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TRANSFORMING LEARNING IN *EMERGING NATIONS*

Dr. Ruth Tembe's Perspective on the Globalisation of the Education Sector and her Role in Strengthening the India-Africa Bond

DR. RUTH TEMBE

Fostering Economic Development in Nations

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FROM THE FOUNDERS' DESK

Ashish Srivastava (L) and Anupam Gupta (R), Founders, B2B Market Media | The Founder Media

Empowering education via innovation

Dear Prime Reader,

Education is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by technology, collaboration and a renewed focus on holistic learning. As we bring the second edition of *The Educator* at the 4th World Education and Business Conclave and Awards (WEBCon) 2025 in Chandigarh, we reaffirm our commitment to foster meaningful conversations around the future of education.

This edition delves into ground-breaking innovations, transformative pedagogies and the power of digital tools in reshaping learning experiences. From policy shifts to classroom dynamics, *The Educator* continues to be a platform where educators, thought leaders and visionaries unite to shape a more inclusive and impactful education ecosystem.

As we move forward, collaboration remains at the heart of progress. By bringing together diverse voices, we aim to inspire ideas, challenge conventions and drive real change. We thank our contributors, readers and partners for being part of this journey.

Here's to a future where education is not just a process, but a movement—empowered by innovation and guided by purpose.

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Redefining learning with 'no limits'

Welcome to a new chapter in education—a landscape where innovation and digital transformation are rewriting the rules of learning. In this edition of *The Educator*, we explore fresh perspectives that challenge conventional practices and illuminate the path towards a more inclusive and dynamic educational experience.

This edition brings forward visionary ideas, pioneering technologies and innovative teaching methods that are reshaping education at every level. We explore the evolving role of educators, the impact of digital advancements and the creative approaches that are enhancing engagement and growth in learning communities.

As we navigate this transformative era in education, we hope to keep connecting with the insightful voices and ground-breaking ideas driving change. Let's all come together to create a future where learning knows no limits and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Akanki Sharma
editor@thefoundermedia.com

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As we navigate this transformative era in education, we hope to keep connecting with the insightful voices and ground-breaking ideas driving change

Transforming learning in
EMERGING NATIONS

Passion, perseverance and a vision for change define Dr. Ruth Tembe, Founder, CEO and Chairperson, African Economic Development Agency (AEDA), whose journey has transformed countless lives. Dorina Bhattacharjee brings to life her inspiring tale of dedication shaping the future of education. From breaking barriers to working closely for Africa's development, her story is one of resilience and impact

In today's inter-connected world, entrepreneurship is experiencing a significant boom, particularly in developing continents like Asia and Africa. This surge has led to numerous intra and inter-continental investment opportunities. To harness this potential, Dr. Ruth Tembe, a visionary from Cameroon and an expert in entrepreneurial and leadership development, established an agency for trade and investment.

Dr. Tembe, while speaking about establishing the African Economic Development Agency (AEDA), stated, "The AEDA was found to serve as a bridge for trade and investment activities including financing, business expansion, digital trade between Africa and the rest of the world. However, our primary focus is on Asian markets because of the similarities both continents share, and the needs that can be met."

She further added that since its creation, the agency has organised numerous trade missions to India, China and Dubai in a bid to strengthen economic ties with these nations and facilitate trade among these. She revealed, "We have been able to create the African Economic Development Fund to be able to invest in some of Africa's most viable sectors like education, real-estate, agriculture, wholesale and retail, healthcare."

Dr. Tembe, also the founder of Avicomm Group and the Asia-Africa Trade and Investment Council, holds 13 years of global business experience, she leads the African Women Chamber of Commerce and Trade as well and fosters youth and female entrepreneurship. Through Avicomm Group, she helps companies to find new markets across the African continent.

She said, "When companies thrive, they can better serve the communities that patronise them, hence enabling socio-economic development."

Despite the global demand to meet industry needs, such roles are often predominantly awarded to men. The gender gap remains a significant issue and a topic of ongoing debate. Dr Tembe added, "All over the world, women face roadblocks when they are trying to break through the status quo to become a force for good and

change–all because society has labelled women and aligned them to domestic tasks and minor roles. In my quest to create global impact and become a global voice, I encounter a lot of gender bias as I somehow meet resistance with the opposite gender believing they can take my place or do what I do better than myself. However, that has never been an issue as I believe in hard work and the power of adding value and solving problems which is what I do on a daily basis."

Speaking further, she remarked, "Women can only thrive if they remove their

> All over the world, women face road-blocks when they are trying to break through the status quo to become a force for good and change

focus from the way they are treated and focus on doing the work, changing lives, changing communities, changing the world and living their mission and purpose."

Further explaining her job

role, Dr. Tembe added that her company specialises in providing solutions for entrepreneurs by crafting innovative strategies that facilitate exponential business growth. They assist business owners in exploring and entering new markets, while also guiding investors to make informed investment choices, ensuring that their Return on Investment (ROI) is maximised. With a passion for empowering women, the business leader has spent over a decade creating platforms and organisations that have impacted the lives of approximately

BRIDGING BORDERS

The role of globalisation in shaping future-ready education

Education is transcending borders, fostering interconnectedness, and preparing students for a globalised future. Dr. Ruth Tembe, a visionary business leader, explores how global education is shaping future-ready learners and highlights the India-Africa education partnership as a key driver in bridging gaps and creating opportunities for a prosperous and knowledge-driven world

With the world becoming one with a glaring inter-connectivity, there is a greater advantage for globalisation in education. Slowly, geographical boundaries are being erased to welcome the diversity in educational resources, practices, culture, and to introduce international educational systems.

To practice global education, schools either welcome foreign students to integrate global cultures, races, religions and traditions and eradicate geographical boundaries regarding education, or students learn from their peers through hybrid learning, and are prepared to be transformed into global citizens by learning about global issues and current affairs.

The varying dynamics of a rapidly-changing globalised world has led the national education system to outgrow itself and adapt to newer trends in globalising the education system.

Countries are expanding their educational horizons by exploring diverse educational practices, policies and methods, adopting foreign educational systems from other countries into their own.

Globalised education, therefore, is the acceptance for a wide range of learning practices from different countries and backgrounds, and, then, the integration of the collected information traditionally, or via technology, to impact national education.

Globalisation in education

Global education is an inter-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning that offers students diverse academic and professional opportunities worldwide. Instead of being confined to the national education system, global education coordinates with international education systems to sieve their best policies and practices. It also helps to instruct students on global affairs that continuously impact the world. Students are offered exposure to the global world and become aware of different nations' cultures, histories and current world scenarios.

Global education seeks to foster a deep understanding

of the global interconnectedness and interdependence that countries have on one another. It is an effort to highlight the complex issues and challenges the world faces. By educating students about the world, different global agendas and their plight, global education aims to prepare and transform students into well-informed, responsible and engaged global citizens. When students know about global concerns, they can address global problems. They can contribute positively towards building a more just, sustainable and peaceful world.

Why is global education important?

Building interconnectedness: In the modern era, it is necessary for students to have global exposure to the social, economic, political and cultural agendas to stay informed and have an opinion of their own. It also helps to build a sense of interconnectedness instead of isolation. It is critical to be globally aware to make informed decisions.

Cultural tolerance: Global education promotes respect for cultures, religions, languages and individualistic traditions. It is crucial for building social harmony and cooperation.

Building sensibility: Global

education encourages and empowers students to participate in local and global civic activities to understand and build sensitivity towards global concerns. Only after becoming fully aware can students strive to bring a change.

Career growth: Students looking to go abroad for future studies, or have an international professional life, must be exposed to global education early to practice and prepare themselves. Employers value global competence and cross-cultural communication skills while looking for the best fit for their companies. Global education enhances global awareness and

opens doors to international job opportunities.

Preparing students for a connected and inclusive world

Global education serves a multi-faceted purpose, equipping students with essential knowledge, skills and attitudes to thrive in today's inter-connected world. It promotes global awareness by integrating economic, political, social and environmental topics into the curriculum through activities like debates and discussions. By fostering cultural understanding, schools encourage respect for diverse cultures, languages and traditions,

nurturing open-minded and empathetic individuals. It enhances critical thinking by encouraging students to analyse global challenges and propose innovative solutions, with platforms like Model United Nations (MUN) fostering informed decision-making. Additionally, global education strengthens inter-cultural communication skills, enabling students to express their ideas across cultural boundaries. As global challenges like climate change, conflicts, poverty, inequality and health crises intensify, global education ensures students are prepared to address these pressing issues and become responsible global citizens.

The impact of globalisation on education

Unlimited access to information: While educational resources and study materials are limited by national borders, globalisation impacts education by offering access to a vast amount of information resources. Using the internet, students and educators access a wide range of materials, research and educational content from around the globe.

Collaborate internationally: Globalisation has significantly increased collaboration and partnerships between national and international educational institutions. Schools and universities encourage students in international research projects and foreign exchange programmes.

Diversity in thoughts: Globalisation in education promotes schools to offer exposure to students regarding cultural, social and political perspectives. This not only enriches students with the opportunity to learn about different cultures, languages and global issues, but also fosters more inclusive and comprehensive education.

Cross-cultural exchange: Globalisation influences students by facilitating the initiative of cultural exchange programmes, thereby allowing students to study abroad. Such global-scale programmes promote cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Multi-cultural awareness: Students exposed to globalisation early are more likely to analyse, interpret and utilise their information about the diverse society to formulate their conclusion about the world, global concerns and potential crises.

These are the impacts of globalisation on education that encourage educational institutions, parents, teachers and students to access global

education and transform the students into well-informed, independent and opinionated individuals who can bring global change in society.

