

Innovative Practices and New Challenges in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Enlightenment and Empowerment through quality education. This paper highlights the status of innovative practises in higher education institutions and improve the quality by adopting various quality management principles. The system of higher education is found efficacious in making available to the society a dedicated, committed, devoted and professionally sound team of human resources to decide the future of any nation. This is possible only when the principles of quality management are cultivated in the system of higher education. The paper is a theoretical attempt to explain the application of innovative practise and new challenges in tertiary education. It deals with issues pertaining quality in higher education and moves on to identify variables influencing quality of higher education. This paper tries to emerge and enhance the principles, values and benefits of higher education in various respective fields.

Keywords: Innovation, dimensions, SWOT Analysis of higher educational institution, challenges and problems.

I. Introduction:

Innovative practice is about change and maintaining a high rate of change. The engine of change is dissatisfaction with the present and people's conscious and unconscious acceptance of the need for change. Higher education makes everyone think globally in different way for their better tomorrow.

II. Background study :

The higher education in its various dimensions of knowledge, technology and research is important for developed and developing countries alike, according to the developed ones is to

maintain its leadership and for developing countries to get along with developed countries, hence, the higher education institutions play an important role in building a good man, and an important tool to achieve progress and development through roles such like teaching and scientific research. To achieve these roles effectively, the institutions of higher education must be with high quality. Since, Universities are responsible for keeping the scientific heritage to be transferred to future generations, it is also responsible for the discovery of new knowledge in all cognitive aspects, as well as it is the main engine to the economic development and supporting the scientific and technological inventions.

The importance of higher education has increased in the light of what the globalization introduces of new concepts and applications backed by the rapid developments of communication systems and information technology, resulting essentials shifts to adapt to the knowledge of society, and the challenges among international markets between companies have moved to higher education institutions, and such challenge imposed any university seeking to global challenge to consider its strategies and systems and anything that would impact on their ability to gain access to global competition.

Objectives of the study:

- The quality and social relevance of higher education imparted in developing nations remain quite low and deteriorating due to paucity of funds.
- Innovative practice should be unavoidably common factor that will shape the strategies of higher educational institutions in a same manner.
- The development of higher education is correlated with the economic development.
- Study on the feasibilities of different strategies for higher education.

III. Innovation:

Innovation is inextricably linked with creativity. Innovation and creativity processes are interrelated, because finding a solution to the problems in the process of innovation requires creativity. Innovation covers a practical application of a marketable invention; however, innovation is possible without a prior invention.

IV. Higher Education:

“Higher Education is the manifestation of perfection in man”. Higher education imparts in depth knowledge and understanding so as to advance the students to new frontiers of

knowledge in different walks of life. It develops the student ability to question and seek truth and makes them competent to critique on contemporary issues. It broadens the intellectual powers of the individual within a narrow specialization, but also gives him/her a wider perspective of the world around.

According to Ronald Barnett there are four predominant concepts of higher education:

1. Higher education as the production of qualified human resources: In this view, higher education is seen as a process in which students are counted as “products” absorbed in labour market. Thus, higher education becomes input to the growth and development of business and industry.

2. Higher education is training for a research career: In this view, higher education is preparation for qualified scientists and researchers who would continuously develop the frontiers of knowledge. Quality within this view point is more about research publications and transmission of academic rigour to do quality research.

3. Higher education as the efficient management of teaching profession: Many strongly believe that teaching is the core of educational institutions. Thus, higher education institutions focus on efficient management of teaching-learning provisions by improving the quality of teaching, enabling a higher completion rate among the students.

4. Higher education as a matter of extending life chances: Higher education is seen as an opportunity to participate in the development process of individual through a flexible, continuing education mode.

Interestingly, all these four concepts of higher education are not exclusive, rather they are integrated and give an overall picture of higher education.

V. Innovative Practice in Higher Education:

According to the reports of UNESCO and the World Bank, a social and private return of the higher education is less than those primary and secondary educations. It is estimated that social return of primary education is 25% while that of higher education is only 1%. This has led to the thinking that the returns of higher education are largely personal/private and therefore, subsidy on this should be reduced. There are three generic approaches to TQM in higher education, firstly there is a customer focus where the idea of service to students is fostered through staff training and development, which promotes students choice and autonomy. The second approach has a staff focus and is concerned to value and enhance the

contribution of all members of staff to the effectiveness of an institution's operation to the setting of policies and priorities. The third approach focuses on service agreements stance and seeks to ensure conformity to specification at certain key measurable points of the educational processes.

