Suggestive Measures for Attainting Excellence through Higher Education

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Abstract

The system of Indian higher education is the second largest in the world. It caters the educational needs of millions of students belonging to different socio - economic strata of the society and provides leadership in different walks of life. In order to achieve the basic aim of higher education, there exists a strong need to bring out the best from the individual's personality. This great purpose requires selection of appropriate courses which should always be in consonance with the interest and hidden potentialities of the students. It is quite obvious that students are the prime stakeholders in any system of higher education. Quality is the end product of responsiveness to their educational and professional needs and also to the need of personal development which has been the primary concern of the traditional systems of education in the country. Student aspirations and goals change in a fast changing world. That system of higher education, which is ready to honour them and shape its curricular and administrative performance, accordingly is alone relevant. It can make student stakeholders partners in planning and governance rather than keeping them as docile recipient of that which is imposed on them without sensitivity to their changing needs and aspirations.

Introduction

Education is a vital process for personality development and social change. During the last sixty years after independence, higher education has expanded in India somewhat remarkably. The number of universities and colleges has increased; there is an explosion in student numbers, the enrolments in higher education has swelled. Today we have number of technological, management, medical science institutions, besides a large number of engineering colleges and agricultural colleges. India is regarded as having the third largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower in the world of nations with an estimated stock of about seven million[1].

India has made significant achievements in the development of education. The Indian education system was thrown open after independence to all at all levels rich, poor, middle income classes, men and women, rural and urban population, backward and non backward segments of the population. Social and cultural diversity has also become an important strength of higher education; as a consequence, there has been a veritable explosion in number of students, institution and teachers. There has been the development of institutions of excellence, producing highly specialized human capital. Lastly it could produce the second largest stock of educated and skilled manpower in the world; and the third largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower. The best practices are those which improve the entire operations of the institutions and decide the standard of quality. The identifications of the best practices depend on many variables; all these variables must be considered while identifying the best practices.

The basic purpose of education is to create skill and knowledge and awareness of our glorious national heritage and the important achievements of human civilization, possessing a basic scientific outlook and commitment to the ideals of democracy, nationalism, pluralism, secularism and peace along as the cherished goals enshrined in the preamble to the Indian constitution. The above ideals need social spokespersons, economic analyst and political leaders to amplify and use it for the betterment of a society. These people are produced by higher education. The University is the epicenter of higher educational activities in our country[2].

Restructuring higher education to attain excellence

The Chinese philosopher Confucius stated that the goal of education was to produce men of quality who combined competence with virtue. Thus quality is multidimensional and through higher education it strives to develop human resources of global standards. Perceived thus, quality defines the goals and purpose of education. Quality impacts the content of higher education. Its processes, its output or product as it seeks to develop human resources with required skills, excellent in performance and capable of delivering the goods as a unit of the work force. In a developing country like ours, the diametrically opposite demands of quality education and the increasing numbers of students demanding higher education are in conflict. This growing demand for higher education has brought to the fore the problems of access, equity and quality. As the developing countries address themselves to the problems of access and equity, the problem of quality gets acute. An independent task force set up by UNESCO in 1998 has in its

report entitled "Higher Education in developing countries, Peril and Promise", said that today higher education has become basic education demanded by the masses and can no longer be confined to a tiny elite. This is more so, in the developing world due to three factors at work here. Firstly, the incredible growing thirst for knowledge, secondly the growing importance of knowledge in society and thirdly, the inexorable and often cruel logic of globalization[3-5].

Suggestive measures for attaining excellence

Teaching, learning and evaluation: i. Clarity and transparency in the process of admission and recruitment of faculty should be maintained. The most crucial factor in ensuring excellence of teaching, learning and evaluation is the quality of the faculty. If merit is the only criterion for recruitment, and no other influences are entertained, it will automatically ensure outstanding academic performance. ii. Faculty development programmes, such as conditions of service, participation in seminar, symposia, conferences, orientation programmes, refresher courses, publications are important in continuous updating of quality teachers. Monitoring and periodic performance appraisal including access to feedback mechanism will improve the quality of attaining excellence, objectivity and accountability of the teaching faculty. iii. Visible welfare measures will motivate the teachers in achieving greatest academic pursuits. So, measures should be taken into account to reduce stress and strain of the faculty members[6].

