



Community Colleges: Imparting Skill Based Higher Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Community colleges provide education above the secondary level and below the degree level with appropriate skills keeping in view the needs of local industry and community there by leading to gainful employment and option for horizontal and vertical mobility. While vertical mobility facilities movement to higher education and research, horizontal mobility creates opportunity for entry into the employment market with appropriate skills. There is also flexibility for further skill development. There is no age barrier for entry to a course, thus it also meets the life-long learning needs of the community. These Colleges are also engaged in Adult Education and Developmental Studies for academically weaker students. Community Colleges allow Dual / Concurrent Enrollment to facilitate High school students to take courses in Community Colleges to shorten the time and lessen the costs to get Associate degree and later full degree. The commitment of the Government of India to integrate skill development in the higher education system with flexible learning formats is reflected in its initiative to prepare a National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF) for standardization and thus, wider acceptance of the skill oriented courses amongst the employers. 100 Community Colleges are launched in the academic session beginning the year 2013.

KEYWORDS

Community Colleges, Features

Introduction

Skill development has been an integral part of education system worldwide be it USA, Germany, Canada, UK, Japan, China and a host of other countries. Somewhere skill development starts at school level while at other places, it starts at College level. They are known by different names in different countries. More known amongst them are the Community Colleges, which are in existence in USA for about a century. These colleges provide education above the secondary level and below the degree level with appropriate skills keeping in view the needs of local industry and community there by leading to gainful employment and option for horizontal and vertical mobility. While vertical mobility facilities movement to higher education and research, horizontal mobility creates opportunity for entry into the employment market with appropriate skills. There is also flexibility for further skill development. There is no age barrier for entry to a course, thus it also meets the life-long learning needs of the community. These Colleges are also engaged in Adult Education and Developmental Studies for academically weaker students. Community Colleges allow Dual / Concurrent Enrollment to facilitate High school students to take courses in Community Colleges to shorten the time and lessen the costs to get Associate degree and later full degree.

It is a system created for addressing the learning needs of the community at low and affordable cost without compromising the quality. In USA, the cost of tuition to the student in Community Colleges is about one-third the cost in regular undergraduate degree colleges. One third of the funding for running the community college comes from Student fees. The Governments at Federal, State, Local levels contribute a major share towards meeting the budgetary requirements of these Community Colleges. In addition, endowments from corporate sector, foundations, and money earned from training programs, etc. also contribute in meeting the financial requirements of the Community Colleges. Community Colleges receive grant from the Government only when it is able to maintain A grade in accreditation.

The Community Colleges keep the community engaged with the affairs of the Colleges in several formal and informal ways. Community is represented on the academic and administrative bodies of these Colleges. Community Colleges often have

multiple campuses underlying the principle to keep the learning facility at not more than 30 minutes drive from any point, thereby making education accessible and affordable. These Colleges give preference for admission to the local community, particularly, the marginalized sections of the population that include minorities (non-white race/ethnicity), uneducated (first-generation degree seekers), backward areas (domicile) and low-income (Pell grant status). Strong college-industry interaction leads to regular updating of the curricula. Skill-based courses have essentially 'hands on' practice and experience.

Objectives of the Community Colleges

The main objectives of the scheme are:

- (i) to make higher education relevant to the learner and the community;
- (ii) to integrate relevant skills into the higher education system;
- (iii) to provide skill based education to students currently pursuing higher education but actually interested in entering the workforce at the earliest opportunity;
- (iv) to provide employable and certifiable skills based on National Occupational Standards (NOSs) with necessary general education to Senior Secondary School pass-outs, with general education and /or vocational education background.
- (v) to provide for up-gradation and certification of traditional / acquired skills of the learners irrespective of their age;
- (vi) to provide opportunities for community-based life-long learning by offering courses of general interest to the community for personal development and interest; (vii) to provide opportunity for vertical mobility to move to higher education in future; and
- (viii) to offer bridge courses to certificate holders of general / vocational education, so as to bring them at par with appropriate NSQF level.
- (ix) to provide entrepreneurial orientation along with required skill training for self-employment and entrepreneurship development.