Innovative practice in higher education by providing following tools:

1. Smart class rooms
2. Video conferences
3. Teaching through power point presentations
4. E – library facility
5. Having regular lecture series by experts with practical knowledge
6. Organizing national and international conferences
7. Wi- fi facility
8. Provide the students with journals, Magazines and newspaper to gain knowledge widely.
9. Start new courses which include both Science, Commerce and Arts.

VI. Why Innovative Practices are essential for Higher Education Institutions:

Because of the following reasons teachers, principals, heads of the department and policy makers in education should worry about quality of teaching, programmes and institution.

- 1) Competition: We are entering a new regime, where competition among educational institutions for students and funds will be highly significant. With globalization and Global Agreements on Trade in Services, the educational environment will be seized by increased competition
- 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 highly demanding good quality teaching and receiving employable skill set and thus we should constantly worry about the relevance of our courses and programmes to the needs of the market.
- 3) Maintaining standards: As educational institutions, we should always concern about setting our own standard and maintaining it continuously year after year. In order to maintain the standard, we should continuously make efforts to improve quality of educational facilities.

- 4) **Accountability:** Every institution is accountable to its own stake holder in terms of the funds either public or private used on it. Concern for quality will ensure accountability of funds utilized and inform the stake holders about taking appropriate decisions.
- 5) **Improve employee morale and motivation:** Concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities. If quality system is in place , the internal process would be systematic making every department completing each others service domain and helping in developing internal customer satisfaction leading to high morale and motivation.
- 6) **Credibility, prestige and status:** If institutions are concerned about quality, continuously and not once in a while. It will bring credibility to institutions and individuals because of consistency leading to practise, status and brand value.
- 7) **Image and visibility:** Quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stake holder support, like getting merit students from far and near, increased donation/ grants from funding agencies and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates.

VII. SWOT Analysis of higher educational institutions:

SWOT analysis has become a common tool of strategic planning in organizations. SWOT is an acronym, which stands for Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats. It is the most effective means of locating an organizations potential in order to decide on promotions, replacements or rehabilitation. SWOT analysis is an effective way of identifying strengths and weakness which can lead to useful changes in the structure or functioning of an

The following is a sample SWOT analysis of Higher educational institutions:

VIII. Strengths:

- Enthusiastic management team
- Excellent examination results
- Strong departments
- Strong parental support
- Good staff morale
- Good support from the government

IX. Weakness:

- Old buildings in poor condition
- High average age of staff

- Inadequate budget
- Lack of playgrounds
- Inadequate sports facilities
- Inadequate library

X. Opportunities:

- Merger with local institutions with an excellent infrastructure but mediocre reputation
- Develop reputation in sports
- The excitement of establishing a new institution
- The opportunity to enlarge staff expertise in order to increase the range of activities
- Willingness of the faculty to undergo training and development.

XI. Threats:

- Loss of identify, strengths and reputation
- Risk of losing experienced teachers who may take up early retirement or move to other institutions
- The ethos of another institution, in case of a merger, may change existing culture.
- Large numbers that may make handling unwieldy
- Unforeseen changes in work ethics due to cross cultural behaviour.
- Pressure for administrations from locals

XII. Challenges in higher educational institutions:

As per higher education is concerned, it faces several challenges. According to Srivanci (2004) critical issues in implementing in higher education includes leadership, customer identification, cultural and organizational transformation. Unlike business organizations , chancellors and heads of higher educational institution do not enjoy ultimate authority in hiring and firing of personnel and allocating resources. Lack of necessary authority makes it difficult to deploy their values and goals through layers of higher education institutions.

While higher education institutions are home for learning and create knowledge through their research function, it is ironic that they have been lagging behind other organizations in embracing and implementing . This inertia is due to structural and traditional characteristics of higher educational institutions. There are some special challenges that are not encountered in other organizations. They are as under:

1. Leadership: CEO's of business organizations, Vice Chancellors/Directors of Universities/ Institutions do not enjoy ultimate authority hiring and firing personnel

and allocating resources. Institutional heads can set goals , organizational values and performance expectations. However since they lack necessary authority, it is difficult for them to deploy these values and goals through the layers of higher education institutions.

