Research Paper

Best Practices of Total Quality Management in Higher Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT
Quality has become the defining element of education in the 21st century in the context of new social realities. The information communication revolution, the knowledge economy, and globalization are greatly influencing the "next Society", to borrow the expression of Peter Drucker that has emerged. This networked complex and competitive society places a great premium on education for development. How to provide quality education to large numbers at affordable costs is the primary concern of developing countries. Quality, as all of us are aware, makes education as much socially relevant as it is personally indispensable to the individual. In this sense quality becomes the defining element of education. In this context quality and excellence should be the vision of every higher education institution. Acquisition of quality and excellence is the great challenge faced by all higher education institutions.

"TQM was initially used for the measurement of quality in the HE sector in 1993" (Clayton, 1993). Infect the concept of TQM has come to HE from the business communities. Ideally education should not be related to business as it is to develop values and the personality of a student. HE too is to make students a learned person and a qualified professional and eventually a good citizen. But there is a clear component of business as HEIs charge fees from the students and hence students become selective in choosing the universities and the course they want to study. Keeping these points in mind the significance of TQM in Higher Education can be discussed in two sub-headings (1) HE as a business and (2) HE as service for human development.

(1) Higher Education as a business
Some authors believe that universities should be considered as a business because they have to compete with other universities and their funding resources are limited hence they need to generate money. Arjomandi (2009) claims that in twenty first century universities have to adopt business-like strategies to cope with the increasing market competition and limited funding opportunities. That is why implementation of quality management has become important in HE. Moreover, HEIs are like enterprises as they collect the fees [money] in cash which is the life blood of any enterprise (Warner and Palfreyman, 2000). Tuition fees for overseas students give them a chance to do business as it is a matter of individual institution. Generally the fees of overseas students are higher than those of the natives.

The universities, therefore, need to maintain quality as they have to attract students to fulfil their funding needs. As the students pay fees they examine not only the quality of education provided by a university but also other services like student support services, student leaning resources, student communication and representation and student assessment. In fact they act as consumers. So it becomes important for the universities to assure quality by accreditation and outcome assessment. TQM might support better inputs by focusing on students' achievement, good faculty members and other facilities like library and laboratory to get better output as high quality outputs results if high quality inputs exist (Voehl, 1994, pp. 10-11).

(2) HE as a service for human development
Higher Education, in general, is considered to encourage personal growth and social responsibilities in an individual, in addition to his professional training and academic development. It also educates students to become civic responsible and a citizen of global society (CEPES, 2009). HE must lead to ethical development of students while its process of imparting education. The standard of education has its direct impact on the development of the students' understandings.

Best practices as institutional Quality Index
Best practices, the practices which add commendable value to an institution and its various stakeholders, are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality. The best institutions are those which widely use them. To put it differently, institutional excellence in higher education is the aggregate of the best practices followed in different areas of institutional performance. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) are advocating the best practices benchmarking approach for quality enhancement in higher education.

The benchmarking, the systematic means of measuring and comparing the work processes of an organization with those of others is widely used in industry and the service sector for quality measurement and improvement. The prevailing quality management systems in higher education also can benefit from this tool. The best practices as benchmarks help institutions to find their anchor for self-improvement.

Establishing benchmarks through best practices is not a new concept in higher education. The NAAC uses the best practice benchmarking in the form of criterion statements to assess the level of performance of higher education institutions. In 1996 Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS), a sub system of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) launched an international "University Management Benchmarking Club" for universities form the commonwealth. This club focuses on the effectiveness of university-wide processes. The overall purpose and intent of **the Best Practices benchmarking** can be summarised as the:

Development of an understanding of the fundamentals that lead to success,

Focus on continuous improvements efforts, and

Management of the overall change process to close the gap between an existing practice of the institution and that of the best-in-class institutions with reference to the most relevant key performance variables.

Stages in the application of best Practices: (Four I and D model)
The successful application of the best practices approach depends on our ability to adopt the following five-stage strategy i.e.

- Identification of best practices
- Implementation of best practices
- Institutionalization of best practices
- Internalization of best practices

Dissemination of best practices

Let us briefly elaborate the key elements of the approach:

Identification of best practices: The identification of best practices depends on many variables such as institutional goals, pedagogic requirements, global concerns, and local contexts, nature of learners, competencies of staff, infrastructure facilities and governance requirements. All these should be kept in mind while identifying the best practices.

What might be considered as 'best practices' are limited in a number of ways?

Firstly, what we consider to be the 'best' education practice depends on our own limited knowledge, perspectives, contexts, interests and values. The interests and values on which practices are premised may be contested by others. In that case, many of the assumptions on which the practices are premised will not hold. Secondly, 'best practices' are to be useful at all, we need to identify the ones that can be so restated as to be clearly seen to contribute to value addition to the institution or the stakeholders. Only then can they become context-free and less subjective. This requires a predominantly 'fitness for purpose' judgement and one cannot write an ideal typification of 'best practices' applicable to all contexts. The input factors, the process and output factors should be taken into account in identifying the criteria of best practices. The criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness may also be used in identifying them. Another way of identifying the best practices is the inductive approach. The practitioners may be asked to describe their best practices and the criteria they have applied in their identification, justifying their choices logically. From this, one can discuss the benchmarks of the best practices as perceived by them.