India-Africa partnership holds key to prosperous future

With the rise of Africa's young population clamouring for quality education, coupled with the fact that Africa is striving to educate and upskill its youth, India, considered to be the hub of education in the world, is the right partner.

Africa's growing population is likely to grow rapidly from its current value of about 1.4 billion people to 2.5 billion people in 2050. The continent is also often regarded as the 'youngest continent' because nearly 60 per cent of its population is below 25 years of age. In an ageing world, Africa's youthful population offers great opportunities for economic development. However, significant investments in education and skilling are required today to put its youthful population to good use.
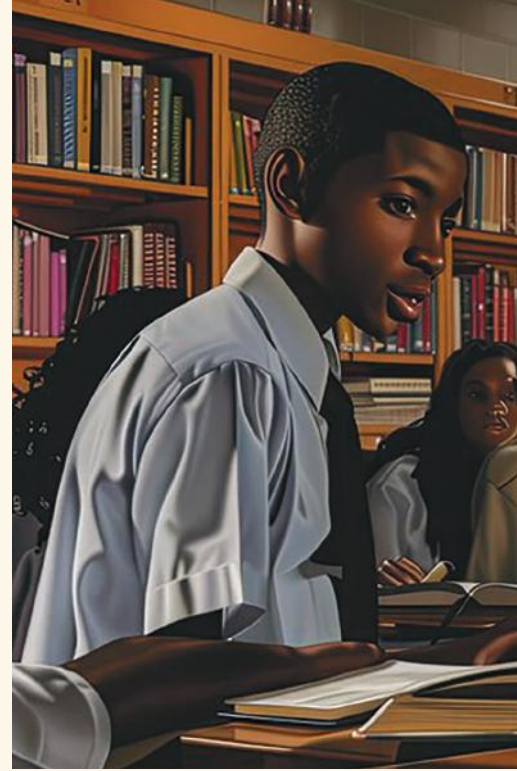
The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Africa's weak education sector due to sudden lockdowns and school closures. Thousands of children dropped out of school and there were significant learning losses. Currently, about 20 per cent of primary-school-age children and 58 per cent of upper-primary-school-age children in Sub-Saharan Africa are out of school.

Further, there are significant gender disparities in access to education because of the persistence of gender inequality in society. Although there are significant variations between countries, typically, there are fewer girls in higher education and the drop-out rates for girls are higher at the secondary level.

With shrinking government budgets due to high debt burdens, African governments will find it harder to attain the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of providing universal access to quality education. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates, to meet the SDG objective of universal primary and secondary enrollment, public and private expenditures on education would need to double by 2030. Barring exceptions like South Africa which spends about 6.1 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education, Sub-Saharan Africa's public expenditure on education (3.2 per cent) is lower than the world average of about four per cent.

As Africa strives to educate and upskill its youth population while struggling with several challenges like poor growth prospects, high debt, shrinking budgets and lower aid flows, India can prove to be a good partner. Unlike other donor countries, India's development partnership programme, built on the principles of shared prosperity, stressed education and capacity building since its inception in the 1950s. As a newly independent country, India understands the importance of investing in human resources and capacity building, which is featured as a prominent pillar of the country's development cooperation programme. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) was launched in 1964 and several scholarships were announced for students from developing countries. Education and capacity building have been important pillars

of India's relations with Africa as Africans have been major beneficiaries of Indian scholarships and the ITEC programme. In African countries like Ethiopia, Indian teachers have also played a crucial role in the school education system.

Over the years, India's capacity-building programme has expanded dramatically. India has supported huge IT projects like the PAN-African e-Network and its successor, e-VidyaBharati AarogyaBharati (e-VBAB). The flow of African students in India has also grown steadily. In his address to the Ugandan Parliament, Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, highlighted India's commitment to African development and said, "We will rely on African talent and skills. We will build as much local capacity and create as many local opportunities as possible."

India is also building higher education institutions like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras and National Forensic Sciences University in African countries. Apart from government-to-government initiatives, Indian non-profit institutions are also playing an important role in Africa.

While India's existing initiatives, particularly government-to-government initiatives are laudable, there is a lot of scope to expand collaboration in other areas like teacher training, pedagogy and curriculum development to improve the quality of education at the primary, secondary and university/tertiary level, an area which has received less attention in India's development cooperation so far. Indian institutions can help their African counterparts in

improving the quality of education by opening up branches in African countries, by supporting teacher training as the continent is in dire need of trained teachers. Keeping in mind the success of Indian teachers in Ethiopia, more Indian teachers can also be employed in other African countries.

India's experience may be more useful for Africa, as Indian and African education systems often face similar challenges. Experts like Goolam Mohammedbhai assert that several policy (NEP) proposals in India's National Education Policy, such as differentiated higher education sector, multiple exit degrees, digital and online education, are particularly relevant for Africa as the profile of the higher education sector in India and Africa is roughly similar. Indian schemes like the mid-day meal programme and the *Samgra Shiksha Abhiyan* can also offer important policy lessons to African countries. Needless to say, India's own education sector is far from perfect, therefore, a partnership between India and Africa should be a two-way street and insights from Africa should also make meaningful contributions to the country's own education system.

10,000 women, enabling them to achieve greater success and independence.

In addition, she mentioned how global organisations can better contribute to Africa's development in partnership with local entities. Dr. Tembe notified, "Africa is the fastest-growing economy in the world, and has been described by the United Nations (UN) as the new frontier for business and investments. The economic landscape of the African continent is booming with infrastructure development, the movement of goods and services across the continent is on an all-time high with trade facilitation through the implementation of the free trade zones. Young people make up 68 per cent of the African population, and, everyday, there is a high demand for jobs, skilled labour and education. This is why the education sector is the most viable sector in Africa as young people are overzealous to learn new skills and technology to be able to compete with the global workforce."

For decades, the global narrative around Africa has been shaped by a lens of negativity, often painting the continent as a place defined by conflict, poverty and instability. However, this story—largely constructed by Western media—only tells a fraction of the truth. Today, Africa stands on the brink of an economic transformation. With a population of 1.4 billion and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $2.8 trillion in 2024, the continent is increasingly seen as the next frontier for investment and innovation.

Dr. Ruth further added, "South Africa's financial and manufacturing sectors are robust, with its mining industry—focussed on platinum group metals, gold and chromium—contributing eight per cent to GDP. Egypt benefits from its strategic control of the Suez Canal, generating significant revenue from this vital trade route. Tourism, driven by Egypt's rich history and culture, also plays a major role in its economy. Nigeria and Algeria both depend on the energy sector, though their

focus varies. Algeria primarily exports natural gas, while Nigeria is a major crude oil exporter. In contrast, Ethiopia relies heavily on agriculture, with coffee serving as a key economic and export driver."

Africa's story goes beyond industries and exports. It's a story of cultural vibrancy, entrepreneurial spirit and untapped potential. Its youthful population—the youngest in the world—is bursting with innovation and creativity, ready to reshape technology, arts, business and governance. This is the Africa the world needs to see; an Africa not defined by exploitation, but rising in power—determined to reclaim its resources, uplift its people and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's economic giants.

Surge in literacy levels for new investment

Over the past two decades, the African continent has experienced a significant transformation in its educational landscape, marked by a rapid rise in the number of educational institutes across the continent. This growth is fuelled by a combination of factors, including population expansion, increased demand for quality education, economic growth, technological advancements and growing global interest in Africa's development.

> **Africa has been one of the world's fastest-growing regions over the past decade, and by 2030, it will be home to nearly 1.7 billion people**

"Africa has been one of the world's fastest-growing regions over the past decade, and by 2030, it will be home to nearly 1.7 billion people and an estimated $6.7 trillion worth of consumer and business," Dr. Tembe added.

Vocational training and skill development is also playing a critical role in equipping Africa's youth for the global workforce by bridging the gap between formal education and industry needs. With Africa's rapidly-growing youth population, these programmes provide practical, job-ready skills tailored to sectors like technology, manufacturing, agriculture and healthcare. Discussing further, she revealed that by equipping youth with practical skills and industry-recognised certifications, vocational training is increasing their chances of finding employment and securing better job opportunities. This practical form of education also empowers young people to start their own

businesses by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to launch entrepreneurial ventures.

She added, "Providing access to quality vocational training, particularly for marginalised groups like girls and young women, can contribute to social inclusion and economic empowerment. Effective vocational programmes are designed to align with the demands of the local and global job markets, ensuring graduates are equipped with the skills employers are looking for."

The collaborations and growth

In the last 20 years, trade between India and African nations has grown significantly, with both regions recognising the potential to collaborate across diverse sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, healthcare, technology and education.

"The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has broadened the scope for India-Africa trade. Indian industry can leverage connectivity and lower tariff barriers for setting up investments and creating regional value chains that can be a part of global value chains. India-Africa trade stands at $83 billion with Indian exports to Africa at $45 billion

and imports at $38 billion. The trade basket mainly includes mineral fuels, food products, pharmaceuticals and so on, from the Indian side and crude oil, diamonds, copper, etc. from the African side to India," Dr. Tembe mentioned.

AfCFTA has also expanded the opportunities for India-Africa trade by improving connectivity and reducing tariff barriers, enabling Indian industries to make investments and create regional value chains that can integrate into global supply chains. Encouraging manufacturing in Africa not only boosts job creation, but also promotes economic diversification. Further, India's pharmaceutical industry has already established a strong foothold in Africa by providing affordable generic medicines and supporting healthcare infrastructure. Indian manufacturers have also set up assembly plants across the continent, benefitting the automobile, transportation, electrical equipment and machinery sectors. Additionally, sustainability and green energy solutions are advancing environmental objectives by encouraging renewable energy adoption and fostering innovations in clean technologies.

"Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has enunciated ten principles for engaging with Africa with economic cooperation as a key pillar. The economic principles include sustaining and deepening Indian engagement with Africa, creating local capabilities and opportunities, greater market access to Africa and greater investments there, use of digital tools to support Africa's development, enhancing agricultural productivity and addressing climate change challenges," she added.

The India-Africa business relationship is poised for continued growth, with both regions increasingly focussing on sustainable development, climate resilience and green technologies. As Africa becomes a global hub for youth talent, innovation and entrepreneurship, India's experience in fostering inclusive development and digital transformation offers valuable lessons and collaborative opportunities. Together, India and Africa can build a prosperous future based on shared values, complementary strengths and mutual respect, fostering economic resilience and global competitiveness.

Dr. Tembe's role in Africa's development

As the African middle class is growing rapidly, with rising disposable incomes and an increasing desire for quality goods and services, it provides a lucrative market for a wide range of industries, from consumer goods and retail to education, healthcare and technology. The role of AEDA becomes prominent. Dr. Tembe added, "We work with African Government, urging it to create policies that foster an enabling regulatory environment for foreign investments and create scale-up programmes for business growth and economic development. We ensure better financing solutions to offer African businesses affordable capital and liquidity to invest in strengthening their supply chains through the African Economic Development Fund."

For over 15 years, Dr. Tembe has been on a mission to change the African narrative. Driven by a sense of duty and purpose, she has dedicated her career to contribute to Africa's growth and development. Every initiative undertaken by her has been rooted in the desire to uplift the continent, from helping businesses grow and expand to projecting Africa's values of greatness and ingenuity. Her commitment has fuelled a vision to not only transform Africa from within, but also to present its true potential to the world. Through years of hard work and determination, she has carved a path in marketing Africa globally, bringing its rich resources, diverse cultures and innovative spirit to the forefront.

By championing Africa's strengths, she has helped to bridge the gap between Africa and the global market, positioning the continent as a key player on the world stage. "The African Economic Development Agency is just one of those platforms that can permit me to carry these projects on a higher level, liaising with the government to make the impact tangible and realistic," she added.

Africa: The emerging hub for investment

Africa is on the brink of becoming a global powerhouse, with its growing population, untapped resources and increasing economic development. Investing now allows businesses and investors to leverage the continent's emerging market opportunities and position themselves for success.

Dr. Tembe revealed, "I have quarterly training programmes where I train women on business and personal development. This year, I want to invest in women. So, we will be launching the Women Commercial Bank and the GWIC – Global Women Investors Club. Investing in women and seeing them grow has always been my passion." Further, education in Africa is undergoing a remarkable transformation, driven by increased government focus, international partnerships and rising awareness of its importance for economic and social development. Countries across the continent are investing in expanding access to quality education, building new schools and upgrading infrastructure to accommodate growing student populations, summarising now to be the perfect time to invest in Africa.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in
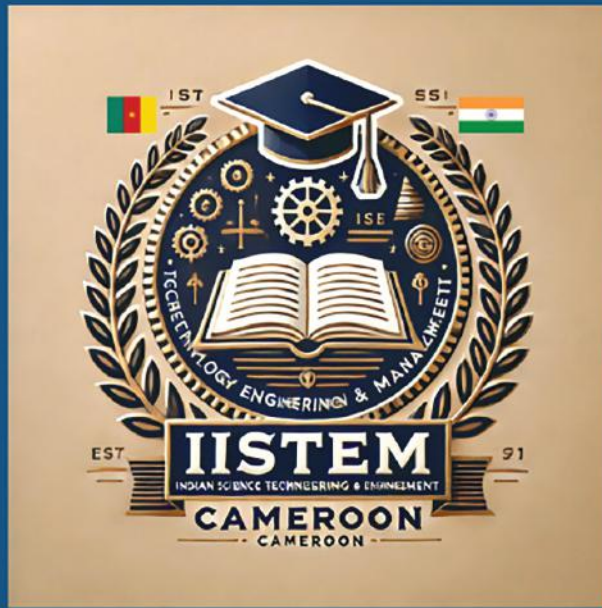
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- **60%** of Africa's population is made of young people aged 25 in average.

- Every year about **450 million** young people graduate from secondary education, seeking the best tertiary institutions.

Let`s Build the Next Big University in AFRICA

'Industry-relevant' curricula a need

Dr Sunil Rai, President, UPES, Dehradun, discusses with Dorina Bhattacharjee the relevance of designing industry-relevant curricula for the university

Q **UPES has been a pioneer in Petroleum and Energy Studies. How has the university evolved to keep pace with the dynamic global energy sector?**

Three ways in which University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES) keeps pace with advancements in the energy sector are as follows:

■ Comprehensive partnership with the best-in-class industry organisations: Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Reliance, Slumberger, Adani, Energy Efficiency Services, etc. to co-design, co-deliver and co-evaluate courses. Hence, those are updated with the latest practices.

■ Promote research in advancements in Energy for students by faculty by funding, encouraging and partnerships with the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs).

■ Sending faculty for six weeks' externship attachments in energy

sector to gain the first-hand knowledge in the latest energy practices and technology.

Q **The university has expanded its courses beyond petroleum and energy to include infrastructure, transportation, IT, design and policy management. How does it ensure that the curriculum for these expanded courses meets industry demands?**

Curriculum design at UPES for all programmes is an elaborate exercise. There are expert committees at each school drawn from faculty, industry experts, celebrated academics, alumni, students who give feedback and inputs on the latest trends and industry needs. Faculty designs courses under the guidance of an expert committee. Besides, extensive quality audit is performed twice each year to monitor progress and corrections applied, where needed. Each school has celebrated mentor professors and professors of practice who guide faculty in course delivery and evaluations.

Q **What inter-disciplinary opportunities exist for students looking to blend energy studies with emerging fields like data science or Artificial Intelligence (AI)?**

UPES is an inter-disciplinary-oriented institution.

Students under the School for Life initiative can pick up five-six courses between semester three and seven from any school other than their own. All students, irrespective of their programme, technology/management/design, etc. have to take compulsory courses in Working with Data and AI Mark-up Language (AIML), amounting to six credits. We also have a Centre for Inter-disciplinary Research and Innovation (CIDRI) which coordinates inter-disciplinary research and projects across schools.

> " Srijan is an initiative to expose students to re-al-world problems. The motivation is to make them life-long learners and empathetic citizens

Q Tell us about some notable research projects or innovations in the energy sector led by UPES faculty and students.

Some of the notable projects include converting waste plastic to fuel oil through a process of re-verse distillation; converting waste biomass to ethanol; enhancing battery life in solid state bat-teries and smart grid apps.

Q How does UPES collaborate with leading energy corporations to provide real-world exposure to students?

The university collaborates with leading energy corporations through a comprehensive approach that ensures real-world exposure for its students. Some practical industry experience provided by

UPES is as follows:

■ Co-Design, Co-Deliver and Co-evaluate courses with Industry experts. Almost 30 per cent courses are taught by industry in semester five-six-seven.

■ Summer internships coupled with additional industry projects.

We also conduct courses in advanced topics and latest practices by the best-in-class experts. These are also offered to our alumni under the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST) scheme.

Q Tell our readers about Srijan. What was the inspiration behind introducing it, and what impact has it had on students in terms of their personal and professional growth?

Srijan is an initiative to expose students to re-al-world problems. The motivation is to make them life long-learners and empathetic citizens. All students work for a six-week project after first year during summers to understand and help members of society who are have-nots with solv-ing challenges of education, health, sanitation, environment, employability and women empow-erment through our 2000 plus Non-Government Organisation (NGO) partners. After completing the project, they present their work to peers, pro-moting cross-learning and knowledge sharing.

Q How do you see the future of online edu-cation evolving, and what role will UPES play in shaping it?

Online education holds a great future because of ease of learning, low-cost, high reach and integrating knowledge from top institutions. Simulations provided by advanced software schemes like metaverse provide a real-life feel to learners. UPES online is our wing that provides online courses to more than 2,500 students. We are even upscaling our capacity to reach 10,000 students online.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in 干

Bridging skill gaps for workforce development

Dr. Sandeep Singh Kaura, Chancellor, Lamrin Tech Skills University Punjab and Advisor, NSDC, shares his perspectives with Dorina Bhattacharjee, on NSDC's initiatives to bridge skill gaps in India, foster entrepreneurship and enhance employability. He also discusses Lamrin Tech's role in shaping India's future workforce

Q How do you ensure NSDC's programmes remain relevant and effective?

As an Advisor at the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), I bridge the gap between industry needs and workforce capabilities, ensuring initiatives align with national priorities, collaborating with government bodies, industry leaders and educational institutions, to align them with large-scale programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). My responsibilities include offering policy recommendations, promoting vocational training and addressing skill gaps through partnerships for internships, apprenticeships and certifications. I also advocate for incorporating Industry 4.0 elements—Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation and digital technologies—into training programmes.

Additionally, I foster public-private partnerships, integrate vocational training into academic institutions and ensure courses meet the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). By promoting collaboration, innovation and digital learning, I aim to empower individuals and contribute to India's economic growth through a robust skill development ecosystem.

Q What kind of financial and mentorship support does NSDC provide to skilled individuals looking to start their own businesses?

NSDC provides financial assistance in the form of subsidies, skill loan scheme, scholarships and incentives for trainers and industry stakeholders to encourage broader skill development adoption across rural and under-served communities by providing financial assistance in the form of the following:

Startup loans: MUDRA loans (up to Rs 10 lakh), skill development loan programme and credit guarantee funds.

