

Valuing a multidisciplinary approach



DR. M. GOPAL

Dr M Gopal, Director of Engineering, Shiv Nadar University who was in Hyderabad recently, speaks to Madhavi Gosukonda about restructuring courses to make it more valuable for students

Do you feel that the face of undergraduate education in India needs to be changed?

Certainly. The current jobs in the industry expect an engineer to have the knowledge and the ability to handle broader implications of the job such as sustainability aspects, safety, health, environmental and other professional issues including ethics and economic considerations.

Traditional learning focuses on disciplinary depth and ignores a multidisciplinary breadth and does not prepare students to meet the current industry demands.

What is the most urgent innovation necessary in vocational education?

Embedding broader aspects of education and training is urgently required. Examples of some broader aspects are: entrepreneurship, technology-driven learning replacing the conventional methods, development of literacy, language and empirical reasoning. This kind of training will boost confidence necessary to succeed.

How does an interdisciplinary approach work? Does it compromise gaining expertise in one specific area?

In an interdisciplinary approach embedded with flexibility and choice, there is no compromise. Students interested in disciplinary depth have the option of choosing a speciality track in their own discipline through proper selection of university electives, while others may opt for multidisciplinary breadth.

Would such an innovative degree allow for equal access to higher education within the country and abroad?

This kind of innovative education is not a new concept. Its importance has increased in today's context because of technology development and the corresponding shift in the current needs of the industry. Interdisciplinary education is the model of education in many global universities. Such an education will rather be an asset for higher education within the country and abroad.

How would research led education differ from the conventional courses?

Conventional education is based on dissemination of knowledge while research-led education focuses on dissemination and creation of knowledge. In such a course, the teachers actively support the creation of knowledge by guiding the students through internships, doing case studies etc.

How does a curriculum change when the teacher moves from the role of an instructor to that of a mentor?

As an instructor, the teacher delivers the course through a set of class-room lectures supported by tutorials and lab/ project/case study sessions. As a mentor, the teacher develops the self-learning ability of the student. Both the aspects are very important in a well-designed curriculum.

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