

(quantitative and qualitative), including physico-chemical parameters, sediments, substratum characteristics, river depth, width, flow rate, etc. Information is often available on life cycles of many of the species (though sometimes it is fragmentary), but the life-cycle studies are not viewed at all related with hydrological regimes. Similar information on mahaseer and snow trout in the upland rivers may also be available. In this situation, it is not possible (at present) for a fishery scientist to precisely suggest the water requirements of total fishery or particular species in a river stretch. Therefore, there is an urgent need to prioritize the studies to unravel the issues with the help of interdisciplinarily experts from ecology, geomorphology, hydrology, biology and other stakeholders such as socio-economics and local community.

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## COMMENTARY

### When will Indian universities open their doors to international students?

*P. J. Lavakare*

At a recent international education conference in Pune, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) revealed that Indian universities and colleges have the potential to host almost five lakh foreign students per year on their campuses. However, they are able to attract only 32,000 students. As if to give a ‘quick fix’ solution to this problem, the Union Minister of Human Resources Development, responded by saying that ‘institutions must “strategize policies” in such a way that intake of foreign students is utilized to full capacity’. Actually, the Government of India has to evolve a strategy on how it wants to attract international students, as part of its much awaited National Education Policy. Developed countries like Germany, Japan, the UK, etc. are setting targets for 2020 to considerably increase the intake of international students and laying down

strategies on how the government could help in this process. India needs to do the same. Let us first understand why it is necessary for our universities to bring in more international students and then analyse why they are not able to do so. Based on these analyses, some measures will be suggested for the consideration of the Government.

India takes pride of its demographic dividend and claims the ability to provide skilled manpower to different parts of the world – both developed and developing. For this, we must produce manpower that is acceptable and employable in the diverse world culture. Our own national employability reports have highlighted that a majority of our graduates are considered unemployable even in the domestic market. How can we then assume that what is not suitable for the domestic market will be acceptable

abroad? Indian universities are not able to impart skills that are required in the real-life world of the employment market. The skills development report shows that our institutions primarily impart ‘specialized domain’ expertise to our students, who form only a quarter of the diverse skill requirements of the employment market. Skills such as adaptability, cultural understanding and communication skills are seriously lacking in our graduates. The process of testing the capabilities of the graduates, further produces unfit graduates. Interpersonal skills, learning agility, integrity and values are some of the other soft skills that are expected by the employers which are not part of a ‘degree-giving’ education system. Logical ability and problem-solving approach are seriously missing. Some of these skills are learnt not necessarily in the classrooms, but by meeting

and interacting with a diverse population – cultural, social and professional. Understanding and adapting oneself to diverse and foreign cultures can be only acquired if our students get an exposure to international environment involving foreign faculty, foreign students, short-term exposure to studying abroad and internships abroad. Majority of these opportunities of global exposure are not available to Indian graduates. The education curriculum does not provide for programmes that will impart these non-tangible skills. Therefore, there is a need for the government to come up with a policy of ‘internationalization of higher education’, where some of the attributes described above will be taken into account. One of the elements of internationalization relates to our students being able to interact with international students, studying in the same classrooms and even living together in hostels and apartments, and thus adapting to a foreign culture and adjusting to the same with apathy and understanding. Today, we have a dismal scene on providing international exposure to Indian students. Here is a little mathematical exercise that proves the point. The India higher education student population consists of roughly 30 million students. In this very system of all our universities and colleges, we have only about 30,000 international students. So every group of 1000 Indian students gets to meet only one international student studying with them in their classrooms. This is a key argument why we need many more international students in our higher education system. The government needs to set targets to bring in at least ten times more international students to make this ratio about 1 : 100. Why are international students reluctant to come to India? First,

most of the public Indian universities are not interested in hosting international students because the faculty and staff do not like to take additional responsibilities associated with hosting such students. They need to be sensitized to the expected benefits that Indian students and the society could get from interacting with international students. The recent problems of racial discrimination faced by the African students in a few towns in India, also add to the lack of interest of hosting such students by the society at large. In fact, a study carried out by the present author last year had shown a declining trend of African student population in India. This observation was brought to the notice of the officials of the External Affairs Ministry and some suggestions given to change this; but to no avail. Asian students from countries like Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka prefer to come to India for their degrees, but Indian students have no exposure to students from other continents. Students from Western countries are not interested in obtaining degrees from Indian universities, but they want to attend short-term courses. Indian universities do not make special efforts to develop short-term credit-based courses, especially for this group of students. Such efforts have been made by some universities; for example students from developed countries have come in large numbers for the ‘Study in India’ programme of the university of Hyderabad. There is also the question of defining as to who is an international student. Students coming from developed countries, who come for periods less than a year, and not for a recognized degree of the host university, arrive in India on a tourist visa and hence do not get ‘counted’. The Indian system is just not geared to handle international students.

Countries like USA and the UK generate financial resources from the tuition and living expenses incurred by visiting students. Every year a country like the US benefits to the tune of \$32 billion due to the presence of international students. India does not look at this possible incentive as a source of revenue, though there is a great potential for the same.

Finally, our universities do not appear in the list of top 200 world-class institutions, which is a great deterrent for international students to choose India as their destination. Thus the quality of education, lack of interest of our universities and social discrimination in some cases, all add to the fact that international students are not attracted to India.

If conscious efforts are made by the Government at the policy level and with the academic community being educated about the benefits of international education, India can attract many more international students than what it is doing today. The ‘OPEN DOORS’ study by the Institute of International Education has clearly shown that the international student mobility is rapidly increasing with over 5 million students studying outside their own countries. India can increase its share if conscious efforts are made to strategize our National Education Policy to open the doors of our universities to many more international students. The presence of international students can make a major change in the ‘education’ of our young graduates, who may be better prepared as the future ‘global citizens’ of India.

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