

BLUEPRINT FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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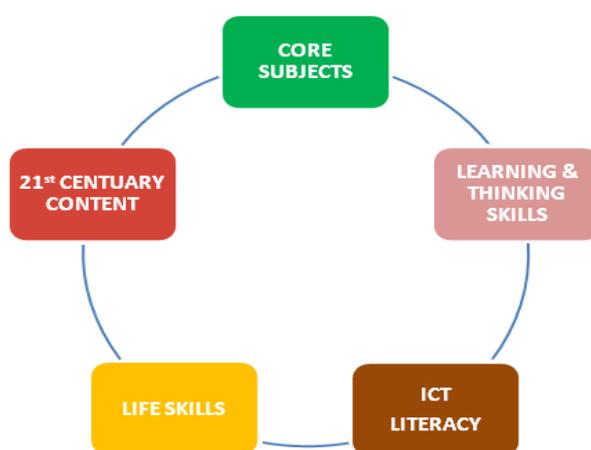
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1.0 Introduction:

Higher Education is considered as one of the most influential tool for the development of the human communities. It is essentially meant to empower humans with knowledge, skill and disposition to enable them to improve their lives. Since from the time immemorial, education institutions were and are created to offer ‘learning – services’ to students, it is imperative that every education institution primarily contributes to the intellectual, social, economical and cultural development of its ward. In the context of the change in emphasis from the ‘teaching paradigm’ to the ‘learning paradigm’, and the consequent challenges of the 21st Century ‘learning’, it is the needs of the learners (students), and not the preference of the institution, that should guide the priorities of academic planning, policies, and programme of the institution.



21st Century Learning

It is important to remember that ‘education’ includes ‘literacy’, but it is not confined to literacy alone. It comprehends much more: It is the acquiring of knowledge or learning,
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together with the equipment, which provides the skill and the inclination for making profitable use of that knowledge. Since the acquiring of knowledge and improvement of the skill for its application are parts of a dynamic process, education is a lifelong exercise. Higher education is, therefore, never complete in a continuously evolving dynamic personality. If the process becomes static, it leads to stagnation, which must be avoided.

For 21st century learning the students must be aware about the material and content of 21st century. Present age is the age of technology, everywhere on the Globe peoples talking about modern technologies like Information technology, Biotechnology, Nanotechnology and herbal technology etc. Besides, there should be enhancement of learning and thinking skills among students to improve life skills apart from core subjects of the curriculum.

2.0 Quality

What is quality? We define quality simply as ‘fitness for purpose at minimum cost to society’. Many countries are debating whether their tertiary education systems are indeed fit for use, in the sense of providing the education and training that students and society need. In developing countries, where resources are scarce, countries should not waste them on institutions that are not fulfilling important purposes. For India today, quality in higher education is a key priority. And this must be achieved keeping in mind the issues of relevance, costs, equity and international standards.

2.1 Why worry about Quality?

As teachers, principals, heads of departments and planners and policy makers in education, you may be having this question in your mind – why worry about quality? It is not just because of the UGC directive that you should think of quality, rather quality should be a bottom-up approach and every one should be conscious of why we should worry about quality of our teaching, programmes and institutions.

Some of the reasons are:

2.1.1 Competition: We are entering a new regime, where competition among educational institutions for students and funds will be highly significant. With globalization and the GATS (Global Agreement on Trade in Services), the educational environment will be seized by increased competition. In order to survive in such a situation, educational institutions need to worry about their quality.

2.1.2 Customer satisfaction: Students, parents or sponsoring agencies as customers of the educational institutions are now highly conscious of their rights or getting value for

their money and time spent. They are now demanding good quality teaching and receiving employable skill sets, and thus we should constantly worry about the relevance of our courses and programmes to the needs of the labour market.

2.1.3 Maintaining standards: As educational institutions, we are always concerned about setting our own standard and maintaining it continuously year after year. In order to maintain the standard, we should consciously make efforts to improve quality of the educational transactions as well as the educational provisions and facilities.

2.1.4 Accountability: Every institution is accountable to its stakeholders in terms of the funds (public or private) used on it. Concern for quality will ensure accountability of the funds utilised and inform the stakeholders about taking appropriate decisions. Thus, quality can be considered as a monitoring mechanism.

2.1.5 Improve employee morale and motivation: Your concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. If a quality system is in place, the internal processes would be systematic making every department complementing each others service domain and helping in developing internal customer satisfaction leading to high morale and motivation.

2.1.6 Credibility, prestige and status: If you are concerned about quality, continuously and not once in a while, it will bring in credibility to individuals and your institution because of consistency leading to prestige, status and brand value.

2.1.7 Image and visibility: Quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stakeholder support, like getting merited students from far and near, increased donations/grants from philanthropists/funding agencies and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates.

3.0 Blueprint for QE:

Can quality be managed? To many of us, concept of management as applied in business and industry cannot be applied as such in higher education. According to Pillai (2006) there are limitations in applying the market metaphor to education. According to him the products of education are not really finished products that can be bought off the shelf. The student (customer) competes to get admission and the educational institution (provider) often chooses its customers. Though the customer pays the fees, the output (graduation) is not guaranteed. The student has to play an active role in the process; and behaves more like an

entrepreneur (investing time, efforts and money) to produce (acquire) knowledge and skills that are useful in the job market. Thus, quality cannot be managed in the way it is done in business and the industry.