Features of community colleges

The Community College is a concept apparently working well in countries like USA for about last 50 years but all its features cannot be imported to India due to the socio-economic and socio-cultural differences that the two countries have in spite of several similarities. Therefore, the model of Colleges the Committee is going to recommend need not be called the Community College. They should be given a suitable indigenous name, which represents the character of these Colleges aptly and meets the contemporary needs of the society and the nation.

(1) These Colleges offer courses that are a mix of knowledge and skill components. The curriculum to be transacted under the present 3-year Honours Degree Course broken into modules/credits specifying the total number of credits required for acquiring a Degree. As the degree is awarded in recognition of a level of knowledge in a subject, the University will also prescribe the number of credits out of the total credits to be acquired for the award of degree in a subject. Similarly, the number of credits required in a subject to get an Honours degree in that subject will also be prescribed. The skill component of the curriculum is drawn from the credit framework prepared under the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for the concerned sectors of the NVEQF. Vocational learning outcome of these courses essentially conform to the NVEQF framework while standards of general education conform to the University norms. Award of degree will depend solely on acquisition of credits and not on the duration of time spent in pursuing the course. In this system, the learner will have the facility to learn at his /her own pace – an average student will acquire the degree in the stipulated 3 years period while an extraordinary student will be facilitated to acquire it earlier.

(2) These Colleges also specify the credit requirements for awarding other qualifications, viz. Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma / Associate Degree, etc., so that learners joining the College after Class 12th have option to exit the College at convenience with some qualification in hand. Qualifications so specified shall have to conform to the levels prescribed in the NVEQF in so far as skills- learning is concerned. All these courses dovetail appropriately with the levels of NVEQF so that mobility between general and vocational education is facilitated by bridging the credit gap.

(3) Such Colleges also offer barrier free short-term certificate courses of various durations to the learners, in the sense that no formal qualification would be required to join such courses. It will be predominantly skills-based and will particularly take care of the workforce and life-long learning needs of the locality. Learning outcome of these courses would essentially have to conform to the NVEQF framework. In our country, forestry, agriculture, and allied and other traditional skill sectors are largely served by the unskilled or semi-skilled workforce. Special focus on skill development of this workforce through these colleges would not only boost the growth of economy by increasing their productivity but also lead to distributive justice and equity through increased income of this workforce, which is very large in number.

(4) These Colleges offer courses for preservation and up-gradation of traditional skills available with the people by virtue of their profession or geographical location or caste. Such traditional skills should be recognized and certified appropriately. Courses designed to upgrade the traditionally available skills to a certifiable level so that the certified skills of the learner are acceptable nationally. These Colleges also act as catalyst centres for developing and propagating the traditional skills of the community on commercially viable basis.

(5) Besides preparing skilled workforce for the market, these Colleges pay equal attention to the development of entrepreneurship in the community. Towards this end, they offer management related courses of different durations also.

(6) All the Courses offered by these Colleges is modular and credit-based. Banking of credits earned is permitted. The learn-

er have the option to exit after completing certain credit points of a course and rejoin the course at his convenience later with full protection of the credit already earned by him. On accumulation of prescribed credit points, appropriate qualification, viz. Certificate/ Diploma / Advanced Diploma / Degree with or without Honours will be awarded by the College / University.

(7) Curriculum for these credit-based modular courses is developed by the Board of Studies of these Colleges in accordance with the credit framework keeping in view the local skill requirements. Board of Studies have representatives from the College, University to which the College is affiliated, relevant industries including business, service, agriculture and allied sectors, their associations by whatever names they are known, Agriculture University / Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), State Council of Vocational Training (SCVT) and the State Board/ Council/Directorate of Technical Education and the relevant professional bodies / guilds at State and National level.

