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Challenges and opportunities for improving quality in teaching and learning at higher educational institutions

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is that stage of academic learning in the Universities, affiliated Institutions, technical Institutes, Seminaries etc., and the field of education in India has stake holder's right from the Union Government to the Private entity.

The Nalanda University was the oldest traditional university known for its existence in the Indian territory for the system of education in the old golden days, while with the advent of the British raj the western system of education was infused and therefore the system is followed and updated.

With the influence of globalization and with easy accessibility of the Western culture disseminating education and learning culture has undergone drastic changes due to various influences and plethora of changes happening around, it is rather difficult to hold the system of learning and teaching at the same level and standard, without inevitable dynamism and changes.

Add fuel to the fire, the innovations, creative mind, infuse of technology and growth of technology as teaching aid has raised many challenges in the process of the teaching and learning scenario at Higher Educational Institutes.

Taking stock of the situation and finding necessary methodologies to combat the circumstance and make it conducive for teaching and learning, it requires an evaluative thinking and positive approach by every player in the field to achieve the objective of bringing in quality teaching and learning process in the higher educational institutions.

Key words: Quality, Higher Education, Technology, Teaching Aid, Learning process

1. Introduction

In the context of diversification and enabling sustainable growth in the Higher Educational System the society in general is very much concerned about the quality of programmes offered to students in these higher educational institutions. As a result of these, lots of comparisons are being drawn within the education sector and outside the sector, with public assessment playing a major role in the present day.

Institutions offering higher education can implement their own evaluation mechanism to identify and enhance their good teaching practices, while the statutory authorities concerned

may also contribute to the conducive environs and lead these institutions to enhancement of quality in teaching through various means and modes.

The sector of education has several players and each of these players has their distinguished roles and importance to create and sustain good environs for the successful delivery of the objectives in this sector. Thus, it is understood that the Government at the centre, State, the University, the members of the Faculty, the experts from the corporate and the learning community, all of them put together has an explicit role in bringing valuable changes to incorporate quality education in teaching and learning initiatives to be practiced and shared among higher educational institutions.

1.1 Definition of quality

The definition of quality teaching depends on the meaning of a “quality “a multi layered and complex word. As Briggs (2001) points out “Quality can be defined as an outcome, a property or a process”.

It is seen that as many number of authors exists on the subject, there exists that many number of definitions on the subject Quality. Hau (1996) says that “quality in higher education and quality teaching in particular, springs from, a never ending process of reduction and elimination of defects”.

Argyris and Schon (1974) believe that “quality is driven by the inquest “Are we doing things right? and by the next question “Are we doing the right things ?

Hence, definitions of quality in general and higher education in specific is an outcome , a end result, a property or a process which are not necessarily in conflict and can potentially be used by educational institutions that offer higher education as aspects of complementing their deeds and words. Hence it depends on how the institution looks at quality.

1.2 Background of quality initiatives in HEI’s

Quality in teaching is difficult to be measured at the point of delivery while the end outcome of every learner is weighed in terms of understanding their subject, their interpretation of the concept, their explorative skill on the subject, their re – teaching skill with others and of course the result of their subject evaluation would undoubtedly refer to the quality of teaching they had in their institution is an well known fact and it is said that teaching matters in higher educational institutions.

The majority of the teaching initiatives undertaken by the faculty for bringing in quality in teaching are practical, yet it serves only the concerned institution at a given period of time than serve for infinite period.

For the statutory bodies and governing bodies to consolidate and bring in varied initiatives for quality teaching coherently to become an universal policy applicable to all higher educational institution remains to be an policy matter, long term statutes with multiple constraints.

International educational environs in the influencing mode and opening up of higher educational institutions by the foreign player in the domain conditions, quality education need to be given a dynamic thought in the context of new innovations, being creative and closely apt to the need of employability with the right skill, knowledge and up gradation.

The players in the educational institutions should be committed in creating dimensions to affect quality teaching and the community of learners should be equally committed to provide feedback on their learning process as well the faculty teaching process with programme evaluation.

