

Aspects of Quality in Education for the Improvement of Educational Scenario

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Abstract

The economic growth of a nation depends greatly on the improvement in education. Human development to a great extent depends on the improvement in Education. Among various levels of education, higher education has a pervasive and influential impact on development. Higher education empowers the individual with necessary skills and competence for achieving important personal and social goals and thereby contributing to the social development. It is widely believed that the state of higher education in a country is an index of its future well-being. Education scenario in India is fast changing. In developing countries like ours, government is finding itself incapable to bear the responsibility of higher education as it is already facing acute dearth of resources. Universities and colleges are starved of funds as the support of Govt. is being reduced and grants are not being provided in time causing hardship to them. One of the easier options to overcome the financial crisis in the educational sector is to start self-financing courses. But this alternative is possible only for courses with high demand. Secondly, these courses further strengthen the numerous entry barriers to higher education existing already. Thirdly, the scope for self-financing educational institutions in Kerala is much more limited than for the country as a whole. Fourthly, these institutions cannot evolve as centers of excellence. But, however privatization of higher-level education especially in the field of professional and technical education like Medical, Engineering, Information Technology, Computer, Management, Teacher Education etc. has already commenced.

Keywords: Human Development, Social development, financial crisis, self-financing courses, centre of excellence

What is Quality in Education?

The 21st century knowledge driven society has “Quality” as its defining element, in the same way as “Tradition” defined the ancient society, “Religion” defined society in the Middle Ages and “Reason” was the defining element of the 19th century modern society. Defining quality on education is difficult. Like freedom and justice, quality in education can be experienced, but cannot be defined. But, instead of philosophically stating, the quality parameters have been prescribed and the institutions of higher education are rated on the basis of their performance related to the quality parameters like examination results, students’ employment after graduation, reputation of the institution based on external reports and so on. Though there may be different degrees or grades in quality, broadly it could, mean that quality is the difference between the average and the excellent. It is the difference between failure and success. Ensuring that all get the same kind of education ensures equity; using the right methodology ensures quality”.

Quality in Higher Education

World over several definitions have been put forth on “quality in higher education”. Quality is seen as a relative concept satisfying priorities of different interest groups of beneficiaries. These beneficiaries are students, teachers, technical and administrative staff, parents, would-be employees, funding agencies and the society. In a manufacturing industry the input (the product) are pre-determined and the user needs to be assured of the quality of the product. However, in education, every element –the input, the process, and the output- is a human being and cannot, therefore, be dealt with such a simplistic approach. Ellis states that quality itself is a somewhat ambiguous term (in higher education) since it has connotations of both standards and excellence. Most of the debates on quality and end with synonym between “Quality” and “Excellence”. There is also a notion of quality as conformation to a standard or specification.

Can Quality of education be measured?

With quality being associated with a number of characteristics, many of which cannot be measured objectively, the task of judging the quality of education is highly complicated undertaking. Yet, it is definitely possible to distinguish good quality from bad quality and as is being already done in some western countries, quality in higher education can be measured in terms of certain parameters or performance indicators; like examination results, facilities available in the institution, participation in extra-curricular activities, prospects of employment,

and higher studies and the like.

How improve quality of higher education?

The next question, and the relevant one to be answered is, How to improve quality of higher education? One of the answers to this question is that concepts adopted in the profit-centered business and industrial organizations can be adopted improve the standard in educational institutions too. The debated whether the ideas and methods relating to business and industrial or other profit making organizations are relevant to educational institutions which are service-oriented and not profit-oriented, is no longer of serious importance, as in several countries, there is a transfer of three industry-based concepts to educational management. It is in this context that the TQM is suggested a way to improve the quality of education imparted in the centers of higher learning.

To sum up, TQM implies:

- Serious concern for improving quality “at all levels”.
- Giving utmost importance for the customers’ demands, treating the customer.
- As sovereign and trying to satisfying customer fully.
- Management’s total commitment for enhancing the quality of the products.
- Setting up goals and planning in advance for upgrading quality.
- Removing the defects in the process of production, and improving the process at all levels.

