



Governance in Higher Education in the Context of Assam

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ABSTRACT Governance means formal or informal arrangements that allow higher educational institution to make decisions. Management is the way to get good governance. India is growing on a high growth rate where there is urgent need of skilled manpower. In Assam, government has been quite alive to the requirement, improvement and expansion of education. But to have proper inclusive growth we need good governance because Expansion of tertiary education systems, Diversification of provision, More heterogeneous student bodies, no modes of delivery, internationalization and Research and innovation are leveraging knowledge production. Principles like participation, unanimous consensus, accountability, efficiency, rule of law etc are important principles of good governance. To make proper implementation, challenges like public funding, students' aid, accountability issues, spiritual aspects etc. have to be addressed properly. Only then a dynamic higher education system can be expected in Assam.

1. Introduction:

Governance means formal or informal arrangements that allow higher educational institution to make decisions. Governance uses management techniques for greater efficiency in implementation and execution of policies. Higher education institutions mostly rely on individual initiative and creativity. It is an urgent need for the low and underdeveloped countries to develop good governance that meets the need of the society, the teachers and the students of the world. Governance of post-secondary education, technical and vocational education, tertiary education is becoming a complicated issue. Kezar and Eckel (2004:371-398) suggest that governance is a multi level concept including several different bodies and processes with different decision making functions.

2. Higher Education scenario in India with special reference to Assam

Education is the link to reach the economic and technical goals, to derive the optimum utilization of the assets. The term higher education in India is considered for education after secondary level popularly known as tertiary education.

In Assam, government has been quite alive to the requirement, improvement and expansion of education in the state and so followed policies and decisions taken at the national level for their better implementation. As such it follows the mandate of National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action (1986, revised in 1992) in terms of intervention in Higher Education. The University Grants Commission and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) play a major role in the quality aspect of it.

3. Why governance has become a crucial issue in higher education

Good governance is bound to be subjective as its perception is influenced by the social and cultural factors, the value system, nature of economy etc. If higher education is a means for achieving national objectives, the question arises how government can attain these objectives without inferring the universities independence and their dynamism for catering the needs of the new markets.

Dramatic changes (Hénard, & Mitterle, 2006) have occurred in the area of Higher education over recent decades in terms of Expansion, Diversification, heterogeneous student bodies, internationalization and research and innovation. Countries are seeking to design funding approaches consistent with their policy goals for tertiary education systems. As such, Institutional governance has become a vital element that will permit them to anticipate, design, implement, monitor and appraise effective and efficient policies (Salmi, 2009).

The discussion of Governance, in Assam, thus encourages analysis in the broadest terms of how higher education sector is governed. An effective board will provide good governance and leadership by-----

Legitimacy and Voice
Direction
Performance
Accountability & Transparency and
Equity & the Rule of Law.

3.1 Legitimacy and Voice:

3.1.a. Participation: All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate entities. Care is taken to ensure all voices are heard especially the less privileged and vulnerable. Involvement of educational (users such as staff, students, etc.) and community stakeholders (school as an institution in the heart of the local community) in the decision making and implementation process is necessary.

Capacity building of stakeholders, meaningful and constructive participation, identification of transparent criteria must be developed which will be applied in educational policy and curriculum development.

3.1.b. Consensus Orientation: Genuine involvement of all stakeholders will contribute to a reasonable consensus on prioritization of the major issues based on periodic and genuine elections and universal and equal suffrage.

Good governance in various college and universities in Assam mediates differing interests of the various group of

students to reach a broad consensus objective of Education. In such instances, although decisions are based on the will of the majority, it is also true that the legitimate interests of the minority groups are protected to prevent the tyranny of the former.

It is to be mentioned here that the exercise of the rights and privileges of individuals and groups related to higher education is limited to the extent that they contravene similar rights of others or violates the reasonable requirements and morality of a democratic society.

3.2 Direction

3.2.a. Strategic vision : The National Policy on Education - 1986 (NPE, 1986) inter alia provides for radical re-organisation of higher education to provide the necessary dynamism to the system. At the state level, State Councils of Higher Education is there as statutory bodies to act as a link between the universities and colleges and the state governments on the one hand and work closely with the UGC on the other. The State Councils is responsible for integrated planning of higher education within each state (*Committee on State Council of Higher Education Report, 1998*).

Increasing assertions of identity by ethnic groups have escalated the frequency of conflicts with migrant settlers in Assam. A universally acceptable outcome must address the social and cultural complexities in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious cauldron. Amicable solutions can emerge only people adversely affected by a particular decision are adequately compensated for their loss.

3.3 Performance

3.3.a. Responsiveness : Structures & their objectives, rules and regulations & operational procedures, in our state, are adapted to serve the legitimate expectations and needs of all stakeholders. Whatever projects are adopted is made responsive to rapidly changing teaching and learning demands, educational challenges. One of the important aspect of good governance of higher education in the state is that it adequately meets the requests of public services and also responds to the complaints of the students, teachers and others associated.