2. Identification: A different aspect of customer issue here is customer loyalty. In businesses, customer loyalty is very important because repeat buying by loyal customers has a direct effect on profitability. However higher education is “once in lifetime activity”. If students are considered as customers, this concept makes sense only when they make donations as alumni. However if employers are customers, repeat purchase means recruiting at same institutions every year.
3. Cultural and Organizational transformation: Many business organizations have adopted TQM and transformed their institutions culture into a total quality culture that involves elements such as teamwork, employee participation, customer and market focus etc. However higher education institutions have deep-rooted traditions dating back to several centuries and are resistance to change. In business organizations there is cross linkage and well communication between the various functional departments. But in the case of higher educational institutions, most of the individual departments operate in vacuum. This is one reason that interdisciplinary study and research is a rarity.

XIII. Barriers to overcome:

There are several factors that may stand against a movement for quality education. It is not possible to ensure an environment in which all sections of the organization wholeheartedly agree to TQM in principle. The followings are the barriers to overcome in higher education:

- a) Vision and Mission of top management: Sheer lack of vision and mission of an institution or an organization can become to greatest barrier for any movement. The workforce has joined the institution for employment and its members will continue to work as long as they are directed to work. They would be satisfied as long as the job specifications are achieved. Unless the top management has a vision and it takes such vision to the workforce, the members will not be able to share the vision. There may be several missions which can be successfully conducted by the workforce. It is

possible that the leadership of the management has not thought about sharing its vision with the workforce.

- b) **Complacency and Satisfaction:** A large number of staff serving in different sections of the workforce may be satisfied with whatever work they had been doing. Sometimes it so happens that customers do not complain against mediocrity. Success of practice will depend on the long term devotion of the senior members of any stream of the workforce. Strategic planning to convince them would be an important part of environment .
- c) **Volume of work :** A workforce who had been performing with a particular design will be unwilling to comply if asked to perform more. Managers will have to involve everyone in such a manner that they do not feel pressurized to work but are willing to work voluntarily. Every result has to be highlighted and the team's success and the contribution of its members necessarily acknowledged.
- d) **Resource Crunch:** One of the problems that a TQ movement may face in lack of adequate resources-material as well as human. However a committed group of workers led by an equally committed top management is bound to come up with innovative ideas and improvise. More importantly, the human resource available may not need financial support to become more powerful and capable.
- e) **Middle management power:** Middle managers are the regulators of day today activities and as such their support to movement is very important for success. The managers therefore should take the middle managers into confidence right at the beginning. They should be given adequate knowledge about the quality movement, so much so that they will become the pillars around which most in the team can work.
- f) **Fear of empowerment:** Most managers of teams will be cautious about the empowerment of the lower level workforce. Promoters of TQM movement have to assure every employee that each person has a specific job to do. Team building has to take place in such a way that everyone understands the importance of each member of the team.
- g) **Sceptics and cynics:** It is necessary that any quality assurance has to take into consideration the need to guarantee success stories in the beginning. The activities taken up should be such that they are bound to be successful and therefore sceptics and cynics would see a different pattern. More importantly the movement should be led by members of the staff who are acceptable to the rest.

- h) Accountability and Transparency: Participation of such members of the workforce in teams will have a spread effect that is passed on from the initiators. Therefore, initiators have to be clearly trained and developed so that they will be unwilling to become accountable and transparent. Repeated discussions on these two values likely to make such employees believe in the new pattern of work.

XIV. Conclusion:

In the light of the dimensions, principles and SWOT analysis of the study, the following conclusions are drawn;

1. Provide evidence that quality and excellent education happens in an organization with high level total quality management indicators.
2. Innovative practice can be applied to higher education, but it must be modified to fully recognize some unique aspects of education viz., education is a service industry with no visible, tangible product. Benefits include heightened employee morale, better teamwork among departments, bridging faculty staff functions, increased quality from customer viewpoint and continuous development of everyone one who is part of higher education institution.
3. Quality in education is a rather complex topic. What makes it such is the number of the parties involved as well as the intensity of changes in modern life. If educations apply Innovative principles they would plan more accurately, perform better, estimate their achievements and take all necessary actions in order to prosper and stay focused on excellence.

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