

Quality in Higher Education: A Managerial Prospective

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Abstract: Quality is a concept, it is a philosophy, It is also what we practice. Quality assurance in higher education as a necessary ingredient to National Development. The concept of “quality in education” is an immensely significant concern for academicians and academia globally and rather recently this notion has treaded the realm of Higher Education in India. It has been an accepted fact that there are a number of factors responsible for assuring quality in education both internal and external to an institution. This paper presents a theoretical framework for the concept of Quality in Higher Education by identifying the parameters which are central contributors towards quality of an academic institute of higher learning. The descriptive study identifies and explains these parameters, including Higher Education policies and practices, curriculum, faculty KSA,

Keywords: Stakeholders, parameters, Quality assessment, reasons for lacunae in Higher

I INTRODUCTION

The concept of “quality in education” is an immensely significant concern for academicians and academia globally and rather recently this notion has treaded the realm of Higher Education in India. It has been an accepted fact that there are a number of factors responsible for assuring quality in education both internal and external to an institution. Any endeavour to either induce or monitor quality in academic setting hinges on the awareness about the factors responsible in bringing about this desired attribute. This paper presents a theoretical framework for the concept of Quality in Higher Education by identifying the parameters which are central contributors towards quality of an academic institute of higher learning. The descriptive study identifies and explains these parameters, including Higher Education policies and practices, curriculum, faculty KSA, institutional design and strategy, institutional leadership, learners’ profile, resources, open-system thinking and change, and the sub factors in each parameter of this “octet of quality in education.” The study attempts to find the lacunae in quality of present education as well as the assessment of quality on the

basis of student evaluation the paper also describes the various stakeholders associated with these institutions.

Quality as excellence. This definition is considered to be the traditional academic view that holds as its goal to be the best.

Quality as zero errors. This is defined most easily in mass industry in which product specifications can be established in detail, and standardized measurements of uniform products can show conformity to them. As the products of higher education, the graduates, are not expected to be identical, this view is not always considered to be applicable to higher education.

Quality as fitness for purposes. This approach requires that the product or service has conformity with customer needs, requirements, or desires.

Quality as transformation. This concept focuses firmly on the learners: the better the higher education institution, the more it achieves the goal of empowering students with specific skills, knowledge and attitudes which enable them to live and work in the knowledge society.

Quality as threshold. Defining a threshold for quality means setting certain norms and criteria. Any institution that reaches these norms and criteria is deemed to be of quality.

Quality as value for money. The notion of accountability is central to this definition of quality with accountability being based on the need for restraint in public expenditure.

Quality as enhancement or improvement. This concept emphasizes the pursuit of continuous improvement and is predicated on the notion that achieving quality is central to the academic ethos and that it is academics themselves who know best what quality is at any point in time.

II RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper presents a theoretical framework for the concept of Quality in Higher Education by identifying the parameters which are central contributors towards quality of an academic institute of higher learning. The descriptive study identifies and explains these parameters, including Higher Education policies and practices,

curriculum, faculty KSA, institutional design and strategy, institutional leadership, learners' profile, resources, open-system thinking and change, and the sub factors in each parameter of this "octet of quality in education."

The assessment of the quality is based on the student evaluation which is assessed by preparing Questionnaire from many students associated with the higher education Institutes.

III ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

1. Stakeholders of Education Institutes:

- 1) Providers (funding bodies and community at large). Quality is interpreted as value for money,
- 2) Users of products (current and prospective students). Quality is interpreted in terms of excellence,
- 3) Users of outputs (i.e. employers). Quality is interpreted as fitness for purpose.
- 4) The employees of the sector (academics and administrators).
- 5) The Government.
- 6) The Parents of the Present and prospective students.

2. Parameters of Quality in Higher Education

• Higher Education policies and practices

Quality in education has to be the fundamental concern of all those involved with this process and whatever happens within this domain as the act of academia. This is only possible if this characteristic is not left at the discretion of the individuals but it has to be targeted religiously as a matter of principle by the concerned authorities. At higher education level, it is then the responsibility of Higher Education Commission to focus on quality as the ultimate objective and to ensure policies and practices that are governed by quality standards. The policies and practices of Higher Education should be in accordance with the global standards and must be considered as the framework and benchmark to all institutions and individuals working within the higher education. Instead of merely acting as a policy making and regulatory body, Higher Education Commission through its policies must provide an umbrella to nurture all other quality factors and the policies should be such as to push forward the existing baseline of current quality standards and not to merely dictate a futuristic intimidating goal. The HE policies and practices should be undertaken simultaneously in three areas viz. Physical (policies focusing on the infrastructure), Human Capital (policies towards faculty, administration and staff development), and Intellectual (policies for improving research, curriculum etc).

