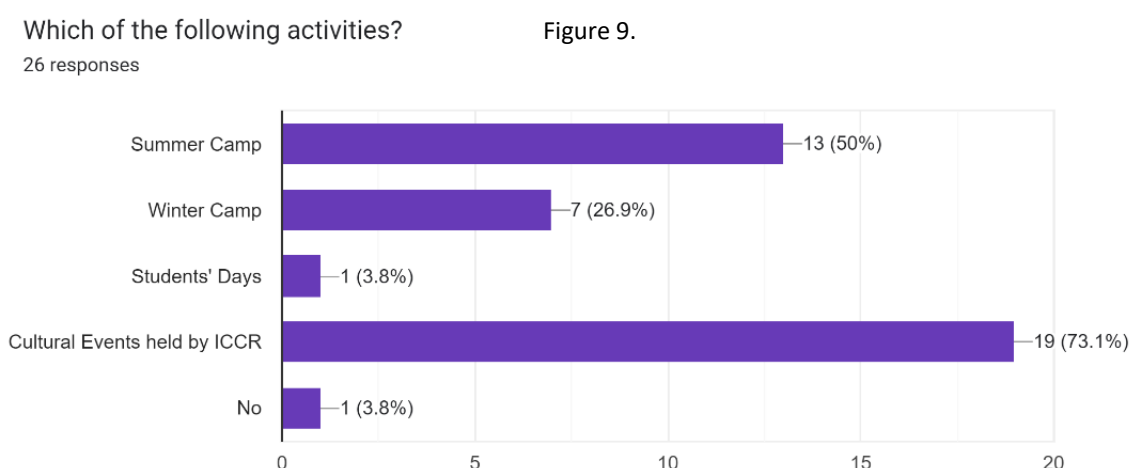
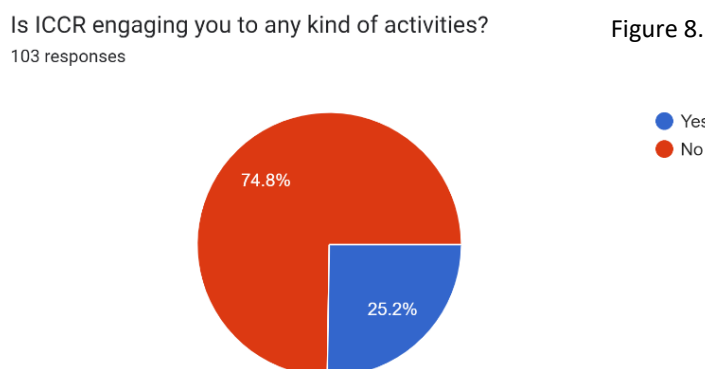
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In order to know whether the stipend is released on time, 47 (45.6%) answered "Yes" and 56 (54.4%). Answered "No". **Figure 7.**

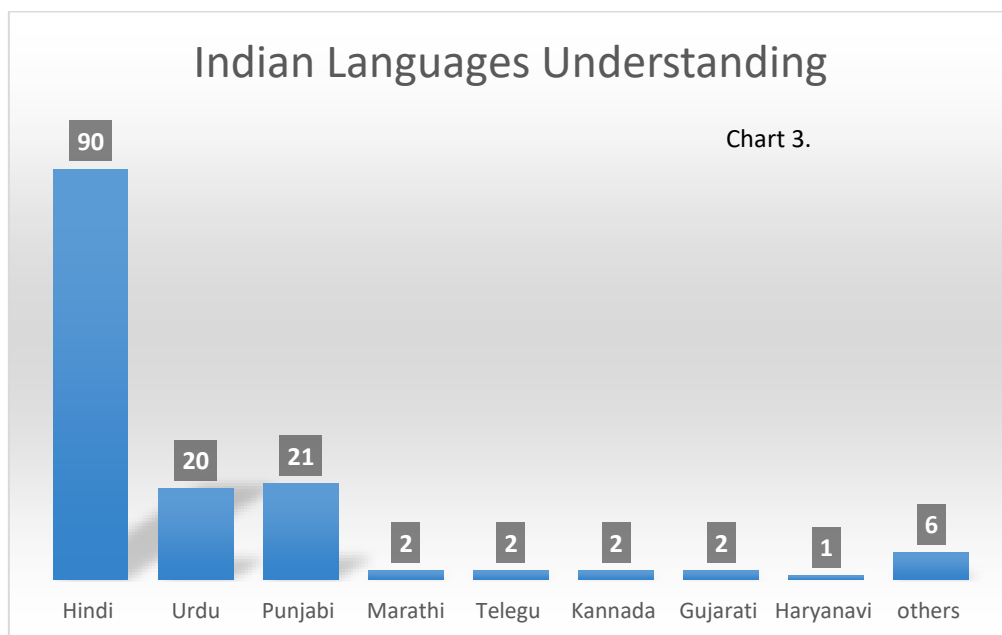


### V. Engagement to Activities

ICCR annually organizes various cultural activities from which 77 (74.8%) participants did not engage to any type of it, but 26 (25.2%) of them participated to programs such as: Summer Camp with 13 (50%), Winter Camp 7 (26.9%), Students' Day celebration 1 (3.8%), and other cultural activities with 19 (73.1%). **Figures 8 & 9**