Is TQM Relevant for Education?

TQM is applied in business and industry; but it has been recently introduced and experienced in higher education. Many universities and colleges apply Total Quality Management as a tool to enhance the quality of higher education. The concept of quality is accepted by everyone. In a world of ever increasing competition, privatization, and internationalization of higher education, many educational institutions in India and abroad apply TQM principles in education.

To suit the TQM principles to educational institutions, the following steps should be followed:

- Creating quality consciousness, among all concerned with the educational institutions, namely, management, faculty, students, parents, and the society at large.
- Total commitment of the management of the educational institutions, be it government, university, or a private body, for providing quality education.
- Treating the students as the sovereign authority and creating a feeling amongst the faculty that the institution exist for the students and not for the staff. Students are not the only customers of an educational institution; the parents, employees, and the society at large are also coming under the purview. Since students are the primary and direct customers of an educational institution, the students should get the best from them.
- Setting up short term and long term goals for improving the quality of education and preparing plan of action for achieving the goal.
- Monitoring the quality improvement programme at frequent intervals and making suitable alternations whenever necessary in the programme.
- Motivating the staff to work with enthusiasm and dedication to achieve the goals set.
- Pay attention for improving the entire process of teaching-learning and the environment in the institution to bring out the best from the students. If the quality of education is to be improved, the entire process of learning-teaching and then educational environment in the organization has to be improved.
- Provide effective and dynamic leadership to be institution for successfully implementing the TQM programme.

The concept of the TQM is applicable to academics. Many educators believe that the Deming’s concept of TQM provides guiding principles for needed educational reform. In this article, “The Quality Revolution in Education”, John Jay Bonsting outlines the ‘TQM Principles’ as the most.....

Roof:

The roof in TQM House is recognition. Recognition is the last and the final element in the entire system. Recognition Employees strive to receive recognition for themselves and their teams. Detecting and recognizing contributors is the most important job of the management. As people are recognized, there can be huge changes in self-esteem, productivity, quality, and the amount of effort exhorted to the task at hand. In fine, these eight elements are the key in ensuring the success of TQM in higher education.

TQM Aboard

‘The TQM approach has already been adopted in many universities, colleges, and schools in the UK and in the USA. By 1992, half a dozen educational institutions in the UK had adopted TQM, and in the USA out of 3400 post secondary educational institutions, about 200 had adopted it’.

TQM in India

TQM, as a means for quality enhancement, has not been followed by Indian universities and colleges so far. In our country also, TQM can be adopted by educational institutions, and a beginning may be made with a few universities and colleges. Improving quality in higher education must become a great and existing challenge to all concerned in the coming years, as the quality of education determines the status of the country and TQM is an approach worth meeting that great challenge. Improvement of quality is possible only with a concerted programme of action. Quality is never by chance. As John Ruskin most expressly puts it “quality is never an accident, it is always the result of intelligent effort”.

Various suggestions for improving the quality of higher education are:

- Increasing the budgetary allocation for education, at least of 6% of the DGP. Improving the basic infrastructural facilities in colleges and universities.
- Improving the standards of school education.
- Academic audit of the institutions of higher education.
- Revising and updating the syllabi in all subjects.

A central of TQM is the “Mistakes may be made by people, but most of them are caused, or at least permitted, by faulty systems and processes. This means that the root cause of such mistakes can be identified and eliminated, and repetition can be prevented by changing the process”.

Teachers and Quality education

Of all the ingredients of quality education, the most important is the dedicated faculty. A college or university may not have good buildings, furniture, play grounds and even well equipped laboratories and library. But if the teachers there are enthusiastic, highly motivated, and committed to their task, the students are likely to have the best education. Good scientific equipment, good library and facilities for the staff and students are necessary to have high standards.

