

Learning mobility between Europe and India: a new face of international cooperation

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Abstract

Europe and India are coming much closer today than ever before. Mobility, particularly learning mobility is one of the main priorities within international cooperation activities. Learning mobility, especially in higher education is one of the areas that both partners have agreed to engage widely. Though educational cooperation has been taking place for centuries between India and Europe the present decade has been marked as the golden era of cooperation on learning mobility between Europe and India. This paper explores the new face of international cooperation on learning mobility between Europe and India.

Key-words

Learning mobility, International cooperation on learning mobility, Learning mobility between Europe and India.

Introduction / background

Mobility for learning has been happening ever since the advent of study abroad. Yet the recent acceleration in internationalisation of education has given a new face to learning mobility (LM). Europe has become a prominent region that promotes LM within and beyond. India is one of the big players participating in LM. According to UIS (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2009) 'since 1975, the number of mobile students has grown by almost 3.5-fold'. There were 0.8 million students on learning mobility during 1975 but during 2007, it raised up to 2.8 million. According to UIS, fifteen countries together account for 44% of the world's mobile students. The top two mobile nations are China and India (in terms of numbers). USA, UK, France, Australia and Germany are the top five host countries (UIS, 2009). Tertiary students are more mobile than the rest of the group in LM.

Some of the underlying reasons for the promotion of LM are economical, political,

social and cultural. The economical aspect is that a multibillion dollar potential has been estimated in the international higher education (Sanyal, 2005). The political aspect is that higher education is used as an instrument of national globalisation policy (Derek, 2007). The social aspect is that LM helps better bilateral understanding and the cultural aspect is that LM helps to know other culture, to acquire linguistic skills and to gain social and cultural intelligence.

1 Mapping learning mobility

1.1 Learning mobility – broader definition

The prefix learning has been attached to mobility (M) to differentiate labour and other mobility with LM. LM refers to anyone such as students, teachers moving from one institution or place to another for a formal, non-formal and in-formal learning or teaching either within or outside their own country for a limited time. According to UNESCO a mobile student is someone who leaves his/her country/territory of origin and moving to another with the objective of studying (UIS, 2009). LM might be classified as free-movers (students and teachers who travel on their own initiative) and structured-movers (students and teachers who use exchange programmes to move). Some of the well known exchange programmes are Fulbright, Commonwealth and Erasmus. LM might be further classified as physical and virtual mobility. In physical mobility the student or the teacher is physically moving to another institution, where as in virtual mobility they do not leave their home country but maybe learning or interacting through internet or through other distance learning portals.

The definition of cross-border education given by UNESCO/OECD is interesting to note. Cross-border education includes education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders. Cross-border higher education may include higher education by public/private and not-for-profit/for-profit providers. It encompasses a wide range of modalities, in a continuum from face-to-face (taking various forms such as students traveling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning) (OECD/UNESCO, 2005).

1.2 Learning mobility according to Europe

LM according to European Commission (EC) is mobility among young people in all sectors (schools, HEd, VET, volunteers, youth exchanges...). Organised LM is linked to learning outcomes. LM of Europe is focused mainly within Europe, but also beyond. Europe not only encourages mutual M, but also cross-sector M. Europe is concerned

about physical M primarily, but virtual M can play an important role as well. LM is attractive to Europe as it helps for Europe's competitiveness. LM in Europe concentrates on young people (around 16-35 years) (DG EAC, July 2009).

As stated in the green paper of European Union (EU) learning mobility is helping to acquire new skills in which individuals, particularly young people can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development (European Commission, 2009b). And studies confirm that learning mobility adds to human capital, as students access new knowledge and develop new linguistic skills and intercultural competences. Furthermore, employers recognize and value these benefits. It has been also observed that students who are mobile as young learners are more likely to be mobile as workers later in life.

According to EC, LM helps to strengthen employability and personal development, helps prepare for mobility in working life, helps education and training systems more open and international, helps competitiveness (as envisaged by Lisbon Strategy), helps acquiring new skills and knowledge, particularly linguistic and social skills and helps combat isolationism and xenophobia. LM helps educational and training institutions to update their programmes and become more international.

1.3 Learning mobility according to India

LM in India is a two way street. Yet the street 'mobility out' is busiest than the street 'mobility in'. Though the discussion about LM is relatively low in India, some of the public documents such as the national knowledge commission encourage mobility of students and staff within and outside the country (National Knowledge Commission, 2006). The 10th five year plan emphasized on improving the mobility of students and staff and allocated additional funds for the same (Planning Commission, 2006).

