

India's push to Internationalize Higher Education using complex MOUs and not simple Catalysts

The choice of Implementation Matters

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Internationalization of education is high on the agendas of universities today. This aspiration to be global is shared by HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) regardless of whether they are located in the west or in a developing country. There is however a regional difference. For instance, in the US, UK, Canada or Australia, HEIs want internationalization to show up in their student body. Their rankings go up with evidence of diversity in race, nationality, and other parameters. This diversity, in turn, attracts more international students who pay higher fees and enrich the revenue streams, which many universities

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Anil P. Agarwal

in UK, US and EU sorely need to balance their budgets. Internationalization of higher education in India, on the other hand, means matching ambitious standards as benchmarked by reputed HEIs across the world. The NEP2020 (National Education Policy) has stressed this at multiple levels, urging HEIs to innovate models and internationalize the education they offer. But what does matching global standards really entail? Since the NEP 2020 was announced, educators and analysts have widely deliberated on this, and the interpretations are many. One might suggest that in one word it simply means ‘upgrading’ - not merely infrastructure, laboratories, and other educational hardware but upgrading the entire student experience. ‘Student experience,’ in fact, encapsulates an entire gamut of segments. It includes re-thinking syllabus design, re-fashioning content delivery, reflecting on modes of assessment, and most of all, shifting the focus from the centrality of the educator to the learning outcomes, which is especially challenging in digital learning.

“I speak from personal experience. When I began teaching at Georgetown and American University in Washington DC, I had prior teaching experience of several years at the University of Delhi, a premier Indian HEI. However, regardless of my subject-matter expertise, I felt a compelling need to rethink my pedagogy and re-fashion my content delivery and assessment modes, and be mindful that my teaching would inclusively suit diverse students – those engaging in real-time as well as asynchronously. I took a year of intensive professional development

training in innovative pedagogies and digital learning. And it was rewarded by terrific student outcomes! says the author Dr. Maina Chawla Singh”

There is no doubt that today most Indian HEIs are seriously driven towards internationalization — to upgrade faculty expertise, foster innovation in teaching and learning, and get in step with the inescapable shifts towards hybrid models of learning. Indeed, university websites of top Indian HEIs loudly publicize collaborations and MOUs signed with foreign partners in the US, UK, Australia, and so on. Unfortunately, the implementation of those MOUs reflects low success rates. Budgets, bureaucracies, or simply difficulties in finding talented faculty willing to relocate to India are some reasons. In short, for the students, the promise of being taught by international faculty remains largely unfulfilled.

So, while vice-chancellors and deans of Indian HEIs are problem-solving for long-term changes to the learning experience for their student body, is there a speedy, cost-effective solution? “Indeed, there is, says Anil P. Agarwal, founder of US-based start-up [EdifyOnline](#). Agarwal explains that EdifyOnline is a pool of [EdifyProfessionals](#) and a service that provides academic talent from around the world to meet the teaching needs of HEIs as per their subject requirements.” Its pool of faculty experts can teach, design course content, and provide guest lectures on topics that an HEI might require. A partner HEI in India can sign up for just a few courses to be delivered through EdifyOnline - there is no long-term commitment. No administrative staff is required to manage faculty, hence no additional budgets for human resource management. The attractiveness of the model lies in its readiness to execute, speedy implementation and course adoption, no long-term financial allocations required, and most of all, the ability of the HEI leadership and Deans to assess upon course completion and plow in the feedback for a future academic year. Alongside course teaching, EdifyOnline also offers to provide training in syllabus design, digital learning, re-thinking assessment, and so forth to local faculty who are encouraged to co-teach in the long term. Thus, EdifyOnline is a full end-to-end course provider for an HEI to host internationally bench-marked online courses efficiently.

“In today’s hyper-competitive landscape time is of the essence, and costs matter. We provide flexibility, efficiency, and quality so that Indian HEIs can add critical infrastructure and competencies. As vice-chancellors across India build an ecosystem to serve students at truly global standards, EdifyOnline can act as a [catalyst](#) to speed-up internationalization for an HEI, Agarwal adds.” In the last few years, EdifyOnline has already captured important segments of the market in different countries. It has recently launched its service in India.

CONCLUSION:

Building institutional overseas partnerships which support dual degrees, faculty, and student exchange programs is a noble target for HEIs. However, the pace of implementation matters, as do infrastructure costs. From the perspective of a higher-ed practitioner for me, the benefits of a service like EdifyOnline goes beyond meeting the course needs of HEIs. Its value addition is in the capacity-building of Indian faculty. Exposure to modes of teaching and course delivery that reflect the best international standards is invaluable. Opportunities to co-teach alongside global

faculty who are experts in their respective subject areas is an investment in one's own professional advancement. And, for the HEIs this is undoubtedly a long-haul benefit.

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