Not confined to the class-room:

Quality teaching is not confined to the classroom or the laboratory. Its area is wide and unlimited. A teacher has to be a friend, guide, philosopher and nurse to his students as Nature was to Wordsworth. For promoting quality education, the teachers have to guide and counsel their students even outside the classroom.

Intellectual Intrepidity:

The greatest malady in the present system of education is that it makes the students initiate, rather than creative. From primary classes to university classes, students are trained to assimilate passively. They are given very few opportunities to express themselves actively

Modern Management

The university system needs modern management to cope with the demands of the times. Some of the major recommendations of the committee regard to the universities should conduct the external evaluation, using the reports thereof; take follow-up action toning up quality.

Performance Indicators and Process Indicators

Performance Indicators

The activity in the campus can be described in terms of industrial terminology as the “Process Activity”. What happens in the classrooms and outside the classrooms in the campuses of educational institutions give us an idea of the functioning of the

Process Indicators

A simple and easy yardstick to evaluate the work of a university or college is to know its number of working days in an academic year. The number of working days done is a good process indicator. The UGC has prescribed for 180 days in an academic year. It is common knowledge that many universities and colleges do not have even 100 working days in an academic year. **Examination Results**

Many people use examination results as an indicator of the performance of an educational institution. It is considered as a simple standard and verifiable indicator to evaluate the performance of a college or university. Jill Johnes and Jim Taylor, in their book “Performance Indicators in Higher Education” have described examination results as an “attractive variable for measuring the quality of education”.

Admission into Higher Courses

Admission of students in the higher courses can also be a PI for an institution of higher education. If many graduates from a college are admitted in PG/Higher Courses, it can be presumed that the performance of the college is good. Similarly, if the post-graduates of a college are able to get admission in M.Phil and PhD courses, the performance of those institutions can be rated as good. The success of students in the examinations conducted by the UGC like NET, JRF etc., are also indicators of the good performance of institutions. The research work of the faculty is another important PI for a college/university. **Academic Audit**

The report of Justice Dr.K.Punnayya Committee 1992-93 has recommended the adoption of the British practice of academic audit with appropriate modifications to suit requirements.

The committee has been impressed with three important features of the academic audit programme of

the UK such as:

- It has been in the universities own initiative and is largely a self-directed exercise.
- The individual institution has been given the responsibility for adopting quality improvement programmes, thus retaining its autonomy and initiative; and
- A small external audit unit oversees that the practice is widely adopted in the UK.

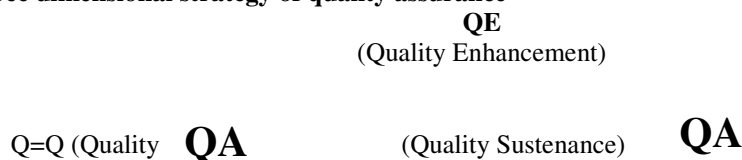
The External audit unit is expected to monitor the universities quality assurance mechanisms by examining and commenting upon: a) mechanism for quality assurance, improvement and design of courses and programmes of study; b) mechanism for quality assurance in teaching, learning and examination; and c) mechanism for quality assurance taking into account:

- External examiner report.
- Students view on programmes of studies, and
- Views of external bodies, professional accreditation bodies' employers and validating institutions.

Three-dimensional strategy of quality assurance

The level of institutional quality depends not only on an institution's educational processes and resources, but also on the institution's successful use of these process and resources to achieve the established goals. An institution must engage in continuous study, analysis and appraisal of its purposes, policies, procedures, and programmes, since it has an obligation to all constituents to assure effectiveness in management. In this context, the NAAC has a mandate not only to assess and accredit universities and colleges, but also to involve in a three-dimensional strategy of Quality Assurance-Quality Assessment (QA), Quality Sustainance (QS), and Quality enhancement (QE).

