

WES Special

# In Pursuit of QUALITY EDUCATION

Teaching is not just about imparting textbook-based education, Amity also ensures its students' alignment with the industry, says

**Dr Vajahat Hussain,**

CEO, Amity University, Dubai, in conversation with **Dr Ravi Gupta,** Editor-in-Chief, digitalLEARNING Magazine

**How did the idea of opening a campus in Dubai emerge? How did the vision evolve?**

I think we have been quite successful in India in providing quality education. There came a time when our foundation decided to expand our institutions outside India. Steps were taken to expand operations in the UK, Romania, Mauritius, Singapore and Middle-East, with the last one being identified as close to India and a potential market. We started with 100 students at this campus, set up by the Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), which is a member of TECOM Group, and the name given to the campus is 'incubator campus'. This is where the foreign universities can come and incubate. And, once they settle down and decide what they want for future, then they take the next step.

In our case, the initial four years were so successful that we decided to set up the largest private university campus in Dubai that is fully owned by our foundation. Generally universities take land on lease, but we purchased it to make our commitment very

clear to this nation that we are here to stay, and that we will align ourselves to the mission and vision of this country and then produce and train students who can align with the national agenda of the country. Even for the selection of our programmes, we took the help of Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) to identify the national agenda, so as to pick up the best courses to go with the same.

**How has the number of students increased over the years, and what they are generally doing after completing their studies?**

Beginning with 100 students, we now have 1,600 students. Three batches have passed out and are successfully employed or have gone ahead with higher education. We ensure that the student's alignment with the industry takes place well while they are with us. It is a compulsory must-have that all the students undertake industry engagement while with us. We also work on their personality development, interview skills and social skills, so that when they face the interview, they can be recognised as professionals.

**You are surrounded by brands from various regions and are facing a stiff competition from them. What is the secret of your success?**

When we started with this campus (in Dubai), we made a conscious commitment to make a difference to the student community. Our focus is always to develop well-rounded graduates and that has been the major differentiator for our campus. Our well-shaped graduates are our strength. When we evaluate ourselves, we look in terms of how we are able to achieve create task-based learning, internships, students-based self-organised groups, etc. Hence, the focus is more on what we are able to deliver in terms of the student experience. We ensure overall experience, and that is what is drawing our students. We have different quality standards - we have regular visits to our campus, moderation process,

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international accreditation, professional bodies' associations, etc., and all these together give a lot of inputs, that make our campus different.

**You have various campuses in different countries. How does the knowledge sharing happen?**

We have a three-country programme, where students get an opportunity to gain invaluable exposure, experience and practical knowledge by studying in three reputed institutions across three continents and get certificates from the partner universities in the UK and the US. A lot of student mobility is happening. We also take a lot of collaborative efforts across the universities among the campuses. As far as Amity is concerned, it has a long and rich experience whether it is case studies, real-time research, applied research, etc. We have very senior scientists in our campuses, and a lot of collaborations happen between the senior teams in our campuses. We have a vision that Dubai should become the hub of international faculties. You can see recruitment of international faculties from the West, but taking them to India is a bit more challenging than to bring them to Dubai. If we get them here, it is easier to take them to India for semesters. As

far as our faculty exchange programme is concerned, our target is to develop Dubai as a hub of international faculty and then share it with the rest of the centres.

**You are an international university now also having presence in Dubai. How are you map profiles of students from various other countries?**

We have students from multiple nationalities and they have accepted us as an international university, which is not predominantly Indian. Although majority of our students are Indian, we also have students from Middle-East, the US, Canada, etc. I think what is driving us is the geographical area around us, as the economies are opening up. The student feels, once they study here and have an exposure to the market, there would not be dearth of job opportunities around them.

**What are the other arms of Amity?**

We have two more arms — pre-school arm and K12 arm. The largest pre-school in Dubai will be operational in September 2016. In fact, we have two pre-schools in Dubai — one towards the end of Dubai on way to Abu Dabi and the other in the premium area named Jumeirah. These are 100-children pre-schools. Nursing care is also available, so working mothers can leave their one-month-old children and go to work. The medical care is good enough to take care of the children throughout the day.

**What makes you stand out in this sector?**

I think there has been a lot of success in India itself in both these areas. Education is the only thing we are concerned with. We are a not-for-profit foundation, so we do it for a purpose and there is no reason why we should not address all the issues relating to children. This is what makes us unique. We are in all these related verticals and deliver quality. After all, it is a quality-driven market. ■