Subsidies and grants: Access to Prime Minister's employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), stand-up India and NSDC-backed funding initiatives.

Venture capital access: NSDC partnerships with investors and financial institutions to fund startups.

Skill loan scheme: Mentorship and business support in the form of:

Incubation and acceleration: Business validation, market research and expert mentorship.

Entrepreneurial training: Workshops on financial literacy, marketing and leadership skills.

Special programmes for women entrepreneurs include tailored training, financial assistance and networking initiatives.

> **"**
> To maximise impact, universities must enhance infrastructure, improve funding access and foster a culture of risk-taking and innovation

Q How can rural and under-served communities benefit more effectively from NSDC's programmes? Further, point out the challenges NSDC faces in upskilling India's vast workforce, and how is the committee addressing it?

NSDC is expanding training access by establishing rural centres and mobile skill units to reach remote areas. Its' programmes focus on local industries like agriculture and handicrafts to create relevant job opportunities. Technology-enabled learning, including hybrid models and digital literacy initiatives enhance accessibility. Collaborations with NGOs and local leaders help to build trust and improve outreach.

However, despite these efforts, several challenges persist including the following:

■ Limited training centres, weak internet

connectivity and a shortage of skilled trainers that hinder infrastructure development.

■ Mismatch between some trade-specific training programmes and industry needs restricts employment prospects, especially in rural areas.

■ Socio-economic barriers, including financial constraints, cultural resistance and lack of awareness, further limit participation.

■ Lack of engagement often leads to low trust in these programmes.

However, to overcome these challenges, NSDC is expanding infrastructure through public-private partnerships, enhancing training facilities and deploying mobile learning solutions. Strengthening collaborations with industries ensures that programmes align with job market demands and improve employment opportunities. Increased outreach efforts through community engagement and awareness campaigns is now boosting participation and trust.

Q **Is there any collaboration between NSDC and LTSU for working towards the *Viksit Bharat 2047* vision, and how can skill development be a game-changer in making India a developed economy?**

NSDC and Lamrin Tech Skills University (LTSU) have been actively engaging in partnership to promote skill development aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 objectives. In collaboration with Ethnotech Academic Solutions, NSDC launched the Centre for Future Skills at LTSU, focussing on imparting high-quality training in new-age technologies to empower youth as catalysts for this vision.

Skill development is pivotal in transforming India into a developed economy. By equipping the workforce with competencies in critical domains such as AI, cybersecurity, green jobs and health tech, India can address industry demands, foster innovation and enhance productivity. This strategic focus on upskilling not only meets the

immediate needs of the job market, but also positions India as a global skill hub driving sustainable economic growth.

Q **How does LTSU foster entrepreneurial thinking among students who may not have a business background? Tell us if there are any specialised programmes designed to cater to high-demand sectors.**

LTSU fosters entrepreneurial thinking by integrating skill-based education, industry collaborations and global exposure. Through partnerships with leading technology companies, it provides mentorship, real-world problem-solving experiences and access to industry-driven resources, nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset across all disciplines.

To meet the growing demand for future-ready skills, LTSU offers specialised training under *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)* 4.0 in high-growth sectors like AI, cybersecurity, Industry 4.0 and blockchain. Developed in collaboration with global technology leaders such as International Business Machines (IBM), these programmes emphasise hands-on learning, industry projects and market-aligned certifications. The AI and Machine Learning (ML) programme focusses on automation and

data-driven decision-making, while cybersecurity covers ethical hacking, data protection and risk management. The Industry 4.0 course prepares students for smart manufacturing, Internet-of-Things (IoT) and automation and the blockchain programme trains them in decentralised systems, smart contracts and secure digital transactions.

By blending academic learning with practical experience, LTSU ensures graduates are job-ready and equipped with an entrepreneurial mindset to drive innovation in cutting-edge industries.

Q What initiatives is the university incorporating to enhance employability?

The university enhances student employability through a comprehensive approach that integrates practical learning, live industry projects and hybrid learning models by providing the on-the-job training and incorporating apprenticeship components into its programmes. This approach allows students to gain hands-on experience in real-world settings, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements. Further, the university collaborates with global technology giants to structure its curriculum, ensuring that students engage in live industry projects. This collaboration provides mentorship from leading industry experts and academicians, enabling students to apply theoretical concepts to practical challenges, thereby enhancing their problem-solving skills and industry readiness. Recognising the evolving educational landscape, LTSU adopts hybrid learning models that blend traditional classroom instruction with online learning. This approach offers flexibility, enabling students to access course materials and engage in learning activities in-person as well as remotely. Hybrid models have been shown to enhance student engagement and performance by combining the strengths of face-to-face interactions with the convenience of online resources.

Q What's your opinion on the role of technical universities driving India's startup ecosystem forward, especially in tier-II and tier-III cities?

Technical universities are key drivers of innovation and entrepreneurship, especially in tier-II and tier-III cities. By integrating entrepreneurship into curricula, offering incubation support and fostering industry collaborations, these institutions equip students with the skills to launch and scale startups. These help to bridge the urban-rural innovation gap by addressing local challenges in agriculture, healthcare and manufacturing. University-led incubators, government initiatives and industry partnerships can further strengthen the startup ecosystem by providing funding, mentorship and commercialisation support.

However, to maximise impact, universities must enhance infrastructure, improve funding access and foster a culture of risk-taking and innovation. With the right strategies, technical universities can accelerate grassroots entrepreneurship, driving economic growth and job creation in smaller cities.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in 廿
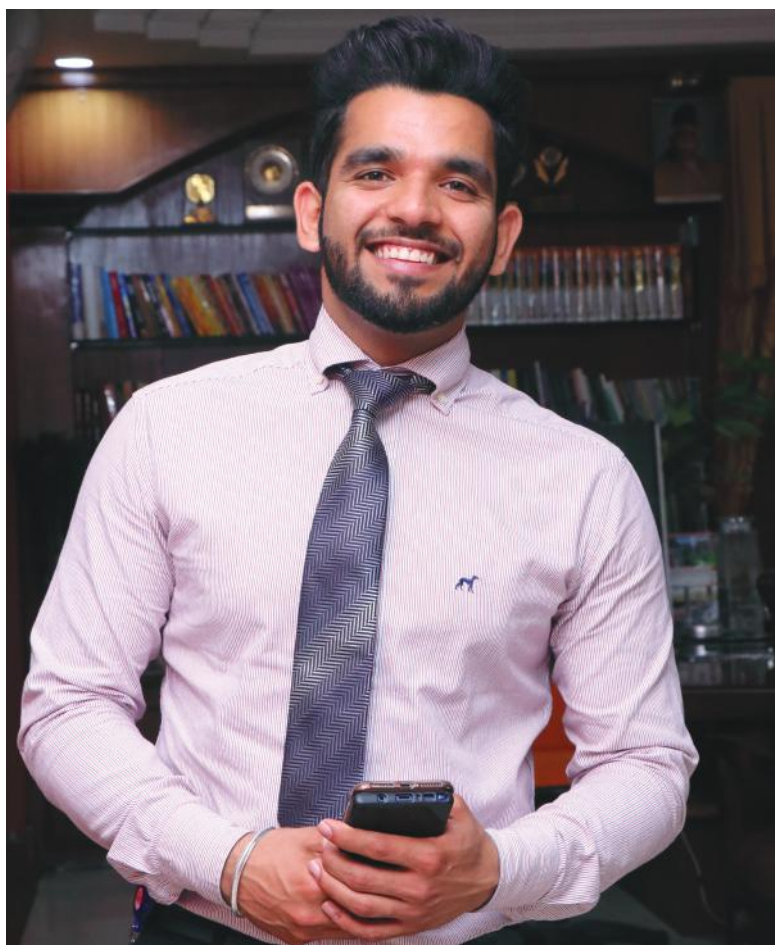
Ensuring affordable education at Sri Sai University

In an exclusive conversation, **Er Kanwar Tushar Punj, Pro Chancellor, Sri Sai University,** shares insights with Dorina Bhattacharjee, on his journey in educational leadership, the university's approach to integrating modern technical education, and its efforts to promote affordability, innovation and entrepreneurship in Himachal Pradesh's academic landscape

Q What inspired you to take up a leadership role in the education sector?

Education has always been a transformative force in society, and I firmly believe in its power to shape individuals and communities. My inspiration comes from the desire to create an institution that not only imparts knowledge, but also nurtures critical thinking, innovation and character development. Leading Sri Sai University allows me to contribute meaningfully to higher education by ensuring students receive world-class learning experiences that prepare them for future challenges.

Q How is Sri Sai University integrating modern technical education into its curriculum? Further, tell us how you ensure students receive hands-on practical experience alongside theoretical knowledge.

At Sri Sai University, we continuously update our curriculum to align with the latest industry trends and technological advancements. Our programmes incorporate emerging fields such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Science, Block-chain and Internet of Things (IoT).

To ensure hands-on experience, we emphasise on the following:

Industry collaborations: Partnerships with leading companies for internships, live

projects and expert mentorship.

State-of-the-art labs: Well-equipped laboratories for engineering, healthcare and management students.

Skill-based learning: Workshops, hackathons and research projects that encourage practical application of theoretical concepts.

Incubation and start-up support: Providing entrepreneurial guidance and infrastructure for students to develop and launch their own ventures.

Q In your view, how can private universities contribute to making quality education accessible to all?