• Resources

Another important and often neglected aspect of the quality is the availability of resources to an institution. These resources can be physical i.e. infrastructure, building, labs, furniture, equipment, books, research

journals etc; they can be human resources i.e. faculty, administrative and other support staff; they could be financial i.e. funds available to carry on different projects and managing events or the availability of petty cash to run day to day affairs. Adequate, continuous, and timely availability and utilization of these resources assures the proper implementation of various policies that are essential to achieve quality objectively. The bleak scenario of resources, as evident from various statistics (percentage of GDP spend on higher education) in comparison with top 500 universities of the world, poses a challenge to the policy makers and creates a threat to those who implement these policies. In fact, resources within an academic setting combine all other components (e.g. policies, curriculum, and faculty input) together to mark the presence of a system. Availability of physical and virtual resources today is a key factor in proper functioning, future growth and development, and quality assurance of an academic unit; and is also catalytic in greater motivation and satisfaction of the key stakeholders: staff, faculty and students. A comprehensive planning to acquire new resources, a policy to protect and audit existing resources, and the study of cost benefit analysis of major resource planning, are essentially important for an institution of higher education to strategically utilize their resources for the competitive edge and play a pivotal role in bringing quality.

• Learners' Profile

The educational system organizes methods, modalities and means for the acquisition of adequate competencies, the provision of equal opportunities, and fair encouragement of excellence, as part of its core activity of preparing young people to contribute to their professions and to take active part in the growth of their nation. Hence, the educational curriculum needs to be devised so as to involve the effective, spiritual, societal, psychological and cognitive personality traits of the learners and practicable in diverse pedagogical settings inside the class and the workplace, through appropriate pedagogical actions. The academic programmes which learners take up at Higher Education level should introduce admission profiles, and an adequate system of consultation and orientation based on true and fair treatment of learners' abilities and dispositions; and more importantly the needs of the employment world are incorporated. As regards access to higher education, the learners should be trained to gain the admission profile required by various HE institutions, and acquainted by their programmes and horizons in their relation to the training of middle and upper positions and careers in the social, economic, cultural and artistic fields, on the one hand, and scientific research and development, on the other.

• Curriculum

Curriculum is the road map which identifies the direction in which the journey has to be made and also ensures the manner in which it has to be completed.

Quality in education heavily rests with the quality of the curriculum in terms of the objectives and outcomes, contents and credits, materials and methods and assessment and audio-visual aids. Curriculum development process and the final product are influenced by the facts that curriculum change is the normal expected consequence of changes in the environment; curriculum development is perceived as a multilevel, multi-sector process and as a collaborative effort; curriculum workers have the responsibility to seek ways of making continuous improvement in the curriculum; curriculum possesses an organized set of principles, a body of knowledge and skills for which training is needed and its theoreticians and practitioners; curriculum planning begins with empirical study of the needs of students, society and the disciplines and curriculum planners should conduct systematic needs assessment to identify the discrepancies between desired and actual student performance (Oliva, 1997; Oliver, 1977; Taba, 1962).

- Faculty KSA

Educational institutions are also called human systems since the process is carried out by faculty, the primary input, and is enacted on students, the products or the output of the entire effort. Faculty knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) are vital to bring quality in higher education. In fact, they are seen as the principal agents of inducing quality in education (Zaki, 2006). Policies, curriculum, socioeconomic factors can improve academia only if the teachers are armed with the knowledge, skills and supports; quality is directly proportional to the quality of teachers, what students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depend on the knowledge, skills and commitments they bring to their teaching. With the changes in the standard research, quality education, and building moral and ethical values among the students. Also, the teams that are working to achieve these goals must possess the attitude and the skills to accommodate the changes affecting the streams of activities within the higher education including teaching, learning, research, and other support activities.

Institutional Leadership

Leadership is a distinct trait exhibited through special characteristics of the individuals, and the kinds of activities they envisage and carry out for leading their organization and the people who are to follow them. House et al. (1999) defined leadership as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization” (as described Yukl, 2006). Drawing on the theory and practices of leadership, the leadership of an academic institution will provide guidance and direction to implement the set policies, to achieve the identified objectives, and to set forth ‘quality’. The prevailing influence of the leader helps to optimize the organizational resources, and motivate the faculty to produce the best within them. A proactive leader may perceive the upcoming challenges and opportunities; hence prepare its institution to confront these challenges and opportunities effectively and efficiently. The challenges and opportunities can be, either changing workplace requirements, upgrading of curriculum, faculty

hiring, training, and retaining, or setting the performance benchmarks in every aspect and measuring them effectively. A successful leader not only provides the clear vision and competitive strategies to achieve ambitious goals, but also enhances the institutional image and credibility among faculty and students in particular and society in general. A leader also works to prepare its successor for the survival of the institution and promote others to work in environment conducive to teaching and learning with open thinking.

