

Employability : The Key Issue in Higher Education

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Abstract

The growth of Higher Education in India demands for “**quality**” and “**excellence**” because the present rate of “**graduate employability**” is just about 20 %. This is primarily because of the poor quality of teaching and research in many institutions; and also, the graduates lack industry relevance to be job ready from day one in terms of their acquired knowledge and skills. The paper examines to evolve a simple framework taking into account of the present time deficiencies owing to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, great shortage of qualified and experienced teachers, significant gaps in the design of curricula meeting industry orientation, inadequate exposure or industry internship of the graduates, etc.; and further, discusses on the continuously increasing expectations from the private sector institutions towards the creation of knowledge networks, skills up-gradation centres, R&D centres, innovation centres, centres of excellence, industry institute partnership, and the establishment of faculty development institutes for faculty and support staff to be trained in their respective fields.

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Introduction

With the continuous thrust being given to the growth of higher education in recent years, India has become the largest country in terms of number of institutes and the second-largest in terms of enrollment of students. However, the higher education sector in India still faces many challenges owing to the shortage of faculty, lack of infrastructure, inadequate support from industry, poor quality of teaching and research, besides having very severe employability problem. The present rate of graduate employability is just about 20 % and possesses a direct threat to the quality. Though the UGC’s 12th Five Year Plan (2012–2017) document¹ recognizes the challenges what the India’s higher education system has to face in the years to come suggesting several measures to resolve them, it is now imperative to introduce “ **quality** “ and “ **excellence** “ into the education system. Furthermore, the employability linked higher education shall remain the key issue in near future for all the stake holders whether the Government, universities, institutions, industries and employers. Also, the role of the private sector institutions needs to be over emphasized in achieving all these outcomes through the creation of knowledge networks, skills up-gradation centres, R&D centres, innovation centres, centres of excellence, industry institute partnership, and also, in the establishment of faculty development institutes for faculty and support staff to be trained in their respective fields.

Having said so much on “quality” and “excellence” in the UGC’s 12th Five Year Plan document, our focus primarily has to be on drawing massive national attention as to how best the institutions develop their teaching-learning framework to provide ample opportunities to the graduates to meet all the challenges of the 21st century pertaining to “**knowledge**“, “**skills**“ and “**applications**“ including gainful employment. While efforts need to be directed to ensure that quality and excellence are sustained and upgraded in all the institutions of higher education identical with the global / international standards, the process of monitoring and assessment of the higher education system meeting the desired norms and standards be also evolved keeping in view the national commitments without diluting accreditation process so that the institutions with the higher education system do contribute to the faster development of the country and earn world-wide recognition.

Proposed Framework to Develop the Higher Education

Education as a tool towards bringing ‘ **perfection in human beings** ‘ has to satisfy definite goals, and is usually linked with the value addition in achieving the professional skills and competence as indicated below:

- (a) **Fulfilling National Goals:** The higher education as the backbone of any country’s development programmes will have to be focused in the fields of academics, administration, curricula development, pedagogy, programme offerings, research and extension, etc. to ensure excellence in (i) teaching and learning; (ii) discovery and innovation; (iii) helping industries in its growth; (iv) promotion of Govt. social policies; and (v) employment of grass-root people with the thrust on the welfare of under-privileged, school dropouts, and economically backward sections of the society.
- (b) **Structural Changes:** The policies and guidelines emphasizing certain structural changes such as autonomy and good governance, etc need to be introduced for enhancing quality and to promote excellence in higher education, enabling industry institute interface and increased graduate employability.
- (c) **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** The companies can contribute in association with the universities / colleges in discharging its CSR policies in terms of promotion of education in both the Formal and Non-Formal sectors with gainful employment opportunities empowering the youth from the weaker and under-privileged sections of society including women, school drop-outs and physically challenged; and also, imparting skills based training to the youth to efficiently meet the industry job requirements.
- (d) **Academic Orientation:** Inviting industry to decide the course contents and/or development of new and upgraded curricula to address to the various requirements of the industry together with the teaching methodology and pedagogy, delivery mechanism, students’ examination and evaluation norms thereby finalizing the grading pattern, choice-based flexible credit system, examination standards, recognition/accreditation, etc. shall be essential for the inclusive and qualitative growth of the existing higher education system. Emphasis should always be placed on the higher education institutions so that they are geared up to take into account such challenges towards effective economic and social development planning leading to poverty alleviation and improved status of the grass-root level youth.
- (e) **Trained Manpower:** India with its large pool of trained human resources at various levels has the potential to emerge as a favourite nation in dealing with the international and global challenges to provide trained manpower, be it executive, supervisory and skilled or semi-skilled manpower, pro-

vided continuous support from the policy planners and makers is directed on laying more and more emphasis to form a stronger knowledge society from the view-point of learners' perspective in satisfying the ever rising national and international demands of the society.