Fig. 1.1 Three dimensional strategy of quality assurance



The top priority items for the three states included institution-specific issues such as:

Academic Staff Colleges-Role in Quality Improvement

In pursuance of the National Policy on education (NPDE) of 1986 to improve the quality of teaching in the colleges and universities, the UGC established 45 Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) in 1987, in different universities all over the country. The establishment of these ASCs is one of the most significant steps taken by the UGC, for motivating the teachers in the institutions of higher learning, with the objectives of improving their teaching, which in turn is expected to result in an improvement of quality. The UGC started Academic Staff Colleges during the Seventh Plan Period and it is a unique experiment possibly not tried in any other university system in the world.

The real Scenario

“Universities in India are increasingly becoming unable to attract bright young men and women to study and research pure science and humanities. All the brilliant youths now want to do medicine, technology and engineering. No one, these days, wants to pursue higher education in science and humanities. No one, these days, wants to pursue higher education in science and humanities. As a result, thousands of seats in science and humanities are remaining vacant at the universities and colleges”. This is a real crisis for the institutions and for the nation. One major reason for this is that engineers and technologists are getting big money while those spending several years studying and researching science and humanities are poorly paid. Another reason is the lean scholarships and fellowships offered by the universities to researchers. “This is true for faculties too. It is hard to get brilliant teachers to the university system because of the low salary and poor infrastructure. Even the best salary in the university system is not enough for a decent living.

Table. 1
World University Rankings

	Top 20	Top 50	Top 100	Top 200
China	1	2	2	6
Hong Kong	0	2	3	4
India	0	0	2	3
Japan	1	2	3	11
Other Asia	1	1	3	9
Sub-Total	3	7	13	33
Australia	1	6	7	13
Canada	0	3	3	7
New Zealand	0	1	2	2
The U.K	4	8	16	30
The U.S	11	22	33	55

Source: The survey report of The Times Higher Education Supplement, The Times of India, October 6, 2006.

(Each new column subsumes the previous column: a university in the top 20 is also in the top 50, 100, and 200.)

The structure of higher education in Kerala is not different from that of the Country as a whole. Kerala has laid emphasis on quantitative expansion in terms of number of institutions, students and teachers. Deterioration of standards is the main criticism leveled against the system of higher education in the state. The report on higher education by the 'high level committee on education and employment, Kerala' has identified many reasons for the falling standards.

Conclusion

The present system of higher education in Kerala is not the result of a considered or organized set of the relevant ideas. Not is it the product of evolution, responsive, in its growth, to the changing needs of the society it serves. It was made elsewhere to meet the needs and aspirations not our own. It was modeled on the British curriculum of ancient times when kings and nobles had to be educated on the basis of the philosophy of liberal education. The absence of an appropriate philosophy of education is one of the lacunae of higher education in Kerala. It lacks the touch of the wealth of our tradition, rich literature, art and culture. Our curricula and pedagogy do not represent them. Fossilized or irrelevant curricula, ineffectual pedagogy, absence of accountability among the constituents of the educational enterprise and non-performance on the whole are the ills of present day higher education in Kerala. An educational philosophy addressing itself to such needs is yet to be evolved. We often look back nostalgically at the Guru Kula system of education Rabindranath Tagore attempted to capture such a vision of education at Shantinikethan. Accepting spiritualism fully and leaving materialism wholly may not be suitable for the modern era. Jawaharlal Nehru, hence, advocates the integration of scientific temper with spirituality in devising a system of education for India, for 20th century. For the 21st century India what we need is a re-look. The total quality management is a philosophy of continuous improvement and a technique for zero waste. The Japanese management principle like Kaizen and Kanben are the weapons of TQM. By taking these practical concepts and actionable approaches, and making them part of our curricula we can turn fresh and cutting edge thinking into real world of innovation in higher education. The students, the faculty, the parents, the management and the government of higher education in Kerala must be ready to accept these time proven management strategies in our higher educational sector so as to enable it to improve the quality of our higher education.

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