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Sustainable Practices in Teaching-Learning Environments

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Abstract:

Technology, innovations and entrepreneurial ventures have started revolutionizing every industry in continuum and shaping the global economy. This paper delves into the transformative impact of innovation and entrepreneurship focusing on the convergence of entrepreneurial schemes offered by ruling ministries with innovative ideas from technopreneurs and innovators in almost all service sectors including teaching-learning environments. For this sustainable stories have been captured from self-financed higher-educational institutions from Indian academia. Careful analyses can be undertaken in these case studies in order to elucidate strategies for educationalists and associated external stakeholder-entrepreneurs to thrive in a climate enveloped with technological disruption and unprecedented opportunities of the Era.

Keywords: ***Indian Higher Education, Self-financed Higher Educational Institutions, Evaluation Criteria, Stakeholder Hierarchy, Uprising Bottlenecks.***

Introduction

The core as well as higher educational setup in India does not have a very organized governance structure involving different regulatory bodies as can be seen evidently from one of the web page that introduces National Network of Education to have covered all the existing Apex Educational Bodies of India like NAAC, UGC, NCERT and AICTE. (https://testbook.com/ugc-net-paper-1/apex-level-bodies#:~:text=Apex%20Level%20Bodies%3A%20NAAC%2C%20NCTE,%2C%20NCERT%2C%20AICTE%20and%20RUSA!)

However, this is not reflected in the organization structure of All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Instead, it functions with a conglomeration of bureaus: Training & Learning, Regulation, Policy and Academic Planning, Scholarships & Grants, Administration and Finance, also cells like NEAT, Innovation Cell, Vigilance Cell, Internal Audit and Indian Knowledge Systems. However, this could have been better reflected in the form of a well-drafted organogram for easy understanding nationwide. As on date, a handful number of the higher educational institutions do get government aid in the name of R&D, travelling grants while 79% of the institutions are still sustaining themselves as self-financed (private-unaided) or semi-financed (private-aided) institutions tagged in 2-tier category. Specially, those who are offering technical courses are also wrapped in the same assessment strata as government-aided institutions by Ministry of Education with the help of an intermediary monitoring layer of AICTE, its bureaus and cells. For instance, if Policy & Academic Planning is formulated, why doesn't holistic education

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(refer to https://www.aicte-india.org/bureaus/policy-academic-planning) become its prime responsibility? Also, the responsibilities of these boards, committees, councils and cells are not coherent to set of precise objectives laid under NEP. This has resulted in disparate set of accreditation requirements towards 2-tier institutions in contrast to those asked for 1-tier institutions [1] [2]. This has become a cause of concern and a cumbersome task to suffice by 2-tier Universities and institutions.

Background

Imparting education is the most adorable and a white-collared profession all over the globe. However, a blog report from www.edumilestones.com ranks the academician career as last option chosen by youth in India. In spite hard core efforts being put up by statuary bodies at the apex of Indian Government such as Ministry of Education & Ministry of Human Resources, what makes this white collared profession of teaching as their last choice of the able professionals? What causes the job dissatisfaction whilst teaching is the only profession which can be dwindled with flavors of research, innovation, field surveys, entrepreneurship and indefinite interactions with today's youth – the future HR capital of tomorrow? Case studies are covered amidst the sections where the inevitable issues are discussed that need dire attention to keep in pace the quality teaching-learning environments of very vast Indian Academia.