Private universities play a crucial role in bridging the educational gap by offering innovative learning models, flexible academic programmes and industry-relevant courses. To enhance accessibility, private institutions must:

■ offer scholarship programmes and financial aid for deserving students.

■ establish distance and online learning platforms to reach students in remote areas.

■ develop vocational training programmes that equip students with job-ready skills.

■ foster public-private partnerships to create more affordable education models.

Q Education is often perceived as expensive, making it inaccessible to many. How does Sri Sai University ensure affordability for students from all socio-economic backgrounds?

Affordability is a key concern, and at Sri Sai University, we take multiple measures to ensure financial constraints do not hinder students' education:

■ Merit-based and need-based scholarships to support talented students.

■ Flexible payment plans and financial aid programmes for economically weaker sections.

■ Collaboration with government schemes to provide subsidised education.

■ Skill development programmes that help students gain early employment opportunities.

■ Low tuition fee structure compared to many private institutions while maintaining high academic standards.

Q How does the university maintain high academic standards and ensure continuous improvement in teaching methodologies?

Academic excellence is a continuous process. At Sri Sai University, we ensure this through the following :

Curriculum revision: Regular updates in line with industry and global standards.

Faculty development programmes: Training workshops, research funding and exposure to new teaching methodologies.

Technology integration: Smart classrooms, e-learning modules and AI-driven personalised learning.

Student feedback and industry inputs: Incorporating feedback from students and industry experts to improve courses.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE): Focussing on real-world applications rather than rote learning.

Q Share your opinion on how universities in Himachal Pradesh can contribute to the state's economic growth by fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

Universities are key drivers of economic growth. In Himachal Pradesh, institutions can contribute by:

setting up innovation and entrepreneurship centres: providing resources and mentorship to young entrepreneurs.

encouraging startups in tourism, agriculture and IT: leveraging the region's strengths to create sustainable businesses.

promoting research and development: encouraging innovations in biotechnology, renewable energy and healthcare.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

Durg: The emerging 'Kota of Chhattisgarh'

In an insightful conversation, Dr. Monika Sethi Sharma, Vice Chancellor, KK Modi University, Mahamara, tells Dorina Bhattacharjee, how the university leverages its strategic location in Chattisgarh, fosters student readiness through its pre-college programme, blends Indian culture with global education and balances innovation with ethics in AI research

Q KK Modi University is located near Durg-Bhilai, a prominent education hub in Chhattisgarh. How does the university leverage its strategic location to attract and support students from diverse backgrounds?

Located in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, Durg-Bhilai is a rapidly-growing urban agglomeration that has emerged as a prominent education hub in the region. Bhilai, a city in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh, has earned a reputation as the 'Kota of Chhattisgarh' due to its thriving culture of competitive exams and serious studies. The city is home to many students who aspire to crack exams like Indian Institute of Technology-Joint Entrance Exam (IIT-JEE), National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Common Admission Test (CAT) and other competitive entrance tests.

While establishing the KK Modi University (KKMU), we conducted extensive research to understand the region's educational needs and identified areas where we could make a significant impact. Our findings led us to develop innovative and progressive courses that focus on enhancing communication and presentation skills through real-world applications and practical experiences. Notably, our programmes incorporate 80 per cent

experiential learning pedagogy, combining liberal studies with hands-on training. Our cooperative education model, featuring faculty expertise from industry professionals, has proven to be a major draw for students from diverse backgrounds.

Q **Please elaborate on the university's pre-college programme and how it supports students transitioning from school to university, particularly in skill-building and academic readiness.**

Our pre-college programme offers free skill-based and academic readiness workshops, tailored to help students transition smoothly to university life. We focus on essential skills and academic pre-

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> My passion for teaching and mentoring, combined with my love for my students and team, makes my job rewarding

paredness to bridge gaps in learning. Additionally, our school outreach programme conducts entrepreneurial boot camps in over 200 schools annually, while research workshops for college students connect theory with practical applications. Together, these initiatives foster a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurial learning, research and skill-building at various academic stages.

Q **How does KKMU integrate Indian languages and culture into its educational approach to prepare students for a globalised world?**

At KK Modi University, we've developed an educational approach that integrates Indian languages and culture into a globalised landscape. Our approach focusses on three key areas: inner life skills, outer life skills and career skills. We offer contemplative studies, including yoga, mindfulness and Buddhism, to cultivate inner peace and happiness. Our programmes also emphasise positive psychology, personality development and essential life skills.

To ensure students gain technical competencies and global perspectives, we partner with top universities and industry leaders worldwide. KKMU also collaborates with international celebrities such as Sanctum, Rinpoche and acclaimed graffiti artists, who share their expertise with students and inspire them. We have local as well as international guest speakers from academics to industry. These engagements enrich

our students' learning experience, providing unique perspectives, inspiration and networking opportunities.

By combining Indian values with global best practices, we empower our students to become holistic, well-rounded individuals equipped to succeed in an increasingly inter-connected world. Our approach fosters emotional intelligence, self-awareness and spiritual growth, while also developing essential skills for the modern workplace.

Q **What are your thoughts on the balance between innovation and ethical responsibility in the context of AI research?**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) transforms education, requiring a balance between innovation and ethics. At KKMU, we train students to be AI-savvy for quick decisions while upholding ethical standards through workshops on moral conduct. We ensure transparency, data protection, human oversight and value alignment, fostering responsible innovation that respects human dignity.

Q **Tell us how your research background supports the university's efforts to foster innovation and critical thinking. What are your rewarding moments in your strategic career?**

My Ph.D. in Human Resources (HR) brings a research-driven perspective to leadership, focussing on human values and strengths. My research background enables me to drive evidence and data-based decision-making, encourage experimentation, research, innovation and creativity, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning.

I believe a 'research-with-impact' approach is the key to foster innovation, critical thinking and creativity. By prioritising research, we've created an ecosystem where Under Graduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) students actively engage in high-order thinking, writing research papers and participating in conferences under the guidance of their teachers and that lead to discussion and new learning. This gained momentum at our university with faculty and students publishing widely in peer-reviewed journals and making their presence felt at conferences and workshops, within India and abroad. The development of cutting-edge programmes, curriculum and pedagogies prepare students for applying their theoretical knowledge into practice through live projects, case studies and discussions. Moreover, research collaborations with industry partners are facilitating the translation of knowledge into practice, and address the pressing societal challenges. My goal is to create a vibrant ecosystem that supports the advancement of knowledge, promotes student success and contributes meaningfully to the betterment of society.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

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Fostering innovation and leadership

In an insightful conversation, Prof. (Dr.) Manoj Kumar, Vice Chancellor, DAV University, Jalandhar, speaks with Dorina Bhattacharjee about his leadership style, teaching pedagogies and fostering student-centric learning. He also explains how his research experience and global exposure shape his vision for holistic academic and leadership excellence

Q How has your experience as a researcher influenced your leadership style as a Vice Chancellor at DAV University?

Apart from my rich and ripe experience in the field of education and research, I am level-five certified in Leadership and Management from Chartered Management Institute, United Kingdom (UK). I believe that no fixed leadership style can help an individual to embark on the leadership journey in varied circumstances. Rather, for all managerial and leadership positions and roles, I adapt and gear up to different leadership styles as per the contextual and situational demands.

Q You've supervised several PhD candidates and authored numerous research articles. How do you manage to balance administrative duties with such a prolific research career?

I could recognise at a very early stage of my life that I was a curious mind and looked for the minute details. Research was a passion for me, apart from my management skills. I also had an eye for the details when it came to micro and macro planning. This paved the way for me to create a striking balance between administrative duties and research inputs.

Q How has your experience of working on the UKIERI project helped to shape your approach to university leadership?

The UK-India Education & Research Initiatives (UKIERI) project gave me a thorough understanding of the various leadership styles and sensitised me well as to which leadership style was the best suited to a particular situation and circumstances.

It also helped me to carry out a self-assessment of my emotional control and regulation, empathy and happiness index. It helped me to make use of various motivational theories and expedite them in practice.

There is always resistance to change but the 'Change Management Theories' learnt during the UKIERI project are really helpful in implementing the Change Management Project(s) and are vital to the success of the organisation.

Q You have introduced novel teaching pedagogies at DAV University. Please elaborate on some of these methods and their impact on the quality of education.

I always believe that we should teach the students the way they want to learn. Thus, I always build a

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> 'Change Management Theories' learnt during the UKIERI project are helpful in implementing Change Management Project(s) and are vital to the success of the organisation

focus on student-centric learning when it comes to the use of teaching pedagogies. I make ample use of 'Flip Learning' for advanced learners and I advocate the use of 'Activity-based Learning' for all types of learners. 'Mind Map and Jigsaw Activities' are frontiers in activity-based learning for me.

I also advocate the conduct of quizzes at the end of every teaching-learning session to make a quick assessment of learning on the part of students which helps us to plan for future sessions with the students and also build up the process of continuous evaluation of students.

INTERVIEW

Q As a certified Master Trainer in Leadership Management, how do you integrate leadership development into the academic environment at the university?

Well, it's always a matter of debate whether 'leaders are born or can be developed'! I firmly believe that some people are born with leadership qualities, but, at the same time, it is the skill that can be developed.

In the 21st century, all the graduates of the university need to exhibit leadership skills with a passion for leading from the front in their professional space, apart from demonstrating their domain-specific skills.

Therefore, we have integrated the curriculum of all our Under Graduate (UG) programmes with a course on 'Leadership Management' which a student can opt under the Choice-based Credit System.

Q What steps are being taken to ensure that student clubs remain active, engaging and aligned with the academic and extra-curricular needs of the students?

