

Every Accomplishment Starts With the Decision to Try

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Abstract. A stimulating intellectual environment and access to resources are of paramount importance in creating an ideal learning and research atmosphere conducive to quality scholarly work. Being in a system that rewards academic contributions through publications and funding garners commitment towards the chosen field of research. Inspirational role models help to shape students and thereby enable them to pursue academic disciplines they can excel in. We have been lucky to be mentored/supervised by Prof. Alex Yakovlev during our Masters and PhD degree courses in Newcastle University. Through his work he has shown how satisfying and gratifying research can be once you start on this path. His objective for research made an impression on many professional careers towards a more fulfilling objective in life rather than just material and personal gain. In developing countries learning is always a goal to achieve personal gains rather than actually understanding and spreading the knowledge. In this paper, we will aim to provide an Indian student's perspective on learning and research in India and how it compares to Britain and how role models like Alex helped shape us into what we are today.

1 Introduction

As a student, coming to study in a different country has a lot of excitement associated with it. The excitement of living in a new society, with people from various countries and culture, is foremost for new students. Most students find this experience, a background learning process which enhances their appreciation of other cultures. The first hand exposure of this new society is something which cannot be experienced through portrayals in British dramas and movies. However, along with the excitement there is a sense of apprehension regarding the challenges to be encountered in a new education system. Education system for higher degrees in the UK universities is operated in a very professional manner. The way universities are set up makes the initial experience a very welcoming one. Even in a one year course the initial days are spent just enjoying the whole university experience rather than immersing the students in a classroom. Once the taught modules begin, the lecturer and students exchange starts at a very personal level. Most lecturers practice an open door policy to the students and are ready to share their experiences. In this paper we try to highlight the key advantages that we experienced in the UK University over our experience in an Indian University.

2 Experience

Our first-hand experience of being taught by Prof Alex Yakovlev was during our Masters programme. We both were coming from an education background in India which had a different approach to teaching compared to our experience working with Alex Yakovlev. His teaching style was more a subjective approach as compared to having an objective approach. This was a refreshing change where the details of each concept were analysed and explained for understanding of the students. This meant the involvement of the student in getting curious about learning. This also enabled students to extrapolate from established theories and be creative about the subject.

Owing to Alex, our university education became the beginning of our un-schooling. This is where we began to love learning and not lose ourselves in the production line. Much of what we feel are the weaknesses of the Indian education system comes from the fact that emphasis is solely given on a student's grade when considering admission to a particular field of study. In the UK, lecturers like Alex, look beyond grades and identify the potential of student through their skills, knowledge, aptitude and aspirations.

One of the major things that alienated the school education system was the expectation that students can memorise large amounts information in order to reproduce these during examinations. On the contrary, in the UK, lecturers pushed students to think and know that there can be two right answers to a question.

Another key strength of UK education system is the emphasis on original research and publication. Many University departments in India have poor government and corporate funding which hinders student participation in workshops and conferences. During our tenure at Newcastle University we have always been encouraged to attend workshops, seminars and conferences which helped us bounce off ideas against each other and helped us grow as a researcher.

3 Conclusion

The development of a discipline in any country is closely related with the overall economic and political stability. This has a deep impact on the available resources to invest in higher education and the resulting infrastructure within universities and research institutions. Although the Indian education system had its shortcomings we feel we still benefited from it in many other ways. The Indian education system provided us with good theoretical background which enables us to pursue higher education in UK. The competitive nature of the Indian education system also enabled us to adapt quickly to the education system in UK. We are enriched in our experiences due to our university experience in UK. Our experiences in two different worlds have made us better professionals.

This paper is dedicated to Prof Alex Yakovlev and how his teaching and mentoring style has left a deep imprint on our lives. We feel his teaching style has had an impact on many students before us and will continue to have on many students in the future.