LM has been often associated with brain drain and commodification of education. It is viewed that most Indian students who leave the country for study abroad seldom return to the country. The presence of foreign universities in India is often attached to profit making and as a threat and competition to Indian universities. Yet around 150 thousands of Indian students are studying abroad and several foreign universities are already operating in India through twining, study exchanges and various other forms of partnership. Many private as well as public institutions have signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) with foreign universities.

Bhushan considers internationalisation of education against the 1986 policy guidelines, relating to access, equity and quality and the importance that it attaches to public provision of education and the recent trends of commodification and

internationalization of education that may set up forces acting against those objectives. This tension may also get reflected in the policy of protection to public provision of education and various GATS articles that imposes free trade philosophy and approaches upon a country (Bhushan, 2004).

Ved Prakash observed that India is still at its formative stage with regard to providing education abroad and regard to the presence of foreign universities in India. At the same time a number of good and low quality foreign institutions are operating in India without any sound mechanism to regulate their entry and operation. India has to take urgent steps to ensure that only quality institutions are allowed to operate in India along with proper mechanism for mutual recognition of degrees. (Prakash, 2005).

The private university bill and foreign universities act bill are on long discussion to be approved by Indian Parliament. Yet the operations of private institutions and foreign institutions are a vivid reality. There is also a strong absence of regulatory frameworks for the operation of foreign universities in India. After 4 years debates the bill finally has been cleared by the union cabinet and ready to be introduced to the parliament to be approved (The Times of India, March 15, 2010). This decision has been both opposed and supported. Those who support the move say it will give a boost to the higher education sector, increase choices and competition. The critics, on the other hand, warn foreign universities - that will cater to a minuscule elite - could “poach” faculty members from premier institutes (India Today, March 18, 2010).

While strong debate is underway for the bill that would allow the legal presence of foreign universities, the debate about LM of students and staff outside and inside the country has not taken momentum. However a silent revolution is taking place in the area of LM in India. As India is becoming economically important region, more and more Indians living outside the country considers moving back to the country resulting in Brain Gain than Brain Drain.

2 Actions and instruments for learning mobility

2.1 Europe's actions and instruments for learning mobility

European Commission came out with a green paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people (DG EAC, July 2009). As LM has gained momentum in modern learning, Europe has been promoting LM through various programmes. As there was a demand for promoting LM in all disciplines and contexts, European Commission launched the green paper on 8th July 2009 for public consultation which was open until 15th December 2009.

The green paper presents a number of issues where further efforts towards learning

mobility are needed. The aim is to promote organised mobility that is carried out across borders as well as within and across sectors. While the value of virtual mobility is recognised, the focus is on physical mobility and the challenges arising before, during and after such periods (DG EAC, July 2009).

European Commission has initiated numerous LM programmes such as lifelong learning programme, Marie Curie, Culture, Youth in Action, Europe for citizens. Several European tools related to LM such as ECTS, ECVET, Europass, EQF, Diploma Supplement, Youth Pass, EURAXESS have been launched. Yet, only 310,000 of 16-29 age group profited from EU's LM programmes (which is only 0.3%) during 2006. Thus it is clear that much more could be done to boost LM in Europe and beyond (DG-EAC, July, 2009).

EU directives on visa for students and researchers facilitate incoming mobility. Visa problems exist in with regard to volunteers, pupil exchange and unremunerated training (ibid). Bologna Process, Copenhagen Process and European Research Area have improved conditions for educational recognition. European tools such as European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) have been developed to validate LM. Attempts have been made to validate non-formal and informal learning in the spirit of Lifelong learning (LLL) (ibid).

The European Quality Charter for Mobility was approved by the European Parliament in 2006 as a reference document for people undertaking, planning or organising education or training visits ("mobilities") abroad. The European Quality Charter for Mobility constitutes the quality reference document for education and training stays abroad. It complements, from the quality point of view, the 2001. Recommendation on mobility for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers and has the same scope European Commission (December 2000).

The high level expert forum on mobility was mandated to undertake a reflection and to make recommendations with a view to promote an expansion of mobility between member states for students and young people. The aim was to explore how the EU can, building on the success to date of the Erasmus programme, further expand mobility not only within the university sector but also among young people more generally, for example among young entrepreneurs and artists and in sectors such as vocational training, adult learning and voluntary activity. In this regard, the forum examined the barriers to mobility, the potential for future EU actions and for action at member state level to support the general EU objectives.