Our university has a highly functional 'Student Council' which draws its representatives from all the clubs, societies, hostels, class and department representatives. Each of the student

clubs under the patronage of the Dean Student Welfare, prepares their own budget and plans a series of activities which are detailed in the academic calendar of the university. The in-charges of the student clubs are given a free hand to make the club active, engaging and aligned with the personality grooming of the students.

Q How do you encourage cross-department collaboration among student clubs at DAV University?

DAV University has implemented National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and is offering a range of courses in the repositories of skill sevelopment courses, ability enhancement courses and value-based courses. We are able to break the barriers between the faculty/departments by offering these courses irrespective of the faculty/department and helping the students to come and study together in these courses.

Apart from the major project, we also encourage the students to opt for minor projects depending on the nature of the course in groups with due focus on various sustainable development goals with a special focus on society and the environment.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

Incubators and Startups: Catalysts of Change

Prof. (Dr.) D K Sharma, Vice Chancellor, HRIT University, Ghaziabad, explains the role of university incubation centres in shaping future entrepreneurs. These centres empower students and alumni with resources, mentorship and funding opportunities to help turn innovative ideas into successful businesses, driving India's start-up growth

University incubation centres are designed to support students and alumni who are interested in starting their business. A higher education institution should be equipped with the facilities and resources to learn, discover, invent and build students' careers during their campus journey. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are also responsible to shape students in such a way that they can generate new thoughts and ideas. Incubation centres can play a vital role in shaping the future of students and ultimately, the nation. These incubation centres provide entrepreneurs with access to experienced mentors and coaches, who can guide them through the process of starting and growing a business. Mentors can provide valuable advice and feedback on business plans, marketing strategies and funding opportunities. Incubation centres offer various workshops, training sessions and courses to help entrepreneurs. These centres provide essential skills i.e., business planning, marketing and financial management.

These centres also support entrepreneurs by reducing risks, providing funding opportunities and offering guidance on securing and utilising funds effectively, while also offering hands-on learning,

showcasing successful businesses and creating networking opportunities with entrepreneurs, investors and industry experts. This ecosystem has contributed to a significant rise in India's start-ups, from 450 in 2016 to over 128,000 in 2024, boosting confidence in entrepreneurship and fuelling the growth of incubators and accelerators investing in innovative business ideas.

It is believed most commonly that the 'incubators' and 'accelerators' are the same thing, but both the terms have a remarkable difference that the individual must know before signing up. Both incubators and accelerators provide early possibilities for start-ups. The founders receive assistance for expanding their start up business and increase their interest in recruiting a top venture capital firm to participate and support in the fundraising of their startups. Top accelerators always concentrate on growing firms, whereas incubators concentrate more on the invention.

Start-up accelerators are time-bound programmes where businesses work with mentors for weeks or months to address challenges and develop their companies. Programmes like Y Combinator and Techstars

have selective acceptance rates. The key advantage of accelerators is the mentor network, including investors and experts. In contrast, incubators have no fixed timeline and assist businesses at various stages, focussing on business strategy, product-market fit and networking. Some incubators specialise in particular sectors. Accelerators provide quick and immersive learning, helping businesses raise funds, gain traction and

> Incubators are becoming an increasingly popular way for entrepreneurs to raise funds and address other business needs

refine plans, marketing and hiring strategies, thus accelerating growth and development.

Simultaneously, the start-up incubators help businesses with raising funds/capital and other ancillary services required for the successful operations on the condition that they meet certain criteria and prove attractive to the investors. Incubators are becoming an increasingly popular way for entrepreneurs to raise funds and address other business needs. Incubation is also useful for the common man and is used

to address various economic and socio-economic policy requirements. These include the following:

■ Generating capital wealth and jobs along with encouraging people to launch their own business/enterprises.

■ Providing an appropriate roadmap to start-up.

■ Motivating people to participate in generating ideas and converting their ideas to new inventions.

■ Creating, keeping and promoting entrepreneurship.

■ Possible spin-in or spin-out enterprise opportunity identification.

■ Redevelopment of the community and quick access to fund-raising sources.

■ Promoting female-owned businesses.

■ Promoting the expansion of regional industrial clusters.

■ To help a life-time mentorship network of accomplished and qualified professionals.

■ To promote creative and innovative ideas, well-supported by solid research and realistic expectations.

University incubation centres empower visionary minds to transform ideas into thriving ventures, driving both entrepreneurial success and national progress.

Together, they light the path to a brighter, more innovative future for all.

WHETHER YOU ARE AN ENTREPRENEUR OF A SEASONED BUSINESS OWNER, (WHO HAS EMBRACED TECHNOLOGY) WE INVITE YOU TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS WITH OUR COMMUNITY. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTRIBUTE YOUR STORY, ARTICLES, OR INSIGHTS ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY.

Describe the Path

You have Travelled

Inspire, Connect & Empower

We celebrate the entrepreneurial journey and achievements of individuals who dared to dream and toiled hard to make those come true. We believe that every success story is unique and has the potential to inspire and empower others.

SCAN THE QR CODE
& Start Inspiring Everyone Around

At The Founder Media, we are a dedicated team of passionate entrepreneurs, storytellers and innovators. We understand the drive, ambition and challenges founders face, because we are founders ourselves.

From degree completion to societal impact

Dr. Sanjay Bahl, Vice Chancellor, Indus International University, Una, explains his perspective on the evolving Indian PhD ecosystem, the key challenges and opportunities for improvement, focussing on industry collaboration, research quality and fostering impactful academic contributions

India has long been a hub for academic learning and intellectual thought. The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) ecosystem in India, however, has increasingly become a subject of scrutiny. While the country boasts a rich tradition of scholarship, there is growing concern that the focus of PhD students is becoming more about the pursuit of the degree itself, rather than creating impactful and result-oriented research that can benefit society at large. Moreover, despite the considerable growth of research output in terms of numbers, there are notable gaps in the practical applicability of these contributions to industry, technology and societal development. As India moves towards establishing itself as a global leader in research and innovation, it is essential to re-evaluate the current PhD ecosystem and identify the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The current state of the Indian PhD ecosystem

India's PhD ecosystem has grown significantly, producing thousands of doctorates annually. However, this growth highlights a key challenge: the disconnect between research output and real-world relevance. Many PhD students prioritise obtaining their degrees over addressing societal or industrial challenges, leading to research that, while academically sound, lacks practical application. This issue is compounded by institutional factors, where faculty members often steer students towards projects that align with their own academic interests rather than socially impactful research. As a result, students focus on niche topics that contribute to academic knowledge, but fail to tackle pressing industry or societal needs, limiting the broader impact of India's research contributions.

The challenges to a result-oriented PhD system are as follows:

Rigid academic structures and focus on quantity over quality: Indian universities often follow rigid academic structures that discourage inter-disciplinary research, leading to fragmented and less innovative projects. Additionally, the focus on quantity over quality in research outputs prioritises publishing numerous papers over producing impactful and socially-relevant work. A shift towards flexibility and quality-focussed research could address societal challenges effectively.

Limited research funding: Another significant challenge is the scarcity of funding available for research, particularly in areas that could contribute to societal advancement. Indian researchers often face difficulties securing grants for research projects that require substantial investment. This lack of funding restricts the ability of students to undertake high-impact and result-oriented research.

The opportunities for reforms

Promoting industry-academia collaboration: Increased collaboration between academic institutions

and industries offers a promising way to transform the Indian PhD ecosystem. Encouraging PhD students to engage in industry-oriented research projects would provide practical experience and lead to innovations that benefit society. Industries should actively shape research agendas, provide funding and offer resources, creating a more effective ecosystem that addresses real-world challenges. **Inter-disciplinary research:** The future of research lies in inter-disciplinary work. By encouraging PhD students to explore research that crosses traditional academic boundaries, Indian universities can produce research that is more holistic and applicable to a wider range of issues. Inter-disciplinary research, especially in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), climate change and health sciences, can yield solutions to some of the most pressing global challenges. Universities should offer flexible PhD programmes that allow students to engage in collaborative and cross-disciplinary research initiatives, enabling them to develop well-rounded solutions to complex problems. **Revised research incentives and funding for impactful projects:** The academic

reward system in India needs to shift focus from quantity to quality, innovation and societal impact. Universities should recognise research that leads to patents, industry applications and solutions for social challenges. Increased funding for high-impact, re-

> India stands at crossroads in its academic journey, with the potential to become a global leader in research and innovation. The Indian PhD ecosystem has the talent, intellectual capital and resources to contribute meaningfully to global scholarship

sults-oriented research is also essential, with collaboration among the government, private sector and academia to support projects addressing societal needs like clean energy, public health and infrastructure.

Global exposure and collaboration: Indian PhD students should be encouraged to collaborate with global scholars to gain exposure to the best practices and advanced

research methodologies. Universities should form partnerships with leading international research institutions to facilitate exchange programmes and collaborative projects, enhancing innovation and relevance in their research.

The future lies in collaboration

India stands at crossroads in its academic journey, with the potential to become a global leader in research and innovation. The Indian PhD ecosystem has the talent, intellectual capital and resources to contribute meaningfully to global scholarship. However, for the country's PhD system to truly create global scholars and thinkers, it must evolve from a system focussed on completing a degree to one that fosters result-oriented and socially-impactful research. The future of Indian research lies in collaboration with industry, a focus on inter-disciplinary work, an incentive structure that rewards impact and increased funding for projects that address global and local challenges. By embracing these opportunities, India can ensure that its PhD graduates are not just scholars, but also thinkers who shape the future of the world.