Assessment Methodology in HEIs – A Survey

The preparation of accreditation process by each institution begins with fetching of non-uniform course curricula approved by different sets of Universities where the syllabi are ill-crafted with missing 'course objectives' for some courses and missing 'course outcomes' for the other as can be referred in criterion 2. Eventually, the question arises as to how to reflect mapping of syllabi to Program Outcomes and Program Specific Outcomes as prescribed in NAAC / NBA accreditation manual by regulatory bodies of Indian Academia. Thus, many-year old Universities who themselves are yet to undergo their own accreditation evaluation processes and are still running the voluminous clusters of institutions under dilution of quality monitoring [3] [4]. In another sub-criterion 2.1.2, it is nowhere described in the manual: the confined definition of Content Beyond Syllabus so that its significance should be realized in fulfilling attainment gaps, that is supposed to be the most difficult portion handled by institutes and Universities. Teaching-Learning Processes in Criterion 2 also demands systematic dissemination of instructional pedagogies in classrooms and laboratories, examination paper setting and conduction of internal assessment, handling students' projects, undergoing industry-institute interactions and supervising students' inter-semester internships. Criterion 3 which is supposed to carry along with it: voluminous documentation task that reflects the program outcome and program specific outcome attainment scores in a comparative mode. This is supposed to be the most crisply defined criteria in the accreditation manual. Criterion 4 deals with students' performance statistics along with placement, pursuing higher study and entrepreneurial counts in comparative mode during stipulated time of course completion in higher educational institute. Crterion 5 asks for detailed academic and research profiles of faculty, student-faculty ratios, faculty-cadre ratios and also their innovative research contributions. Sub

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criteria 5.6 and 5.9 if carefully planned and monitored eventually escalates the repute and ranking of the academic institution. Criteria 6 and 7 are relevant up to what degree are quality and environmental concerns is the institute beholds as its social responsibility.

Findings - Uprising Bottlenecks

Any systematic phenomenon carries with it systematic set of observations. However, if we take case studies from self-financed institutions, there, the semesters are commenced without any systematic overview, action-taken documentation on past semesters' feedback from stakeholders or action-taken on result analyses of past academic semesters. Also, enormous pending work of past semester in form of answer script evaluation in digital mode by affiliating Universities causes delay in running of scheduled calendar timelines.

Examination Reforms Manual is still being overlooked by the management or administrating bodies in academic institutes due to acute dearth of faculty or avoiding long-checking times per manuscript during digital evaluation. Moreover, faculty are tuned to fabricate question papers in the interest of students so as to reflect good scores in result analysis as students' feedback. Also, projects are a method of making student-teacher clusters so as to carry forward faculty's doctoral or post-doctoral research in accelerated mode. This calls of plentiful breaching of authoring and publishing ethics in various ways by faculty community.

In general, it is observed that the most sincere and the most senior faculty groups are assigned to drive criterion 3 meticulously, However, faculty resignation, deliberate faculty transfer among sister units under group of institutions make this documentation a challenging task.

Although, Indian Government and its apex bodies have been campaigning around diversified entrepreneurial initiatives, yet majority of the institutes have not realized how to incorporate this as strength into their academics and research [5].

Handling Fast Learners vs. Slow Learners: It is usually observed that students with exceptional profiles are seen indulged in grooming themselves in research and innovation by exploring newer dimensions apart from achieving their academic credits. These pitiful souls are tagged as attendance defaulters and are asked to accomplish various requirements of fulfilling criterion 3 assessments. This could otherwise have been intelligently handled by giving shared access of profiles of these students across departments, library, training & placement, internship coordinators and management and providing due academic credits at absolutely no cost. In fact, innovative frameworks can be called for from the apex bodies to have drafted uniform set of database-cum-reporting tools regarding all assessment criteria set by the apex bodies for the institutes and Universities nationwide.

Non-uniform Appraisal Systems and Reporting: The major bottleneck rises in documenting criterion 4 when students do not turn up into academic campuses for learning their courses. The author would not go into the reasons but is rather interested in discussing on how to accomplish their physical appearance in the classroom and laboratory environment. Now, the intellects can undertake this issue as a topic of doctoral work on studying the psychology of student communities. The need of the hour is to cater to these students

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something different apart from what course ware and digital content available on internet. This decides the niche on their performance statistics as no performance can be measured without sufficient levels of live student-faculty interactions. In this context, different institutes and Universities are adopting their own students' appraisal systems now operational as software tools having report-delivery capabilities. Cannot these long-running robust student and faculty appraisal portals be recognized or made uniform by apex bodies at national level?

