Exchange of experts

If the United States of America has risen to number one position today in all spheres and has become a Super Power, it is primarily because it has embraced people of different origins, races, countries, languages and cultures into its social system. Most Indians prefer to study or get jobs and settle down in USA. In the USA, they face no obstruction in such aspects, except for visa restrictions in certain categories. The countries in the Far East and South East welcome senior experts from Europe and USA to occupy faculty positions and offer emeritus professor or visiting professorship. China which was very conservative with regard to these matters, has now opened up for collaborations in a big way and invites senior faculty members from the West as adjunct professors in its universities and institutes. Why India has not adopted or oriented to such a mechanism is not known. Such measures could provide room for exchange of ideas, more exposure to our students and transfer of expertise between the countries and all these would have benefited the Indian students immensely. Even if permanent positions are elusive under the present rules and financial system, at best, tenure-track positions could be offered to senior or retired professors who are active and are interested to work (say maximum of 5 years). Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, China, Taiwan, Indonesia and Brunei are inviting experts from other countries. Maybe private universities in the country would be interested, but the hurdles and bottlenecks in the Indian official system prevent them from hiring experts from foreign universities. Decks have to be cleared to bring in such a trend.

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Catering to institutional e-learning needs

Learning is no longer confined within the boundaries of place and time. Alternative forms of learning have come into picture; e-learning is important among them. It can be defined as technology-based learning in which learning materials are delivered electronically via a network of computers. The charm of e-learning approach lies in the adaptation of technology-aided methods in addition to the existing traditional learning. There are a number of benefits from e-learning. Compared to lectures in the traditional form of teaching, this new learning methodology has enhanced flexibility in terms of time and space. In this approach, learning is done at the learner's pace. The content can be repeated until the student understands it. Though much infrastructure is not required in the present scenario for this approach, it requires focused effort in terms of creating an e-learning platform to cover our higher education system. No doubt that once fully operational, e-learning can play a significant role in developing our higher education system. E-learning techniques help the teachers to deliver lectures as well as assess student learning using creative and innovative methods. In addition to course work, the e-learning method can also provide opportunities for self-assessment through assignments and questionnaires. There are two layers to a successful e-learning programme – the technology component and the learning component. The first requires integrated efforts from the management side of the institution and the second is important for academic fraternity as it is necessary to prepare effective e-learning content. Therefore, sincere efforts are needed to develop such e-learning modules. The audience has to be understood, as there is a difference between the way a student understands a concept versus the way a professional understands it; therefore after understanding the audience, the audio-visual components need to be developed. UGC, the apex body governing higher education in our country has also taken bold initiatives in this regard and e-learning content is being developed. Another important project is the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. This project has been initiated to enhance learning of basic science and engineering concepts. Significant infrastructure has been set up for production of video-based teaching materials by the Indian Institutes of Technology and some other leading institutions. In addition to these efforts at the national level, some institutions have started e-content collection, validation and dissemination to cater to the specific needs of their students. Intranet based e-learning has added new features in the e-learning field, in particular at the institutional level. This is because the requirement of internet connection is not necessary all the time. E-content may be uploaded on the Wi-Fi-enabled intranet of a particular institution and students can access it from anywhere within the campus. The content is personalized with the institution. Institutional requirement of regional language-based content for technical subjects can also be dealt with in a relatively easier manner. Viewing and replaying the audio/video/text content multiple times does not affect bandwidth limitations as the material is stored on the server of the institution. In turn, learning is not affected by internet connectivity.

The future of e-learning is bright in our country. This becomes clear if we look at the trends concerned with e-learning worldwide. In the light of the efforts being made by our State and Central Governments to provide computers to the student fraternity, it seems that e-learning will not only co-exist with other technologies and ways of acquiring knowledge, but it will enhance/upgrade the teaching and learning environment.

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