Integration of environmental priorities and concerns in the design of educational facilities another way how good governance is maintained. *An effective board will provide good governance and leadership by understanding their role.*

3.3.b Efficiency & Effectiveness: Good Governance can be evaluated on the basis of benefit it accrues to higher education and how effective it is to impart proper planning and implementation of the policies undertaken for the development of the sector. It ensure us that the investments made for higher education have met the needs and expectations of the community while making the best use of available resources but still a long way to go. Wide disparities exist in enrolment percentages among the states and between urban and rural areas while disadvantaged sections of society and women have significantly lower enrolments than the national average. The pressure to increase access to affordable education is steadily increasing with the number of eligible students set to double by 2020.

The financial resources, in the long term, is required avoid physical, environmental and functional disqualification that can arise in the process of implementation.

3.4 Accountability & Transparency

3.4.a. Accountability : Accountability can be ensured through various means, including quality assurance frameworks, performance-related funding, market mechanisms and participation of external stakeholders in governing bodies.

Higher education institutions in Assam are accountable to their sponsors, whether public or private as well as to institutional stakeholders which does not imply uncontrolled interference, rather a requirement to periodically explain actions and have successes and failures examined in a transparent fashion. All interaction in various parts of higher education occurs within the context of agreed rights and regulations. Buffer mechanisms are made to help determine the appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability. It reflects the recognition that there is a public interest in tertiary education which needs to be reconciled with the benefits of institutional autonomy. Hence, public interest in the higher education sector is sustained in the areas of guaranteeing academic quality and standards, ensuring equitable admission procedures and accessibility for students from poorer families, and ensuring an appropriate use of public funds within institutions. Decisions are appraised, debated upon and are subject to approval of the higher authority accountable for the job.

3.4.b. The Importance of Close Cooperation

Effective governance requires close cooperation and compatibility between different levels of institutional administration. A useful rule would state that for significant appointments the individual in a supervisory position, for example a dean, has a formal role—more than merely a voice—in selecting the appointee, for example a chairperson. This could prevent counterproductive, adversarial situations, a special problem where the tradition of election prevails. Existence of effective checks & balances against malpractices and infringement of basic rights.

3.4.c. Transparency

In Assam, transparency is built on the free flow of information from various institutions and Government regarding various issues. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them e.g. students, parents, teachers, general public etc. such information provided by the authority is enough to understand and monitor them.

To ensure greater transparency in the higher education sector in Assam, decisions and their enforcement is done according to the rules. High quality information on the state of the facilities, demographic trends, teaching and learning demands, etc are collected and made accessible to identify clear criteria for prioritization. To avoid opportunity for political lobbying and horse trading, decisions are made public and transferred to the stakeholders. In Assam, clear roles and responsibilities at every level and phase for those involved in the decision making process are mentioned for higher education. Behind this planning the motive is to develop a transparent, generic planning with clear roles, responsibilities and competences for the actors and those who monitor and evaluate the process.

3.5 Equity & the Rule of Law

3.5.a. Equity in governance ensures
equal rights of men and women

no discrimination on the basis of race, colour, language, national or social origin, sex or any other status

These measures constitute the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. Social equity is important factor for inclusive growth of higher education which means growth in all parts and spheres of higher education. This is one of the prime criteria for good governance in higher education in Assam. Here money is clearly earmarked for educational investments. To add to this, the higher educations in this part of the country are trying to identify additional resources for special needs fulfillment of the students. It is also trying to give more access to students even those who stay in rural areas by establishing more colleges and universities in remote areas.

3.6.b. Rule of Law : Among the other factors required for the development of any sector rule of law is considered to be number one. With this the authorities related to higher education can gain the confidence of the stakeholders and it also gives confidence that the investments made by the students for their education is safe. There is consistency and predictability in state policies and laws related to higher education. Here, the role of ministries of education and higher education institutions is clearly articulated by law and in national policy documents. So also the faculty, students, administrators, external supervisors, and others have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Traditions of higher education vary from country to country and by type of institution. So it is the duty of the authority to suggest a set of basic principles that promote good governance across a wide variety of situations. Unfortunately these principles are frequently not observed

especially where traditions of higher education are still not firmly established. Good governance may be crucial, but it is not a panacea. Shared governance does not guarantee quality if a tyrannical majority is determined to prevent progress.

It is usually observed that the institutions in Assam face some challenges in relation to governance related to educational infrastructure. *Firstly*, higher levels of public funding are the necessary precondition for any other reforms to be successful. *Secondly*, the higher education in Assam should significantly increase the reach of student aid in the form of scholarships and student loans. *Thirdly*, apart from financial and material incentives we need to create an autonomous and free environment conducive to inquiry and learning. *Lastly*, every student of higher education must be acquainted with the history and culture and value system in order to be partners in the process of nation building.

One important factor that should be kept in mind that without good governance, it is difficult for higher education to succeed even if it has a high research base.

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