Elevating Chandigarh University to next level

(Dr.) Manpreet Singh Manna, Vice Chancellor, Chandigarh University, discusses with Dorina Bhattacharjee his role at the university, the impact of the SWAYAM platform on digital learning, the university's research ecosystem, multi-disciplinary education approach and strategies for enhancing graduate employability

Q **Tell us about your current responsibilities at Chandigarh University.**

As the Vice-Chancellor, I am responsible for overseeing the university's academic and administrative functions and ensuring the institution's commitment to excellence in education, research and innovation. As the leader of a top-ranked university, my foremost responsibility is to sustain its status and ranking while elevating it to the next level by benchmarking against international standards in education and employability. My primary focus is on promoting an environment that encourages learning, creativity

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> As the leader of a top-ranked university, my foremost responsibility is to sustain its status and ranking while elevating it to the next level...

and diversity, in alignment with the university's mission to provide a flexible, experiential and inter-disciplinary education.

Q **You have played a key role in the development of the SWAYAM platform. Take us through its journey, and how has it transformed digital learning in India?**

SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) is built with a primary focus on promoting education—the backbone of a Viksit Bharat. The journey of developing SWAYAM was full of challenges, whether technological, in shifting the mindset of the masses, or in other areas. Today's learners are the primary beneficiaries, gaining both basic and advanced

knowledge on topics of their choice under the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) framework of the University Grants Commission (UGC)/All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), thereby becoming life-long learners. Our team designed and developed a robust platform that overcame technical, geographical and multi-lingual challenges. To meet the target of a 50 per cent Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of the National Education Policy (NEP) , SWAYAM provides accessibility, affordability, quality and equality, delivering high-quality content from institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

Q **With rapidly evolving job roles, how does Chandigarh University's multi-disciplinary approach ensure that students are prepared for emerging careers?**

At Chandigarh University, the curriculum is designed to encourage a multi-disciplinary approach in which students showcase their technical, managerial and creative skills. We always emphasise project-based learning, and projects are aligned

Q Many universities struggle with graduate employability. How is Chandigarh University addressing this? Tell us if there are any initiatives taken.

As industry requirements and technology evolve rapidly, we have implemented a flexible curriculum in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, emphasising value-added learning. Skill-based courses and programmes in emerging technology domains provide students with hands-on training and real-world projects to equip those for challenging roles. Our dedicated Career Development Centre organises regular placement drives, career fairs, soft skills workshops and mentorship programmes with industry experts, ensuring that students are well-prepared for professional challenges. As a result, our graduates secure employment at top-notch companies with impressive annual salaries. The Chandigarh University team is committed to student development and preparing them for successful career placements.

Q With 159 research papers, 57 patents and six book chapters in Electrical Engineering, IoT, and blockchain, what advice would you give to young researchers aspiring to contribute to these fields?

Many young researchers are contributing to the latest developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML). I always encourage students to collaborate using inter-disciplinary approaches and integrate electrical engineering principles into AI and ML research. In light of the latest breakthroughs in quantum computing, my message to all students is to remain focussed and blend their research with the latest semi-conductor technologies. Students must focus on real-world problems and pursue research that positively impacts society.

with industrial problems that come directly from the industry. Cross-disciplinary collaboration enables students to tackle real-world challenges from multiple perspectives. The multi-disciplinary subjects are developed with the intervention of industrial experts and take industry needs into account.

Q India aims to become a global research powerhouse. How does the university's research ecosystem contribute to national and international scientific advancements?

Chandigarh University always promotes an innovation-driven environment by inviting researchers from various national and international research institutes. Through inter-disciplinary research, the university has developed state-of-the-art labs and forged collaborations with industries for innovative projects and technology-driven solutions. Chandigarh University has collaborated with over 250 universities across the globe for research and knowledge transfer. Students, along with faculty members, have published research articles in science-cited indexed journals and international conferences.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in Ⅎ₣

Technology no longer a tool, but a co-educator

Dr. Pankaj Kumar Mishra, Vice Chancellor, Future University, discusses with Dorina Bhattacharjee, the institution's vision to make Uttar Pradesh (UP) a top academic hub. He highlights university-led initiatives, such as India's first credit-based Indian Knowledge System (IKS) course and AI-driven career guidance systems, focussing on blending ancient wisdom with modern education

Q How is Future University leveraging technology to enhance classroom experience, especially with EdTech transforming traditional learning models?

The advancements in Educational Technology (EdTech) have transformed the way students learn and interact with knowledge. At Future University, we have adopted a technology-first approach to modernise classroom experiences and bridge the gap between traditional and digital learning methodologies.

Our classrooms are equipped with Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven learning assistants that help personalise lessons based on individual learning capabilities. By integrating adaptive learning platforms, we track student progress, analyse strengths and weaknesses and tailor educational content to optimise understanding and retention. To make learning more interactive and engaging, we have incorporated blending learning models, smart classrooms and Learning Management Systems (LMS).

Furthermore, virtual labs and simulation-based learning allow students in fields like engineering, medicine and business analytics to perform experiments and case studies in an immersive virtual environment, reducing dependency on physical infrastructure. At Future University, our mission is to create a digitally-empowered academic ecosystem where students are not just passive learners, but active participants in their own education.

Q Are there specific technologies or innovations, such as AI, AR/VR, or data analytics, that the university has adopted to improve teaching and learning outcomes? Kindly elaborate.

Technology is no longer just a tool—it is a co-educator. At Future University, we are harnessing the power of AI, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and data analytics to redefine education.

Some of our most innovative implementations include AI-powered virtual tutors that assist students in self-paced learning by providing real-time feedback and personalised lesson recommendations. AR and VR labs enable students in engineering, medical sciences and business management to simulate real-world scenarios using immersive VR tools. Additionally, predictive data analytics in education leverages AI-driven insights to monitor student progress, predict academic outcome and suggest personalised learning paths, ultimately improving retention and success rates. By integrating these cutting-edge technologies, we are enhancing engagement, making learning more interactive and preparing students for an AI-driven future.

Q What is your perspective on the shift towards inter-disciplinary learning in higher education, and how is the university embracing this trend?

The future of education is no longer confined to rigid subject boundaries. The 21st-century job

market demands professionals who possess a multi-disciplinary skill set, and we are ensuring that our students are equipped with cross-functional knowledge that spans across various disciplines.

At Future University, we have introduced flexible academic pathways that allow students to explore courses beyond their core discipline. Some key initiatives include the following:

Fusion degrees: Students can now pursue integrated courses like AI and Law; Business and Data Science; or Biotechnology and Management, which combine technical ex-

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> To bridge the gap between academia and industry, we have established partnerships with top companies to ensure that our students gain practical exposure and secure strong career opportunities

pertise with business acumen.

Inter-disciplinary research projects: We encourage students and faculty to collaborate across departments, enabling knowledge-sharing and cross-domain problem-solving.

Liberal arts and science integration: Offering holistic education that enhances critical thinking, creativity and analytical reasoning, making students adaptable to diverse career paths.

This flexible and integrated education model ensures that students graduate with a diverse skill set, innovative mindset and the

ability to work across multiple disciplines—a necessity in today's job market.

Q **What steps is the university taking to integrate vocational training and industry partnerships into its programmes? Further, kindly explain how the university ensures a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application in its curriculum.**

One of the key differentiators at Future University is our strong emphasis on industry-aligned education. We believe that academic learning must be complemented with practical exposure to prepare students for real-world challenges.

To ensure a balance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on application, we have adopted the following strategies:

Apprenticeship-embedded degree programmes: In collaboration with companies such as TCS, IBM, Oracle and Quick Heal, we offer students opportunities to gain 'on-the-job' training while completing their degree.

Skill-based learning modules: We have introduced specialised certification programmes in fields like cybersecurity, FinTech, AI, digital marketing and Internet of Things (IoT), ensuring that students graduate with industry-relevant skills.

Internship-driven academics: Every student at the university is required to complete multiple internships before graduation, allowing them to gain practical exposure and industry insights.

Live industry projects and capstone initiatives: Students engage in real-world case studies, solving industry challenges alongside professionals, making them job-ready from day one. These initiatives equip students with hands-on expertise, improving their employability and career prospects.

Q **What steps are being taken to build strong industry-academia linkages to facilitate**

internships and job opportunities for students?

To bridge the gap between academia and industry, we have established partnerships with top companies to ensure that our students gain practical exposure and secure strong career opportunities. Key initiatives include the following:

Industry-sponsored research: Companies collaborate with our faculty and students to work on cutting-edge projects.

Regular industry interaction sessions: Frequent guest lectures, panel discussions and corporate mentorship programmes.

Global internships and placement assistance: Facilitating international internships with leading Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and startups. These partnerships ensure that our students are well-prepared for real-world challenges and have access to top-tier employment opportunities.

Q How does the university plan to enhance its placement record in the coming years, especially with the integration of new-age technology and evolving market demands?

To maximise career opportunities for our students, we have introduced AI-based career guidance systems that match students with job profiles based on their skills, internships and academic performance.

Our new-age skill development bootcamps focus on emerging fields such as AI, blockchain, FinTech and sustainability, equipping students with the expertise needed for the evolving job market.

Additionally, corporate networking and hiring events provide direct industry interaction, facilitating seamless job placements. These initiatives have improved our placement success rate and ensured that our graduates are job-ready upon graduation.

Q What role do you see Future University playing in shaping Uttar Pradesh's reputation as a centre for academic excellence on the national and global stage?

Future University aims to establish Uttar Pradesh (UP) as a leading academic hub by focussing on three key areas: innovation, research and global collaborations. We have launched India's first credit-based Indian Knowledge System (IKS) course, blending ancient Indian wisdom with modern applications. We are fostering research-driven academic culture by collaborating with leading institutions in the US, UK and Japan for joint research and faculty exchange programmes.