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) suggested some guidelines for the identification and application of good practices. The best practices should:

- Be dynamic and revisited periodically
- Recognize diversity and cultural and historical contexts
- Not lead to dominance of one specific view or approach, and
- Promote quality of performance.
- These principles should be interpreted and applied appropriately to different contexts, while identifying the practices.

Implementation of best practices:

However, difficult it may be, all of us engaged in the educational activities have some get (gut) feeling of what best practices are. (The implementation is the Achilles heel). Academic world generally suffers from two limitations. Firstly, we are fond of debates and discussion and consider words as wisdom.

Aristotle deprecated this tendency long back and considered action as virtue. He rightly observed: "Virtue is an activity not a capacity".

Mahatma Gandhi's logic was his action. We have to move from notions of words as wisdom to action as wisdom.

Jocab Bronowski write in the Ascent of Man: "We have to understand that the world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The most powerful drive in the ascent of man is his pleasure in his own skill".

Secondly, when it comes to action all pervading cynicism hinders the pro-active role. There are some genuine limitations in the application of best practices, but many are imaginary. Instead of finding solutions to problems, sometimes our 'academic eminence' may lead us to find problems in every solution. The implementation strategies include planning, resource mobilization, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation. The implementation approach focuses more on performance than on promises. Here quality is considered as attention to details. Total Quality Management is an approach of implementation which focuses on quality of all aspects of operations with the participation of everyone in the organization.

Management pundits of implementation strategies like management by objectives, management by results etc. Mahatma Gandhi very aptly captured the spirit of action and the spirit of leading by example when he said, "we must be the change that we wish to see in the world".

Institutionalization of best practices:

Institutionalization is the process of making the best practices an integral part of the institutional working. Many best practices are institution-specific and individual managed. In most cases, that individual happens to be the leader or head of the institution. Leaders as innovators have been the change agents in many institutions, mobilizing and ensuring the wide-spread support of the campus community for the best practices. While this approach has resulted in commendable improvement in the quality of institutions, continuance and sustainability of those practices depends mainly on individual initiative and runs the risk of disruption or half-hearted pursuit if and when the individual is displaces for any reason. If, however, such a practice is formalized in the sense in which exams are made a formal requirement, individual identity will then be superseded by the anonymity of the function. In other words, through institutionalization this risk can be circumvented.

Secondly, many best practices seem to require extra and it is good that many HEIs have been doing it successfully. But to sustain that effort it has to become an integrated part of the functioning of the institution, gradually. Institutionalization is an effort to make it more institution centric than leader or individual centric and also to make the best practices as a normal practice.

Internalization of the practices:

What we described as institutionalization in the context of institutions may be considered as internalization when it refers to individuals in the institution. Internalization refers to making things a part of one's nature by conscious learning and assimilation. Internalization of best practices means making excellence an integral part of one's habit and nature.

Aristotle rightly observed that: "we are what we repeatedly best practices in higher education for quality management do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit". Such internalization may also be looked upon as making permanent the principle and essence of the best practices as part of the characteristic performance of an institution. The aggregate of such internalized best practices principally goes to make what we loosely call the 'ethos' or 'tradition' of an individual institution.

The instrumental view looks at quality as a strategy. But the intrinsic view looks at quality as a value. Quality in many respects is an attitude of mind. There is a strong feeling among many that quality education is resource specific. The advocacy for quality education is countered many times by resource specific arguments. These arguments are only partially valid. Our experience shows that attitudes play more critical role in quality assurance. Internalization is an attitude formation conducive to sustaining quality higher education.

Dissemination of best practices:

Education is a social process. The institutions not only have the

social responsibility of application of best practices, but also an equal social responsibility of dissemination of these practices for wider application in the system. Many higher education institutions do not attempt certain practices due to lack of information about the feasibility and adaptability of the practices. It is observed that the best practices are the borrowed practices. We must learn and benefit from each other's experience. Even within an institution, at times there are communication gaps which affect the expected outcome of the practice. It also makes building on experience and reviewing the practice difficult. Effective use of recording and reviewing is essential to develop conviction in the system for a particular practice.

Institutions may have to evolve suitable strategies like database of good practices, review forums, recording evidences for success etc. to discuss within and among institutions. The NAAC is advocating every institution to establish Internal Quality Assurance Cell, with one of the functions of recording and dissemination of best practices followed by that institution. The recording of practices is also a means of quality improvement.

Conclusion:
The best practice benchmarking approach is an inductive approach to quality management in higher education institutions with a focus on practice and continuous improvement. The five-stage approach will help institutions of higher education to play their role effectively in quality sustenance and enhancement. The best as an ideal should be the vision of every higher education institution in the country. Stakeholders can contribute differently for the realization of this goal by the institutions. Policy makers in education have an important responsibility of creating an enabling policy framework for effective functioning of the institutions. The management should ensure proper infrastructure and effective governance systems. Teachers have a critical role in building competencies of learners through best pedagogic practices. Finally, students, for whom the whole system is designed, should desire and demand the best.

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