In this section, we will discuss about the blueprint capacity building of higher education institutes on ‘continuous improvement’ and ‘culture of quality’. The main points which are going to be discussed are as under:

- Student-Teacher Synergy (Student-Teacher Relationship)
- Student’s Participation in QE
- Strengthening of Library
- Role of Stakeholders
- Functional IQAC
- Participation of faculty in R & D and Career Advancement Programme

3.1 Student-Teacher Synergy (Student-Teacher Relationship)

The synergy between the students and faculty has been developed in very many ways. Academic advice on course options, counselling on academic and personal life, guidance on career options, suggestions for further studies, assistance in tidying over personal financial predicaments, etc. have contributed a great deal in promoting the emotional bonds of the students with the institutions. In several instances, the students after graduation have reciprocated these gestures with substantial support. Over the years, these features become traditions rooted in the institutional life. The new entrants to such institution become voluntary and willing partners in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the institutions.

3.2 Student’s Participation in QE

When we speak of the stakeholders of the education system, the students hold the highest stake in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning processes. Their entire future will be at stake if the education system does not prepare them adequately for the emerging situation in life. Starting as learners, they continue to sustain an emotional bond with their institutions, provided their experiences during the learning phase were fulfilling. They would cherish the fond memories of their teachers, facilities and support systems. On the other hand, they would like to forget their experiences in a poor quality institution as a bad dream.

The national goals in establishing and nurturing educational institutions are directed towards creating human resource assets capable of generating national wealth and serving as instruments of social change. Molding the attitudes and competence of the students during

their formative years becomes the key responsibility of academic institutions. Students coming from high quality institutions would become performing assets in the progress of the nation. The synergistic relationship among the students, teachers, management, parents, public, government and the production system essential to achieve an enduring multiplier effect on quality enhancement. Isolated efforts in improving the quality of a few selected components of the education system such as the infrastructure, teacher training, research funding or industry participation would be of limited value. Quite often the wholesome participation of student is neglected in favour of other components. Bringing students to the core of the quality enhancement process would stimulate the synergy with all other components. Some of the major areas where more and more initiatives to be taken like Class seminar and discussions; participation in the activities of subject societies/clubs; Activities of student central association; Committees for maintaining discipline & cleanliness; Career guidance and counseling; Redressal of complaints and grievances; More and more participation in Extension activities etc.

3.3 Strengthening of Library

A library is an organized collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. It provides physical or digital access to material, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. A library's collection can include books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, Blu-ray Discs, e books, audiobooks, databases, and other formats. The library is a backbone of any higher education institute. Its services should be upto mark. Libraries should inform their users of what materials are available in their collections and how to access that information. Before the computer age, this was accomplished by the card catalogue—a cabinet (or multiple cabinets) containing many drawers filled with index cards that identified books and other materials. In a large library, the card catalogue often filled a large room. The emergence of the Internet, however, has led to the adoption of electronic catalogue databases (often referred to as "webcats" or as online public access catalogues, OPACs), which allow users to search the library's holdings from any location with Internet access. This style of catalogue maintenance is compatible with new types of libraries, such as digital libraries and distributed libraries, as well as older libraries that have been retrofitted. Electronic catalogue databases are criticized by some who believe that the old card catalogue system was both easier to navigate and

allowed retention of information, by writing directly on the cards, that is lost in the electronic systems. This argument is analogous to the debate over paper books and e-books. Now, in modern age the library is also electronic and known as e-library. At present, state government is highlighting this in some of the institutions and provided the software and e-books.

3.4 Role of Stakeholders

While strengthening the role of the students in QE, we need to be careful about the roles of other stakeholders. With higher education becoming increasingly competitive, HEIs are required to be accountable to many stakeholders and demonstrate tangible student learning outcomes. Probably there are stronger forces in the system than students such as funding links that ensure that student welfare is given its due priority. Everyone associated with the higher education sector - HEIs, parents, students, employers, funding bodies and the governments - is interested in the quality of the sector. The stakeholders have one or more interests of the following interests: students for choice of institution; parents for worth of personal investment in the education of their wards; governments for accountability and policy-making; funding agencies for funding decisions; society for value of tax payers' money; industry for institution-industry partnership; and employers for graduate recruitment. To optimize the potential impact of these stakeholders we should be careful to balance the roles of the various stakeholders appropriately.

3.5 IQAC

The Higher Education institutes have a comprehensive system to conduct an academic audit of its departments. The Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the Higher Education institutes acts as an academic and administrative audit committee. It ensures that standards for providing educational services and other aspects such as Admission, Recruitment, Administration, Examinations, Library, Physical Education, Placement, Co-curricular and extracurricular activities are maintained. IQAC of any institute must be functional and regularly meet at least 5-6 times in a year and discuss problems and major areas towards quality enhancement which will provide the strength for the institute.

3.6 Participation of faculty in R & D and Career Advancement Programme

The University Grants Commission has been making proactive efforts to upgrade the knowledge and skills of faculty members in the institutions of higher education. For the

purpose of organising orientation and refresher courses for in service faculty members, the UGC has established and funds a network of 66 Academic Staff Colleges across the country. Besides, some of the Institutes / organisation engaged in entrepreneurship training having vast experience in the field of entrepreneurship development through Faculty Development Programmes provide inputs on process and practice of entrepreneurship development, communication and inter-personal skills, creativity, problem solving, achievement motivation training, inputs on resource and knowledge industries. The training methodology includes case studies, group discussion, games and simulation exercise, field visits and classroom lectures. Apart from this aspects faculty must have to engage in the basic or applied research and development on current streams. This will lead towards better quality and better environment of the campus.

4.0 Factors Adversely Effecting QE in Higher Education:

When we think about the positive factors towards quality enhancement of higher education we should also discuss about the factors which adversely affect quality in higher education. Prominent factors which were found responsible for deterioration in quality of higher education were poor infrastructure & financial crisis, political interference, lack of stakeholders active participation, apathy of society, non-professional management, commercialization of education, outdated educational policy, defective admission criteria, inadequate teachers.

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