Through our entrepreneurship and innovation hub, we are nurturing young entrepreneurs and empowering students to launch startups and contribute to India's economic growth. By focussing on these initiatives, Future University is playing a crucial role in shaping UP's academic identity on national and global platforms.

Q Your long-term vision for Future University, and how do you plan to align it with the evolving needs of students and society?

My vision is to establish the university as a globally-recognised institution for innovation, research and student-centric education. Over the next decade, we aim to strengthen inter-disciplinary learning and research; expand global partnerships and student exchange programmes and develop Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in AI, sustainability and digital transformation, ensure 100 per cent meaningful placement and entrepreneurship support.

At Future University, our mission is to not only educate students, but to empower them to be leaders, innovators and changemakers in the global landscape.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

Transforming IIT Roorkee to meet future demands

Prof. Kamal Kishore Pant, Director, IIT Roorkee, discusses with Dorina Bhattacharjee, the paradigm shift in chemical engineering, fuelled by advancements in AI, biotechnology and renewable energy. He highlights IIT Roorkee's commitment to equip students with the skills to lead innovations in sustainable processes and green technologies for a better future

Goals (SDGs), we aim to pioneer advancements in emerging fields such as quantum technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI), clean energy and sustainable infrastructure. Collaborations with leading international institutions and industry partnerships further enable us to amplify our contributions to the global academic and innovation ecosystem.

Q **Having served as the Dean of Faculty at IIT Delhi and now as the Director of IIT Roorkee, how has your journey with these institutions shaped your approach to academic leadership? Tell us how the culture and academic ethos of IITs have evolved over the years, and what role do you see these playing in the future of global education?**

My journey with IITs has been profoundly enriching, allowing me to gain a deep understanding of academic leadership, institutional management and the transformative power of education. At IIT Delhi, I witnessed the interplay of inter-disciplinary collaboration and the significance of faculty development, which I continue to prioritise at IIT Roorkee.

Over the years, the IIT has evolved to become more inclusive, innovation-driven and globally oriented. From fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among students to enhancing industry-academia linkages, these have embraced a holistic approach to education. With initiatives like virtual learning, smart classrooms and global exchange programmes, these are redefining the future of global education and ensuring that India remains a hub for knowledge creation.

Q **Your research spans diverse fields such as hydrogen generation, CO_2 capture and biomass valorisation. How do these efforts contribute to address critical global challenges?**

Research in these domains directly addresses some of the most pressing global challenges,

Q **As a Director of IIT Roorkee, how do you envision its role in advancing India's position as a global leader in science, technology and engineering education?**

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee, with its illustrious history and commitment to academic excellence, plays a pivotal role in advancing India's global standing in science, technology and engineering. Our emphasis lies on fostering cutting-edge research, nurturing innovation and equipping students with future-ready skills. By aligning with national priorities like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and global frameworks like the Sustainable Development

including climate change, energy transition and resource sustainability. Hydrogen generation offers a pathway to cleaner energy solutions, essential for decarbonising sectors like transportation and industry. CO2 capture technologies aim to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to achieve net-zero goals. Biomass valorisation not only promotes waste-to-resource transformation, but also supports circular economy principles. Together, these endeavours align with global prior-

> ## Chemical engineering is poised to undergo a paradigm shift, driven by advancements in areas like AI, biotechnology and renewable energy

ities for a sustainable future while creating scalable solutions for societal benefit.

Q Among your many research endeavours, which project or breakthrough do you consider the most impactful and why?

One of the most impactful projects has been my work on coal-to-methanol conversion. This innovation addresses India's energy dependency by leveraging indigenous coal resources to produce methanol, a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels. It holds significant potential to transform India's energy landscape, reduce imports and lower emissions. The scalability and applicability of this technology make it a cornerstone for energy transition in the country.

Q Kindly shed light on your work in coal-to-methanol conversion and its

potential for transforming India's energy landscape.

The coal-to-methanol conversion process presents an opportunity to harness India's abundant coal reserves in a sustainable manner. Methanol serves as a versatile chemical feedstock and a cleaner fuel alternative, reducing our reliance on traditional hydrocarbons. This technology not only promotes energy security, but also aligns with India's vision for reducing carbon intensity in its energy sector. Our research emphasises efficiency, scalability and environmental sustainability, making it a promising solution for meeting India's energy demands.

Q What are some of the most valuable lessons you've learnt during your association with IITs, and how do you incorporate those into your leadership at IIT Roorkee?

My association with IITs has taught me the importance of fostering a culture of collaboration, resilience and continuous learning. I've learnt that empowering faculty and students, encouraging inter-disciplinary research and creating a supportive ecosystem for innovation are critical for institutional success. At IIT Roorkee, these principles guide my leadership approach. By embracing diversity, promoting inclusivity and adopting forward-thinking strategies, we are creating an environment where creativity thrives, and impactful solutions are born.

Q How do you see chemical engineering evolving with advancements in technology and growing environmental concerns?

Chemical engineering's focus is shifting towards developing sustainable processes, green technologies and carbon-neutral solutions. Emerging fields like synthetic biology, energy storage and waste valorisation are creating new opportunities for chemical engineers to address global challenges.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

Shaping education with **innovation** and entrepreneurship

Ankur Gill, Director of Operations, SVGOI, Chandigarh, tells Dorina Bhattacharjee about his mission of transforming education. From fostering entrepreneurship and leveraging AI-driven learning to bridging academia with industry, he explains how SVGOI is shaping future leaders through innovative initiatives like Super60 and Pharma Super60

Q **As Director of Operations, what are your primary responsibilities for ensuring smooth functioning of the Swami Vivekanand Group of Institutes (SVGOI), Chandigarh? How do you integrate your knowledge of instructional management, academia and the corporate sector to foster innovation and growth in the institution?**

As the Director of Operations, my primary focus is to create job creators rather than job seekers, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation across the campus. My responsibilities include strategic planning, academic oversight, admissions management, and cultivating strong industry partnerships to ensure the seamless functioning of SVGOI. I actively work to enhance entrepreneurial thinking by introducing initiatives such as startup incubation centres, mentorship programmes and workshops led by industry leaders.

By blending my expertise in instructional management with my corporate sector experience, I have launched programmes like The Unique Community, Super60 and Pharma Super 60, which equip students with practical skills and entrepreneurial acumen. These eMorts aim to empower students to turn their innovative ideas into viable ventures, creating a ripple eMect of job creation and societal impact.

Q **In your role, how do you work to enhance the overall student experience, from admission to graduation? What role does data and technology play in improving the efficiency of operations at the institute?**

Enhancing the student journey is central to my responsibilities. From digitising admissions to incorporating data-driven strategies in academics and placements, we ensure a student-centric approach. Advanced technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and analytics, enable us to monitor performance, anticipate trends

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> Education is a transformative force, and my commitment to equal opportunities is rooted in a belief that everyone deserves access to quality education

and personalise learning experiences. These tools help to optimise operations, making every phase of a student's journey—from admission to graduation—seamless and impactful.

Q **What motivates you to advocate for equal education opportunities, and how have your scholarship programmes impacted students from under-privileged regions?**

Education is a transformative force, and my commitment to equal opportunities is rooted in

a belief that everyone deserves access to quality education. Through our scholarship initiatives, we have positively impacted more than 1,000 students annually, particularly in under-served regions. These programmes alleviate financial barriers, empowering students to focus on their education and unlock their potential to contribute meaningfully to society.

Q **What role do national and international conferences play in shaping your vision for SVGOI, and how do you bring those insights back to the institution?**

National and international conferences are invaluable for exploring new trends, exchanging ideas and building networks with global leaders. Leadership summits have provided me with insights into digital innovation and global best practices. These experiences inform our strategies at SVGOI, helping us to adopt cutting-edge solutions and ensure our students are globally competitive while addressing local challenges.

Q **What are your thoughts on India's potential to reclaim its status as a global hub of wisdom and technical excellence?**

India has a rich legacy of knowledge and innovation that can be harnessed to reclaim its position as a global hub of wisdom and technical excellence. By fostering critical thinking, encouraging innovation and strengthening the link between academia and industry, we can realise this vision. At SVGOI, we are committed to develop skilled professionals who will contribute to India's growth as a leader in education and technology on the global stage.

Q **What inspired you to write Empowering Youth: Swami Vivekananda's Timeless Teachings for Today's Generation, and what key messages do you hope to convey to today's youth?**

Swami Vivekananda's teachings have always inspired me with their timeless relevance and emphasis on self-reliance and service. This book aims to convey those principles to today's youth, encouraging them to dream big, stay resilient, and lead with values. The central message is to embrace challenges, pursue excellence and contribute positively to society, while maintaining a strong sense of purpose and integrity.

Q **What initiatives are you planning to further align the institute's growth with global education and industry trends?**

To align with global education and industry trends, SVGOI is introducing industry-focussed programmes, leveraging AI technologies and fostering international collaborations. Initiatives like the SVGOI Entrepreneurship Incubation Centre, Pharma Super60 and Alumni talks series provide students with holistic development and exposure to global practices. By prioritising research, innovation and industry partnerships, we aim to position SVGOI as a leader in higher education, equipping students with skills and knowledge for a globalised world.

dorina@thefoundermedia.in

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+91-9717439934	+91-8882002378	+91-9891479894	+91-9599261623
anupam@b2bmarketmedia.com	ashish@thefoundermedia.com	neha@thefoundermedia.in	priyanshi@b2bmarketmedia.in

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