

“Formulate policies in sync with socio-economic realities”

Higher education system in India faces many problems including low level teaching quality, financing of higher education, traditional methods of teaching and supply-demand gap,” says **Dr Rajendra Pandey, President, NIIT University**. In an exclusive interview with **Ritika Arora Bhola**, the expert extensively discusses about quality education, academics, infrastructure, extra-curricular activities, placement cell and faculty, and also talks about government initiatives for higher education



extra-curricular activities are some of the key features of NU education system.

The University also promotes entrepreneurship platform amongst its students. The University is equipped with state-of-the-art, technology-enabled teaching and a strong research-focused curriculum, some of which originated in NIIT's incubation labs viz. Centre for Research in Cognitive Systems (CRCS) at IIT-Delhi campus. Seamless internet connectivity, world-class faculty, well-equipped labs and libraries, vast sports indoor and outdoor ground, lecture halls and auditoriums are some of the infrastructural amenities that students get at the University. We provide opportunity for sports, meditation, trekking and other extra-curricular activities. NU students have launched a drive called 'Shram-Daan' in an effort to convert the neighbouring barren 'Kali Pahari' to a fertile 'Hari Pahari'. Every student participates in 'Astachal' in the evening at Sunset Theatre, where they are encouraged to meditate and repeatedly reminded of their role in the larger environment that we live in.

How are you bringing in innovation in terms of teaching pedagogy at your college? Please throw light on the management staff and faculty.

- NIIT University believes in leveraging technology for:
- Higher order complex thinking
 - Making meaning of the study for students
 - Improving student's experience and
 - Preparing students for futures

Today's classrooms routinely use digital resources for the teaching-learning

“The University is developed as an institution of excellence to provide exceptional education based on the four core principles that make learning industry-linked, technology-based, research-driven and seamless.”

process. With the rise of internet and communication technologies, there is an exponential increase of information, which makes it impossible both for teacher and student to focus on 'taking as much information as possible.' Hence, NU focuses on teaching design and on learning outcomes rather than mere factual details.

At NU, the learning complexity is addressed pedagogically in the course by incorporating a value creating activity-based project in which a team of students with mixed ability levels are challenged, while providing scaffolds and positive environment to be successful. NU recognises well-designed team projects and allows differentiated instruction as well as assessment. NU also encourages faculty to design team engagements that are planned under courses so that students can practice self-directed learning. Last but not the least, another significant connectome implicating insight that literature reports is that the brain connects new information to old. In pursuance of this, NU has experimented with brain-

aligned pedagogic initiatives for team as well as individual learning from real world projects that make 'meaning' to students. This makes learning effective for students. NU has qualified faculty and management staff. They are equipped with domain knowledge and technological skills to practice best teaching-learning and academic administrative practices. NU invests in its people to develop them through workshops, training sessions and encouraging them to pursue higher degrees.

Quality is a matter of serious concern in the higher education scenario of India. Which are the weak points and challenges at present?

The role of higher education in the emerging scenario of knowledge economy is crucial and multifaceted for any country in general and India in particular. There are many basic problems faced by higher education system in India.

- **Lower level of teaching quality:** Our education system faces many quality issues such as lack of faculty, poor quality teaching, traditional teaching methods, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.
- **Financing of higher education:** It is not feasible for India to make massive state investments in research and development that produced researched universities in the west such as MIT, University of California, Berkeley in the US or University of

Cambridge in Britain.

- **Traditional methods of teaching:** Professors still stick to those older methods of teaching like board and marker. They don't like to make use of audio-visual aids in teaching. Also, they are not up-to-date with the information available and what global industry demands.
- **Supply-demand gap:** Despite an average growth rate of over seven per cent in the last decade, India's GER in higher education is very low. India needs to drastically increase the number of places at universities and enrolment through distance learning programmes. Over the last decade, the diversity of courses offered by universities and colleges has narrowed, resulting in saturated markets for engineers, technology graduates and MBAs.

According to you, what are the most sought after professional courses being picked by students nowadays?

Firstly, the distinction between 'professional' and non-professional is waning. Students are opting for many different programmes like economics, psychology, law, and animation design, etc. and also preferring computer science, mechanical or electronics engineering.

Do you have any policy expectations from the Government for institutes having professional courses?

Government should formulate regulations that are in sync with economic and social

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realities of the time if it desires expansion of overall education, and higher education in particular.

Placement is a key factor driving admissions in professional institutes nowadays. How does the market scenario look like?

Education as a teaching domain has completely transformed and so has the placement trends. Today, placement week is being plugged out from more campuses than ever before. Many universities promote themselves as a learning centre rather than placement cell. Engineering campuses with large batches have placements sessions running for two semesters or even more. Today, the placement procedures have become more critical. Corporates scouting for students has never been tougher, recruitment tours are getting longer, first-stage elimination tests tougher and interviews longer. Core companies nowadays plan their campus recruitments only after third quarter results. Hence, the slot-wise placement process is fading fast. **CC**

