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INSIDE

Higher Education in India: Securing Quality, Inclusiveness, Innovation through Teachers

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Vision

To inspire and educate academic scholars, young and old, and to imbue in them a thirst for knowledge, a curiosity, and a drive to work in and contribute towards their respective fields while cherishing a lifetime of open-minded learning.

Mission

To organize seminars, conferences, workshops, orientation and refresher courses for new academics as well as veterans to help them connect with others in their field, explore new areas and participate with fellow academics, and keep up with the frontiers of research.

To help academics to keep up with modern pedagogic methods, and continuously improve their teaching skills. Further, where applicable, to bridge the gap between academia and markets and industries in their corresponding field for mutual benefit.

Objectives

To nurture an atmosphere where academics remain inspired to learn and teach, and become models to other academics and, above all, to society.

To ensure that the university and its academics mould better students, better citizens and become public intellectuals to lead the society.

To ensure that scholars of the university remain connected with their field and motivated to contribute towards it, in the process helping in the growth of humankind.

Higher Education in India: Securing Quality, Inclusiveness, Innovation through Teachers

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It is not just traditional wisdom that teachers or faculty are an enabler of knowledge and wisdom, but it is a fact that we experience in all our life. Thanks to their teachers and faculty who have been instrumental in strengthening a culture of innovative learning and inclusiveness, quality education thrives in countries like the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Singapore, Australia and the likes. While in India the knowledge economy is shaping up, a lot still needs to be done, especially in the field of higher education. India continues to grapple with the issue of severe shortage of faculty. Against the rising enrolment ratios of students in higher education in India, the number of teachers and faculty employed in education institutions have fallen over the years. Check this out!

According to Government of India's All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) of 2019, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (in the age group of 18-23 years) has increased from 24.3 percent in 2014-15 to 26.3 percent in 2018-19. In absolute numbers, enrolment has increased to 3.74 crore students during the period 2018-19 from 3.42 crore in 2014-15, primarily under Undergraduate

(UG) level programmes. In response to rising enrolments and higher demand for UG courses, the country has witnessed an exponential rise in the number of colleges and tertiary level universities over a period of time. However, the number of teachers and faculty, at higher education institutions, have fallen from a little over 15 lakh in 2015-16 to 14.16 lakh in 2018-19. Moreover, the Pupil – Teacher Ratio (PTR), which is defined as the average number of pupils or students per teacher at a specific education level, has witnessed a decline from 29 in 2017-18 to 26 in 2018-19, according to the Survey results, for all higher education institutions under regular and distance mode. For universities and colleges specifically, the PTR has reduced from 34 to 33 during the two time periods. Government's recent report on Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme also indicates the skewed student – faculty ratio of the country. At >24:1, the ratio is quite low in comparison to most of the emerging and advanced economies. For instance, in Brazil and China, the student-to-faculty ratios are 19:1. Similarly in countries like the United Kingdom (UK), Sweden, Canada and Russia, this ratio is 12:1, 16:1, 10:1 and 9:1, respectively.

Way forward

This problem is expected to persist over the next decade and naturally the spill-overs could be felt in quality compromises with respect to imparting higher education in the country or even greater absenteeism of students from regular classroom lectures. As a result, the absence of innovative learning practices, missing academia- industry linkages, rigid curricula, dearth of inter-disciplinary research, demand-supply mismatch of skills and gaps in faculty – students' interactions, are quite common issues in India and might not be a surprise for many of us.

So where does the solution lie? Often people say, we should do away with physical classrooms with virtual teaching. Infact, digital learning is often considered as a convenient alternative to traditional practices of classroom learning. Considering the growing demand for distance learning courses, the online market size of higher education sector, according to some reports, is projected to rise to US\$ 184 million by 2021 from US\$ 33 million in 2016. There is no doubt, that with better use of technology, we should be able to educate the masses, in a customized way. In that context, online means of higher education does offer a comfort factor to students in terms of acquiring a degree or certification in a short span of time, while sitting anywhere in the world. However, the quality, accountability and scrutiny of such learning tools are somewhat questionable and still awaiting a streamlined regulatory framework. Classroom pedagogy, unlike digital education learning, promotes collaborative learning, enhances critical thinking skills, does improve students' social and peer to peer networking skills as well, helps build a rapport with the faculty, in a way it keeps students stimulated through interactive teaching practices. Therefore, while there is some practical reality in this, given the advances in virtual reality platforms, one cannot do away with the need to have the physical presence of a student in the classroom. More so in the Indian context, wherein majority of the students are first generation learners.

It is a known fact that faculty plays a very important part in enhancing the aspirations of students, boost their academic self-confidence, their commitment to complete a certain degree, improve their motivation to learn and passion to follow their dreams. Infact, various studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) disciplines have reinforced faculty – student interactions as a significant factor in student's decision to pursue their field of interest and also the development of high-end cognitive skills in the students. It is therefore, inevitable that we develop suitable policies for recruitment and retention of good faculty in very large numbers. Profession of teachers should be first choice for young people and the job should be made very attractive, both academically and financially.

At the same time, faculty should be given sufficient freedom to introduce innovative learning models such as the intertwining of curricula and pedagogy with the use of technology tools and global best practices. They would know better how effectively they can make use of the technology in not only knowledge generation but also in knowledge sharing in their local contexts. Being well versed with their students, they are aware of their students' learning abilities and capabilities. Accordingly, the curricula and teaching practices can be modified and accommodated to suit the needs of their students, coming from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultural set up. Additionally, global teaching models such as faculty mentoring sessions, tutorial style classroom learnings and course relevant internships especially as UG research programs, have all been acknowledged world-wide in contributing to students' motivation, aspiration,

persistence and achievement. There is no reason why such 'best practices' cannot be suitably replicated in the Indian context if the faculty is given an opportunity to do so. In other words, the linkages between research, teaching and practical learnings can solely be enhanced by the 'on the ground' faculty of any higher education institution.

Acknowledging the Contributions

It is time for India recognizes the need for good teachers, need to provide them an opportunity to freely innovate in curricula and pedagogy, and thereby enabling them to improve the quality higher education in the country. If we do our faculty training and mentorship right, it would be only a matter of time before India becomes the knowledge powerhouse of the world, given its growing working – age population and realization of its demographic dividend.

In the words of Michael Morpurgo, the popular English novelist, “It's the teacher that makes the difference, not the classroom”.



**From UGC - Human Resource Development Centre,
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