- (f) **Universities of Repute:** The present practice of the functioning of the university in India raises many questions on the issues of quality, excellence and graduate employability, and thus, it would be appropriate to focus on the present weaknesses coming on the way of functioning of the universities; and if possible, to evolve a simple framework taking into account of the present time deficiencies owing to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, shortage of teachers, gap in the design of industry oriented curricula, inadequacy of graduates being provided with the industry internship, etc. and to introduce changes which will enable university to grow and earn reputation.
- (g) **Centres of Excellence (CoE):** Each university may be expected to have at least one Centre of Excellence to offer quality programme (s) leading to higher studies and research³ and / or industrial consultancy to function as the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS). The industries should come forward with some responsibility and stake as far as quality advancement in all aspects of higher education is concerned. The maintenance of standards in higher education should be the responsibility of the university but the support of the industry has to be ensured.
- (h) **Quality Assurance (QA):** The Quality Assurance is inevitable for the universities, government and government-aided colleges, and also, private colleges. For this, the university or college management whether Govt. / Semi-Govt. / Private shall be made accountable based on the guidelines brought out by the Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India and UGC. There should be a full proof mechanism to judge the deviation from the laid down norms and guidelines; and in case of any negligence being noticed, the university and college management (whether Govt. / Private) be punished under the university rules.
- (i) **Career Guidance:** A trained graduate's employability does not end by merely getting a job rather the onus is on developing attributes, learning techniques or gaining expertise, etc to enable him/her to get satisfaction with the job; and also, to advance in his/her current profession. This is also linked with his/her own economic growth as well as growth of the society.

The Quality Education

The quality education² system is a complex process. This depends on many factors such as family background, primary, secondary and senior secondary school education, available resources and learning tools/facilities to help a student learn his/her undergraduate classes, exposure to healthy ambience for easy learning, industry internship, etc. By and large, the majority of the institutions often commit to provide quality education but in reality these institutions have great shortage of qualified and experienced teachers. Also, the management and the authorities of these institutions are not known to the industry. In the absence of due recognition by the industry, the students have to suffer a lot for getting the industry interface. Therefore, the time has come to pay attention to:

- (a) **Establishment of Faculty Development Institute (FDI):** The young and middle level teachers may be provided with the necessary training in their subject field(s). They may be oriented domain-wise to know the gap in the existing curriculum and the industrial practices. A good teacher should generally inspire hope, ignite imagination and instill passion for advance learning among the students. The experts from industries may also be invited to identify and bridge the gap between the existing curriculum and industrial practices.

- (b) **Centre of Excellence (CoE):** The centre's role should be to orient the teacher in his/her specialized field(s) by giving adequate exposure to the new and emerging technologies, thrust areas, field jobs, extension services, etc.
- (c) **Centre of Advanced Studies (CAS):** The centre should aim at introducing advanced studies programmes, inter-disciplinary fields of studies, case studies, R&D activities, and promoting industry linkages. The specialized courses and bridge courses may also be decided by the centre.

On-Line & E-Learning

The development of On-line and E-learning courses now finds relevance in terms of many people gradually opting for such studies / programmes through which one's subject and knowledge deficiencies could be overcome to enhance his/her employability prospect. This way education is brought within the reach of the people as an alternative to the conventional class room teaching. In fact, many students prefer such studies / programmes because these offer great flexibility, and also, there is no binding of time as to when to take. The technology supported web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities, etc provide in-depth domain knowledge to the students. Furthermore, the students may have access to any topics as many times as they desire; and by joining the E-learning, one may be connected to the global community having thousands of students studying together with him/her. The ease and convenience with which one can enhance subject learning and upgrade his/her knowledge and skills shall be of immense value in case of the in-service and employed candidates.

Conclusion

The employability issue in the core of higher education will be the key to contribute to the India's socio-economic growth and empowerment in the 21st century. By enhancing the academic, professional and inter-personal development activities, the learners need to be trained in terms of the emerging demands of the industry or employer; and thus, the role of higher education institutions today has become more significant towards the development of appropriate learning and teaching programmes in raising the competency and skills of the employees in meeting future socio-economic challenges in the country. The employee's empowerment with the enhanced knowledge and skills will ultimately strengthen the functioning of the industry or the employer and increase the overall productivity.

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