The vision of the Forum is that mobility does not simply involve "like-to-like"

movement from university to university, from school to school. It also places people into different sectors, from the world of education into the world of business and vice versa; from education into voluntary action; from vocational training to academia; from public research bodies to business. Tempus and Erasmus Mundus are two key instruments used to encourage LM between Europe and the rest of the world. Furthermore Marie Curie, Jean Monnet and Youth in Action programmes have also supported learning mobility between Europe and the Rest of the World.

2.2 India's actions and instruments for learning mobility

India has also set huge interest to attract foreign students to study in India. The following are some of the known Indian government scholarship for foreign students: Cultural exchange programme, General cultural scholarship scheme, Apasaheb Pant scholarship scheme, Commonwealth Fellowship, Technical Cooperation Scheme (TCS), Reciprocal scholarship scheme, SAARC scholarship scheme, ICCR scholarship scheme (Silchar Today (2010). Besides these government scholarships, several independent scholarships are available from various organizations for foreign students to study in India. Asian, particularly South Asian students make a big share among foreign students in India. India is ambitious to attract students from other continents as well.

Educational Consultants India Limited (Ed.CIL) supported by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. The agency has been designated as the Single Window Agency to facilitate the admission of Indian Diasporas and foreign students. Ed.CIL not only guides and informs students about higher education opportunities in India but takes care of admission formalities, provides administrative support and acts as local guardian (MOIA, n.d.). Many universities have set up foreign student's cell in order to encourage their admission. Most of the institutes of national importance such as Indian Institutes of Technologies, Indian Institutes of Management and Indian Institute of Science do recruit international students.

The Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has set up an international commission for cooperation in the area of education. It mainly relates with UNESCO, however function as authorized body for international cooperation in education with the rest of the world (Cf. the portal of the Indian National Commission For Co-Operation With UNESCO at: <http://education.nic.in>) India compared to Europe has not yet become an attractive destination for international students and has not yet invested funds (as Europe does) to attract foreign students.

3 Opportunities and challenges of learning mobility

To better understand LM, it would be worth mentioning the challenges and opportunities for cross-border education listed by UNESCO and OECD. There are both opportunities and challenges for cross border education. The opportunities are the increased supply of higher education, greater access for students, support for the knowledge economy, development of joint degrees, fusion or hybridisation of cultures, growing comparability of qualifications, increasing role for the market-based approach, economic benefits for education providers, and diversification and generation of new academic environments.

The challenges include concern about quality of provision, inequality of access leading to a two-tier system, the growing problem of physical and virtual brain drain on the developed country-developing country axis but also on other routes, homogenisation of culture, weakening role of the state in establishing national policy objectives, growth in market-oriented programmes such as business and information technology, and decline in some liberal arts and pure science disciplines. These opportunities and challenges depend on the priorities, policies, resources, strengths and weaknesses of countries (UNESCO, 2004).

OECD/UNESCO's guidelines (2005) on quality provision for cross border education (non-binding international guidelines that facilitate but would not supersede individual countries' authority to regulate their own higher education system) provide four main policy objectives in this regard: 1. Students/learners' protection from the risks of misinformation, low-quality provision and qualification of limited validity, 2. Qualification should be readable and transparent in order to increase their international validity and portability. Reliable and user-friendly information sources should facilitate this, 3. Recognition procedures should be transparent, coherent, fair and reliable and impose as little burden as possible to mobile professionals and 4. National quality assurance and accreditation agencies need to intensify their international cooperation in order to increase mutual understanding.

4 New face of higher education cooperation between Europe and India

Europe and India has been cooperating for longtime in learning mobility. Europe, particularly United Kingdom has been a center of attraction for learning for Indians during and after colonial time. India has been a country of maximum global exchanges both in importing and exporting on knowledge spheres, since time immemorial. Nalanda, one of the early higher educational institutions in the world, was involving in knowledge exchanges through many foreign students and scholars primarily from South Asia as

early as the 5th century A.D. Yet the cooperation between India and Europe on LM has become prominent recently.

