

TQM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Sweeping Expansion :

It is heartening to find, in the last half of twentieth century, and in particular in the last twenty years, that higher education has spread in all corners of the country and it is now possible even for the rural people to have access to college education. The advent of television, computer and inter-net will make it possible to spread further the higher education. In a country of hundred crores of population, this expansion in higher education is still in an infant stage. It is expected that in the next twenty years, higher education will be accessible to the poorest of the poor, thanks to the subsidised education by the Central and State Governments.

Standards of Excellence :

We should not be satisfied with this massive spread of higher education because, it would be of no use if the requisite standards of quality are not maintained and if the purpose for which young generation takes higher education, is defeated. Higher education is obviously for getting meaningful careers and at the same time, for moulding the young minds. With further development in science and technology and also the information technology, new horizons of higher education are bound to be seen and those imparting higher education and those going through the learning processes, will have to realize that they will have to develop a new vision if they want to

contribute effectively to their career. Then again, with competitive environment in business as well as in the job market, the quality of higher education will certainly have to be improved. It is true that the enlightened visionaries in education have realized this need and have been underscoring the need for total quality management in higher education. There appears to be a contest and struggle between those who want to provide opportunities by giving degrees without bothering about quality of education, and those who consider that certificate is not worth the paper on which it is printed, if the quality of knowledge given to the students is not satisfactory.

The challenge of Total Quality Management in higher education cannot be squarely met unless the present problems in the University system are identified and solved. The most pertinent problem is the inability of our Universities to cope up with the rapid expansion in the number of students who really do not deserve University education. The Government had worked out a scheme of 10+2+3 with the hope that a large number of students would opt for vocational education after the XIIth standard. It appears that there is no response to this alternative proposal mainly because University Degree has become a matter of status in our larger society. If the quality is to be improved, the main challenge will be how to discourage undeserving students

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to get allured for the degree.

Another pertinent problem is the question of making higher education cost-effective which means that the fees will have to be raised. However, the political and social organisations make it impossible for us to raise the fees and insist that higher education must be subsidised. There are three beneficiaries of higher education and all of them must share the rising cost of quality education. One of the beneficiaries is the larger society, including the business world, and this society must provide the seed money for basic infrastructural development. The second beneficiary is the Government. If quality education is given, the professionalism of services will also improve and to that extent there will be a rapid economic development. The Government should therefore, subsidise higher education only for the literally poor students. The third beneficiary, the students themselves, must realize that if the higher education is made cost-effective and if, therefore, they are required to pay higher fees, they must not grumble. After all, quality is essentially a product of intensive investment of capital, talent and hard work. Quality cannot be superficially achieved. Quality is not a chance, but a choice. Quality again is not an accident, but a design. Quality is not a destination, but a continuous journey. This is stated for the simple reason that, even in higher education, knowledge becomes obsolete and new horizons for modern disciplines are emerging. Higher education must keep pace with modern requirements and provide intensive education in science and technology, information development and various statistical and mathematical techniques so as to enable students to become more professional. Further, students taking higher education, will have to be conversant with computer application. It

has been found that Universities, thanks to their rigid provisions in the Act, are very slow and inflexible in making related changes in the curriculum of higher education.

Performance Accounting And Performance Auditing :

The third major aspect of higher education is performance accounting and performance auditing of higher educational institutes. At the moment, it appears that those who are in the higher echelons of the University, are slow in responding to this process of quality assessment. We felt happy when we came to know that the Government of India established a National Assessment and Accreditation Council, inviting Colleges and Universities to get their performance evaluated from NAC. However, it not being mandatory, the response is not very encouraging. It would have been better if evaluation by NAC was made compulsory for all colleges and Universities. There is also a need for decentralising power in higher education. The University Act should be so amended that Colleges get more authority and power to frame their own curriculum and stand in the open market for competitiveness. There was a proposal, some time back, for giving autonomy to colleges. This was opposed largely because of political reasons. Time has now come to allow even private universities to be established and autonomous colleges and institutes allowed to develop their brand equity.

Performance Evaluation :

Notwithstanding all kinds of external difficulties coming in the way of improving quality of education in Universities, the fact remains that if the teachers show a full involvement in academic improvement and undertake the teaching and research work with commitment and credibility, it

would make a world of difference in our academic world. The students will have to be motivated to learn on their own. Our present education system is, in a way one sided. The teachers dump heaps of knowledge into the minds of students, but they do not encourage students to learn on their own. They do not develop inquisitive capacity of the students to explore new frontiers of knowledge. Mark Twain was right when he said that he did not like to continue his formal education because he was prepared to learn but he was always taught. Our present educational system conditions the minds of students in such a rigid manner that they are not motivated to think independently and look to the new horizons.

Accountability in Technical Disciplines :

The need for improving total quality management in technical disciplines such as engineering, technology, computer application and management science, is long over due, particularly because if we do not maintain the standards of education in these technical disciplines, not only the business world, but the country will collapse. We do want competent engineers, doctors and managers to run this country and to make it more competitive. This would require honest self-assessment by the teachers themselves who should understand that these disciplines should not remain only technique-oriented but

should become job-oriented. These disciplines should encourage high degree of professionalism since there is a quantum jump in the knowledge of these disciplines. Every passing year brings new ideas and new views and these students in Engineering, Management and Medicine must keep pace with modern requirements. In the business world, the techniques of production, and even distribution, have undergone a complete change on account of computer technology and electronic commerce. It is necessary for the Management Institutes to so develop their courses that the students will be able to keep pace with these modern techniques and thus become absolutely professional. Similar is the case of computer education. Computer is going to be a household equipment and the world will be at your door with E-mail and internet facilities and you will be able to improve your business through instant communication. Electronic Commerce is going to increase upto 40% of the total volume of business in the next ten years and it is here again that even our ordinary students, whom we advise to become barefoot managers must be conversant with this electronic commerce. It is, therefore, necessary that teachers in higher education must follow the new trends in educational philosophy and educational techniques.

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