Faculty Retention Levels in HEIs

A grave cause of concern is to sustain faculty in self-financing institutions all-round the country. For this reason, the contribution of faculty stake holders was studied in detail with an exemplary case study of a higher educational institution where just before an accreditation visit, a peculiar phenomenon happened: mass resignation of many moderately senior and very senior employees (mostly males) in lieu of prolonged demotivation levels at work place. Whilst, for preparing the records in subsequent accreditation visits, the majority of female employees were left behind busy preparing loads of (unattended) documentation task of past academic sessions may be because of ill-management or dilution in the management in the recent past. The bitter part of the same is that feminine components were neither given recognition in committees nor as academic departmental heads in spite their enormous efforts in preparing voluminous documentation tasks.

A sample survey taken among resigned but very sincere employees revealed that they left the organization because of loads of work without getting awarded with any annual increments or due-long promotions to higher cadres as a mark of motivation to work with greater commitments. The most inhuman reason of resigning from such a long-serving period was that most of class-2 staff who were already eligible to teach in capacity of teaching faculty were not promoted to faculty positions nor were they provided no-objection to pursue higher (post-graduate or doctoral) studies by the managerial layer of the work place. This has caused resignation of more number of male employees as they got better opportunities for their career growth whilst the female employees stay back contributing to faculty retention ratio as they cannot switch over due to their genuine domestic reasons and stable family setups in local vicinity. If perceived from another angle, this was seen as a serious breaching of faculty promotion policies that are mandatory to be implemented in any reputed academic institution or University [8].

Graving the above situation, resignation of this able faculty is usually filled by the authorized local management layer (without the intervention of apex managing layer) by recruiting part-time faculty and lesser number of full-time faculties with regular salary scales. This has become the part of work culture in some academic institutions of the country in order to sustain their classroom-teaching with substantial amount of part-time faculty. Female faculty outnumbers the male faculty in this category. In cases where ample part-time faculty are hired, organizations have started tagging them as regular faculty whilst the volume of task assigned to them is disproportionate to the salary received to them at hand.

Had there been a direct-systematic (transparent) identification-cum-tracking process (at periodic intervals) by vigilance or grievance redressal cells of the apex

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bodies upon the count and details of recruited faculty for each academic institution, it would have given better sustainability opportunities to the most laborious layer of academia – the teaching and non-teaching faculty. This would have increased chances of getting promoted to higher cadres and retaining seniority for the most eligible ones in an organization. This is only possible if NBA-NAAC assessment criteria include extra scores to organizations who value and favour retention of ablest of their faculty [9]. If initiated, majority institutions shall come forward to develop and test such database-tracking portals.

Sustainable Infrastructure and Maintenance

Another deeply inter-related issue is responsible handling of organization's building infrastructure, Central Library, laboratories, their equipments and also human resources. As a consequence of frequent switch-overs made by teaching faculty, regular updation and maintenance of stock registers, library book accession tools for all, writing-off the unutilized books laboratory manuals, ICT gadgets surveillance systems and many more infrastructure is also affected the most. An alternative to such a grave issue will be call for machine-assisted academic governance tools that shall give periodic updating reminders on integrated documentation framework (say ERP) of the academic institutes during faculty switch overs, newer nominations and increased admission intakes and as a part of action-taken reports to various resource-utilization statistics. Huge scope of innovation lay in these realms to be exhibited in national level contests and exhibitions.

Conclusion

The parents and guardians of students (external stake-holders) are no more ignorant and come from well-learned classes of society and so form the crowd that decides the fate of admissions in any academic institution or University. Everything in today's world rests upon quality of work than the quantity of work done. So, those administrators who have established academic clusters a.k.a. group of institutions just for the purpose of ancillary revenue generation and know nothing about the academic governance simply rely on the local management layers that majorly come from superannuated from reputed government institutions or from industry. In either case, if they do not appear to take responsibility for sustainability of the quality academia then this layer becomes responsible for reputation and ranking of the institutions. For an instance, if an apex level or local management layer has not called a meeting even once in an academic semester in an attempt to call for and resolve quality concerns then it is the time to change this layer [10]. Now that if a non-reputed institute or University is compelled to declare its closure down from 'n' number of academic semesters from the on-going semester then who will be responsible for mass lay-offs of the already recruited staff and faculty? Who bears the responsibility of making the staff, faculty and students aware about quality-governance in academic matters?

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