During the India - EU Business summit held on 30 September 2008 at Paris, Dr. Manmohan Singh the Prime Minister of India envisaged seven areas of cooperation between the EU and India; such as infrastructure, service sector, skills up gradation and development of workforce, solar energy development, civil nuclear commerce, development of technologies in agriculture and cooperation in outer space use. Most of these seven areas have some connections to the knowledge sector.¹

It has been observed that the Europe and India are coming much closer today than ever before. Education, particularly higher education is one of the main priorities within international cooperation activities. Higher education is one of the areas that both partners have agreed to engage widely. Though educational cooperation has been taking place for centuries between India and Europe the present decade has been marked as the golden era of higher education cooperation between Europe and India.

The India – EU Higher Education Cooperation symposium that took place during the European Higher Education Fair at New Delhi on 12th November 2008 addressed the need to boost social and economic development through better cooperation in higher education. A Joint Declaration on Education was made in New Delhi on the 12th November 2008, between the then Commissioner Mr. Jan Figel (Commissioner of Education, Training, Culture and Youth – European Commission) and Shri Arjun Singh, the then Minister for Human Resource Development, Government of India.

In line with the India Country Strategy Paper 2007 – 2013 under the Development Cooperation Instrument, EU has committed 360 – 480 Million Euros for the period 2007 – 2013 as support to social sectors (education/health) and as support to the implementation of the joint action plan. 15 – 30 million Euros has been committed for higher education cooperation alone through Erasmus Mundus India Window – III. Another 7 million Euros has been committed for 2010 as support to skills development initiative.

Higher Education Cooperation of the EU with the rest of the world has been facilitated through the instruments of Erasmus Mundus (EM). EM combines the EU education, cooperation and external policies to further deepen and enhance the higher education links between the EU and the rest of the world. EM was launched in 2004 and is instrumented till 2013 as several phases and as several actions.

During the period 2004 – 2010 around 1356 Indian students have been awarded EM scholarships to study in Europe. In addition, 1046 scholarship were awarded through a special India Lot of EM during the period 2008 – 2010. India has a privilege with the

special EM lot. Similarly considerable number of European students were awarded to study in India under EM. During 2003-2004 there were 178 European students studied in Indian Universities and during 2007-2008 there were 309 students from Europe studied in Indian Universities (Dongaonkar & Negi, 2009). This number is relatively lower to the number of Indian students studying in Europe. There are roughly around 40 thousands Indian students studying in Europe, yet most of them are in UK. 150 joint masters and 35 joint doctoral programmes have been agreed between selected higher education institutions in the EU and the rest of the world for the sake of higher education cooperation.

The India for EU platform supports institution-based mobility and scholarship project organized by a Consortium of some of the most prestigious universities in Europe and India. DG EAC (Education and Culture), DG AIDCO (EuropeAid), EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) and DG RELEX (External Relations) are responsible for the management of all actions of EM and other EU educational cooperation programmes. The role of DG RTD (Research and Technology Development) is also inevitable for the cooperation at research and technology, especially in technology transfer and engaging in joint technology development. The EU and India have committed to engage in joint technology development in the area of solar energy, space research and climate change.

Besides EM, there are several other programmes initiated by the EU (such as Marie Curie) and by several member states (such as DAAD, Common Wealth, Chevening, Eiffel, etc...). It is estimated that more than 1000 Indian students come to Europe to study every year through some support from the EU and the member states. During 2007 around 150 thousands Indian students studied abroad of which almost 100 thousands opted USA and around 10 thousands chose Australia. Though 30 to 40 thousands students came to Europe to study, a large number of them were still choosing UK as an option in Europe.

Conclusion

It is viewed that cooperation in LM helps countries and regions come much closer to each other. It supports students and staff to understand others countries and regions better and it helps for better cooperation in other areas as well. Europe and India have taken strong cooperative steps to encourage LM between both partners during recent times. Europe with its huge educational capacities expresses deep interest to provide knowledge and training support Indian students and staff.

It is expected that EM would help making European higher education attractive.

While some critics see scholarships from the EU as stimulating packages to make European Higher Education attractive, the attachment of development cooperation, the sense of positive discrimination (for developing countries like India), the flexibility and openness make it more open and participative. The disconnection of mere meritocracy ascertains the commitment of the EU for social justice.

While making European higher education attractive, attention must be given to make Indian higher education attractive as well, in order to create a win-win situation. It would be collaborative for bilateral cooperation, if India would commit financial resources to attract European students to study in India. The cooperation does not end with simply students exchange but encourages all types of learning mobility. The growing cooperation between the EU and India in the area of higher education and research is just a good beginning and the best is on its way.

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1 http://www.france-in-india.org/en/article.php3?id_article=3274

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