There should be an institutional policy on initiatives to be taken for quality teaching that bring together the internal and external factors to foster a conducive environment to recognize and initiate teaching and quality teaching as a priority.

Participation of the faculty members in the decision making bodies and to act as an intermediary body between the learners and educators is a must to bring in harmony, stability and support communities of teaching and learning to nurture and govern healthy practices in classroom education.

Finally, the upwards initiative from the members of the faculty and setting up a portentous learning and teaching environment, providing effective support and stimulating reflection on the role of teaching in the process of learning contribute to quality teaching in higher educational institutions.

2. The primary concern of quality in teaching

Players from different sector, field of application and statutory bodies should show more attention to the debate of quality teaching in higher education.

The aims, goals and objectives of the institutions guide their quality teaching and their approach towards the process of disseminating knowledge.

The concrete application of quality teaching initiatives, the challenges for its implementation, the players in the field, the needs to be met and the occurring problems to be resolved.

To understand the disseminating practices in the process of rendering quality education, the measurement and monitoring progress.

The quality approach and initiatives taken in teaching mechanisms and quality result in quality culture of the Institution and to initiate combination of approaches towards enhancing quality teaching in education through a sustainable way.

2.1 Role of various players for quality in teaching

2.1.1 Learning facilities

With the ongoing versatility in every field and change in living conditions and facilities availed at home, it has become mandatory for institutions imparting education also to circumvent to these changes and make possible changes in their level of functioning to enable effective learning process with the use of learning facilities.

New ways and means of delivering knowledge in the offing has enabled the institutions think in providing the right and appropriate learning facilities in place and make the best of what is available in the world of technology.

2.1.2 Commitment from institutional leaders

Leadership at every level of the organisation and in every type of organisation has a big and important role to play in every aspect and criteria of its functioning. In educational institutions, their role is even more important as they form the fundamental sculptors to give a shape to the policies and principles of the institution.

A sustained and committed quality teaching is a must for the whole institution and the senior members of the faculty are the torch bearers for this common goal to progress. These are the leaders who at the cross roads between the decision making body and the teachers on the daily job who need to encourage and nurture innovation in day to day routine teaching job and also ensure the means and methods for operating and implementing quality measures in teaching.

Once regular teachers are involved in the quality teaching initiatives ensures that the initiatives are responsive to needs and promotes a sense of ownership.

2.1.3 Actual job executed by teachers

The success of quality teaching and its implementation depends on its acceptance by teachers and use of various tools available at teachers’ disposal. Hence gaining teachers commitment and adaptation in their routine job is very vital for the system to progress and function well.

Technology based teaching via internet, e – learning platform and other technological application will only enhance the pedagogical tool and add value to the student teacher interactive sessions in the process of teaching and learning.

Finally a teacher expectation from the learners and the learners expectation from the teacher will add valued link in terms of learning outcomes and it is also considered that teachers career progression may be influenced by the fact that quality teaching issues are gaining importance and institutions are seeking ways of rewarding teachers who are committed to quality teaching.

2.1.4 Students

Students are becoming the dynamic force in asking for quality teaching and are becoming the primary beneficiaries of all the times promoting quality teaching and expecting them from their teachers.

Students can collaborate with teachers and leaders in the initiative of the teaching concept and bring in live concerns about the teaching, learning environments, quality of the content and the attitude of teachers to bring in new ideas and influence the institutional policy on quality teaching.

2.1.5 Quality council

The institutions should always initiate quality councils as the implementing and monitoring unit for quality teaching and these councils should play a pivotal role in supporting, explaining and advocating institution wide policy on quality initiatives.

These councils in place play a very vital role in helping the teaching members to use the instrument of quality teaching and concentrate on their core mission and ensure that the institutional policy on quality teaching is implemented in total.

Further these quality councils should also consider their reflective role in addition to the importance of quality teaching and see that in every step to disseminate knowledge the quality culture is spread and the whole institution is equipped for the collaborative work as a team.