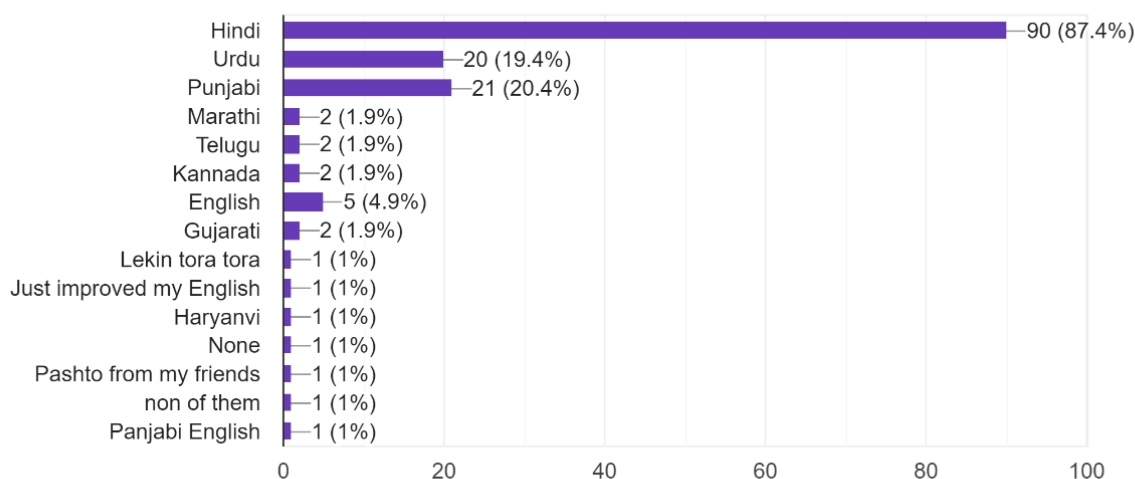


In response to which of the Indian languages understood by the respondents. It is found that: 90 (87.4%) of them understands Hindi, 21 (20.4%) Punjabi, 20 (19.4%) Urdu, 2 (1.9%) Marathi, 2 (1.9%) Telegu, 2 (1.9%) Kannada, 2 (1.9%) Gujarati 1 (1%) Haryanvi. It is mentionable that some of the respondents may understand more one language simultaneously. **Chart 3. Figure 10.**



Which languages could you learn during your stay in India? Figure 10.

103 responses



## FINDINGS

In this research out of 103, (77.7%) male and (22.3%) female responded to online survey from different universities/institutions pursuing their higher educations in the last two academic years (2021-22 & 2022-23). The respondents got information about the award/extension of scholarship by different means especially by the ICCR itself and by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan New Delhi. Hence, 30.1% of the respondents disagreed with the involvement of the Embassy due to corruption, "It will make the process more complicated" and lack of transparency. But on other hand 69.9% agrees with the recommendations necessitate for scholarship application.

From the responses it is found that 55.3% of them were facing financial problem, 20.4% of them were challenged by Legal Stay/Visa Issue and 6.8% of them confronted depression and isolation before being awarded/extended their scholarships.

The problems on the way of the respondents for applying to scholarship were limited seats, delay on result announcement by previous university and closure of admissions of the universities applying for.

For the efficiency of the scholarship, out of 103, it is sufficient for 61 (59.2%) respondents and 42 (40.8%) of them demanding increase in the stipend due to inflation and day-by-day increase in the expenses and cost of living especially in the metropolitan



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cities. Respondents who are living along with their families answer that this amount of stipend is insufficient. However, 54.4% of the respondents answered that their stipend is not released on time.

ICCR organizes variety of activities such as summer camp, winter camp, celebrating national functions and other cultural events. Therefore, it is found that 74.8% of them were not engaged in such activities.

Staying in a society requires understanding the language of that community. In response to the question of language understanding, 87.4% understands Hindi, 20.4% Punjabi, 19.4% Urdu and other languages. It is mentionable that there are some respondents who understand more languages simultaneously.

### CONCLUSION

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) as an autonomous organization under the Ministry of External Affairs of India, played a significant role in the cultural relations of India with other nations. Since its foundation by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on April 09, 1950.

The mentioned organization is awarding scholarships to Afghan Nationals since 2005 under Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals (SSSAN) and the recent scheme for Children and Dependents of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANSF). As the result of political changes in Afghanistan, ICCR has awarded/extended more than 450 scholarships to newly graduated students got stuck in India during academic year 2021-22. With the ongoing of uncertainty about Afghanistan, ICCR has awarded/extended more than 950 scholarships to students for the academic year 2022-23.

In addition of all the problems and challenges being faced by the students applying for scholarship, it helped numbers of students to get back on track. Currently many students are busy with their higher education with the hope for a bright future.

Note: No research is done without limitations. So, for conducting this research the researchers did not get the required data from the respective organization. The number of respondents is 103, while the link for online survey was shared to many students and it was supposed to be highly responded.

### SUGGESTIONS

The following points are suggestions as per the study of shortcomings.

1. On time release of the stipend
2. Extension of the time of admission since the academic year of universities differs
3. Increase in the amount of stipend.
4. Simplifying the admission process.

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