Curricular aspects: India is a country of diverse geographical features, multi religious communities and multilingual population and a different socioeconomic and cultural background. Unity in diversity is the basis of Indian society. In the current decades with much emphasis on economic development accompanied by tremendous explosion of knowledge in all spheres have led to economic differences. Always, there are regional imbalances in the country. Realizing such irregularities, the curriculum should be framed. The courses available through higher education must be consistent with goals and objectives of the country and aspirations of the students. The changing social, educational and economic environments are important determinants of curricular options so as to meet the challenges of the present day society[7].

Research, consultancy and extension: Today, education and research are highly interdisciplinary. Research is diligent inquiry and careful search for new knowledge or facts through a systematic scientific and analytical approach in any branch of knowledge. It is an undisputed fact that research and economic development of any country always go hand in hand as both are interdependent on each other. In addition to teaching the prescribed curricula, under-taking research projects on various socio-economic researchable problems by teachers, has been given considerable recognition11. Research work should be done in a large scale by providing financial support and the additional infrastructure facilities. Forward and backward

linkages should be established for augmenting research and mobilizing fund. Community extension programme should be arranged in the university to develop social infrastructure and learning resources[8].

Infrastructure and learning resources: One of the most important areas for quality improvement is the development of infrastructure and learning resources. Infrastructure should include a wide range of supporting services such as gymnasium, playgrounds, canteen, computer centre, multimedia conference hall, library and hostel etc. while conceptualizing the institution of higher education, it is important to plan not only for today but also for tomorrow. Infrastructure should be both adequate and appropriate as per the norms of the UGC/AICTE etc. Students, staff and faculty members should have access to the use of new technology including internet[9].

Student participation and progression: There are several hopeful trends in the course, which support the student involvement in quality enhancement. Firstly, the employers prefer institutions that have demonstrable academic quality along with value adding activities involving the students. Secondly, those students who have participated in the institutional quality processes are able to make rational career choices and thirdly the performance of such students in facing upto the job interviews and placement exhibits a higher degree of self-confidence and maturity. Therefore, it is imperative that every institution makes a conscious effort to associate students in their quality enhancement programmes[10].

Organization and management: An Institution / University should offer facilities for over all development of the students. Higher Education is not only in the concurrent list but also in the joint sector. The central and state government plays an important role in laying down the policy and offering financial support for smooth management of the institution. Faculty development programmes including promotion etc. are to be implemented by the government / management based on merit and without any discrimination. It is mandatory for the managing authority to strictly adhere to the University Act. Statutes, Ordinances, Regulations and Rules for healthy and efficient functioning of the colleges. Enhancing quality is a holistic process. The synergistic relationship among the student's teachers, management, parents, public, government and the production system is essential to achieve an enduring multiplier effect on quality enhancement[11, 12].

Conclusion

Education is a big service industry because it cultivates human mind and makes them important and useful players in the economy of a nation. On the threshold of the 21st century, global public spending on education tops on trillion US dollars. This figure represents the cost of over 50 million teachers, ten billion pupils and hundreds of thousands of educational institutions throughout the world. But in recent times things are changing

increasingly. Large number of nations, as a consequence of the impact of liberalization of trade, is in favour of curtailment of the role of the government. This is true in case of higher education. In this changed scenario, it is necessary that our planners and educational administrators must expedite the process of reforms and encourage innovation. We must replace the feudal, traditional British system of higher learning and adopt a new more dynamic educational approach that is a must for survival growth. The world of higher education in the 21st century can truly be a borderless world of knowledge and ideas, which will yield reciprocal benefits for all nations. There is no single simple path for reaching this new global future, but instead, multiple pathways that lead towards a world in one nest.

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