The evaluation of the teaching practices needs to be done so that it facilitates to understand the link between the process of teaching and its learning outcomes. Further, being receptive and enhancing the communicative tools to get the teachers and students suggestions for continual improvement will facilitate giving attention to minute details under each discipline and enable teachers to translate them to their typical needs and to develop accurate tools.

Finally the external inputs and good practices can be captivated through open oriented approach via communication network with quality assuring agencies, external partners will have a vital effect on the teaching and learning process.

2.2 Challenging factors to implement quality in teaching

A strong involvement and commitment from the institutions management is a must with sufficient funding and support to adequate facilities.

Higher Educational Institutions should strike a balance between technical aspects and basic issues in the process of bringing quality teaching in education as both these in quantum of good quantity is a must for effective implementation of quality initiatives in higher education.

Technical aspects in quality teaching in higher education means use of teaching aids for delivery of the subject curriculum, use of various technology and its mode to reciprocate towards the learnt subject and its curriculum in form of assignments, project work, seminars, cases studies and evaluation techniques using technology in assessing the teaching and learning process.

While the basic and fundamental aspects like adding value initiatives in teaching to achieve the curriculum objectives.

The institutions need to develop innovative approaches in measuring the impact of their support on quality teaching and need to explore the correlation among the inputs, processes and outcomes of higher education in every curriculum delivered.

Further, if institutions need to be recognized as good quality education providers, then the only way to this recognition is by demonstrating their level of performance. Some of them can be

1. Their respond to students demand for valuable teaching,
2. Students have ensured that their education is leading them to job placement
3. Students believe that their education is providing them with necessary skills needed to lead life in the society.
4. Mobility of students across different levels of study and inter disciplinary study will give due

Consideration to the quality of teaching adopted in higher educational institutions.

3. Future in quality teaching

3.1 Institutional heads should

1. Never give up their efforts in maintaining quality teaching at any given point of time
2. Make a continual effort in sustaining quality teaching to be effective and in an explicit way that would suit the requirement of the organisation
3. Make a combined effort from both the learners and developers to synchronise their teaching and learning activities so that the teaching and learning outcome is efficient.
4. Make sincere efforts to provide adequate time, funds and facilities for implementing quality in teaching
5. Engage the whole campus in the process to achieve the desired results.

3.2 Every teacher in the institution should

1. Exploit and maximize the utilization of technological tools and make the students realize to have better access to these tools and assess their progress by self.
2. To link all the practices, tools and techniques used in the teaching process to the global and institutional quality teaching policy and never dither from the main stream
3. Co-ordinate and collaborate with the quality units and agencies from designing to enhancement to implementation of the curricula.
4. Make an self assessment programme a must and compulsory feature in the quality assurance teaching policy scheme so that own actions are monitored and reflective practices are seen and judged resulting in clear cut adaptation and innovation.
5. To be very considerate and watchful in their career progression and be aware that their roles in making a learner understand the subject is very major and this role evaluation adds value to their profession.

3.3 Every student / learner should

Take active interest and be live in raising concerns about the quality of teaching imparted, quality of the learning environment provided and quality of the content being delivered and the quality of the teacher attitude in the process of disseminating knowledge.

Bring in new values, ideas, innovations and influence the quality initiatives, programmes and policies of the institution so that updated and global standards of quality in teaching is maintained and nurtured at every point of time.

3.4 Quality circles should

Ensure that all the quality policies, initiatives, directives and efforts are channelized and directed through proper channel and well implemented by all the players of the Institution.

Disseminate a quality culture in the whole institution and facilitate collaborative work

Efficiently evaluate their reflective role and find the efficiency rate of quality teaching in implementation.

Research to develop new measurement and evaluation methods in educational sciences and definition of practices.

Be receptive to communication approach and enhance communication tools with information and suggestions from teachers and students.

Keep an open mind and approach towards external inputs and good, best practices to incorporate the healthy one and create a network to ensure quality at all times.

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