3. Assessment of Quality in Higher Education on the basis of Student Evaluation: Assessment is a systematic process of gathering, reviewing and using important quantitative and qualitative data and information from multiple and diverse sources about educational programs, for the purpose of improving student learning, and evaluating whether academic and learning standards are being met. The assessment of the quality in Higher Education achieved by preparing tables and diagrams. These are as follows:

1. Overall Satisfaction frequencies:-

S. No.	Parameters	Frequency
1.	Bad	1.9%
2.	Rather Bad	12.3%
3.	Neither Bad or Good	35.4%
4.	Rather Good	43.4%
5.	Good	7%

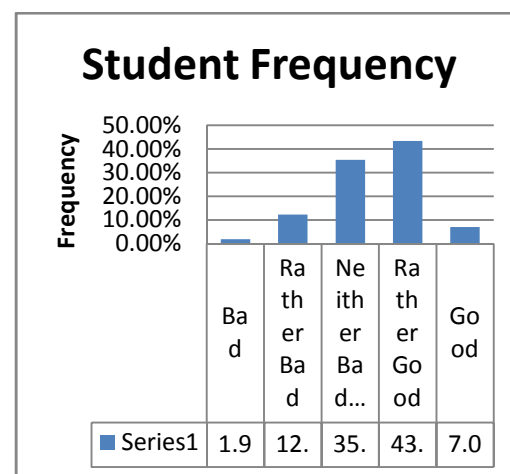


Figure 1 Parameters

Interpretation: Initially a statistical analysis is performed to determine the variations obtained among the student’s judgments. Student’s judgments, represented as frequencies, are given in Figure 1 where it appears that 50.5% of the student sample is “satisfied or rather satisfied” and 14.2% are “not satisfied or rather not satisfied”.

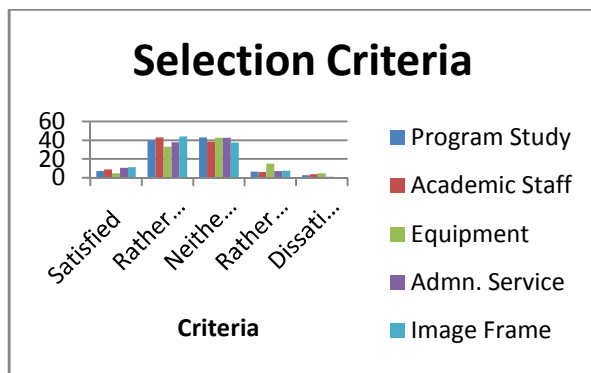


Figure:2

2. Criteria satisfaction frequencies (%).

S.No	Scale criteria	Satisfied	Rather Satisfied	Neither satisfy nor dissatisfied	Rather Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
1.	Program Study	7.1	40	43	6.6	2.8
2.	Academic Staff	9	43	38.6	6.1	3.8
3.	Equipment	4.7	33.2	42.6	15	4.7
4.	Admn. Service	10.4	38	42.7	7.2	0.9
5.	Image Frame	11.3	43.9	37.4	7.5	0.5

Interpretation: Furthermore, the student's judgments in the main criteria of the research are displayed in Table 2 from where we can observe that the criterion Image-Fame of the department shows the highest percentage 55.2% in the "satisfied or rather satisfied" category and the lowest percentage 7.6% in the "not satisfied or rather not satisfied" category. Inversion of the percentages appears to obtain the criterion Equipment (Tangibles) with the 37.7% "satisfied or rather satisfied" answers and almost 20% "not satisfied or rather not satisfied". Should also be noted that a high percentage of students remain indifferent in all the criteria.

4.Reasons for the Declining standards in Quality of Higher Education: A careful analysis of the administrative audit on higher education would identify the following common factors for the declining educational standards in India:

- Administrative mismanagement,
- Highly personalized dealing,
- Political interference and manipulations in matters of appointments and administration,
- Paucity of qualified faculties,
- Financial corruption,
- Apathy of students and teachers, and
- Passive and non-vibrant environment.
- Distance Education.

The concept of "quality in education" is an immensely significant concern for academicians and academia globally and rather recently this notion has treaded the realm of Higher Education in India. It has been an accepted fact that there are a number of factors responsible for assuring quality in education both internal and external to an institution. Higher education is very important for everyone. Because it will contribute in our growth as well as country's growth..At the end I want to say that government should take major steps to improve the level of higher education system because it is the back bone for country's future growth.

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