(8) Since these Colleges are meant to serve the need of the Community, the aspiring learners from the locality are given suitable weightage in registration. If the number of registered learners is more than the seats available, admission is granted on '**first come first served**' basis. Curriculum, teaching-learning material, etc., are developed in local language and context.

(9) Relevancy of technical knowledge, especially in the age of rapid technological obsolescence, is important and therefore, monitoring, evaluation and updating of the curriculum is done periodically in consultation with all stakeholders, particularly the industry including business and service sectors keeping in view their requirements and changes in NOS. It is continuous and dynamic process in-built into the system.

(10) The skill aspect of the curriculum is to be transacted in 'face-to-face' mode only whereas the general aspect of the curriculum may be in any mode without compromising on quality. Therefore, every such College have adequate laboratory/workshop facilities for '**hands on**' practice.

(11) In order to successfully transact the curriculum and to ensure acquisition of requisite skill by the learners, these Colleges require qualified teachers/instructors in adequate numbers. Maintaining permanent faculty for all subjects/courses could be financially unviable for the Colleges. Therefore, as per the most prevalent international practice, the Colleges maintain only the core faculty on permanent basis and remaining are drawn as part- time guest faculty from the industry or the open market.

(12) Like the curriculum, the standards of knowledge and skills of the teachers/instructors also need continuous updating through appropriate training and exposure programmes in collaboration with the University, Agriculture University, Institutions of Technical Education, industry, business and service sectors.

(13) Accreditation are made mandatory for these Colleges. Separate accreditation of physical infrastructure, faculty and pedagogy, and evaluation mechanism, are done to ensure that these Colleges have the necessary wherewithal for enjoying the autonomous status. A College with 'A' Grading is only be accorded the 'autonomous' status by the State/UT. NAAC / NBA accredit these Colleges on priority basis.

(14) These Colleges have full functional autonomy in respect of designing curriculum, its transaction, evaluation, declaration of result, etc. and its Board of Management also include representatives of affiliating University, Agriculture University, relevant Industries including Business, Service, Agriculture and Allied sectors, their Associations / Professional Guilds by whatever names they are known, Local Bodies and State Government.

(15) In order to facilitate hand holding, the States/UTs constitute a broad based State Level Steering Committee (SLSC) under the Chairpersonship of the Chief Secretary and having representation from all stakeholders, viz. The Universities /

Colleges, State Departments of Agriculture, Industry, Labour, Finance, Higher/Technical Education and other course related Departments, Association of industries, business and service sectors, State Directorate/ Board / Council of Technical Education etc., to co-ordinate between various departments / agencies to facilitate the activities of the College to get them completed in time.

(16) The success and acceptability of these Colleges come through participation of the community-based stakeholders and nearly assured employment prospects. Employers will be inclined to employ the product of these Colleges only when they are assured of the level of skills acquired by the learners. Therefore, a rigorous and credible system of evaluation and certification in consultation with the industry, including business and service sectors needs to be put in place in these Colleges.

(17) The expenditure, if any, to be borne on establishing these Colleges from the public exchequer, shall be on sharing basis, between the Centre and the State / UT concerned in the proportion of 90:10 at pilot stage.

Conclusion

The strength of a country's economy is inextricably linked to the strength of its education system, which trains a workforce that is skilled, adaptable, creative and equipped to compete in the marketplace. The commitment of the Government of India to integrate skill development in the higher education system with flexible learning formats is reflected in its initiative to prepare a National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF) for standardization and thus, wider acceptance of the skill oriented courses amongst the employers. Community Colleges across the world have been working towards these goals besides providing opportunity for vertical mobility and lifelong learning. Therefore, an idea to establish 100 Colleges on pilot basis on the pattern of Community Colleges of the world was shared in the State Education Ministers' Conference held on 22nd February 2012 where the Conference unanimously endorsed the proposal and decided to constitute a Committee of Education Ministers to develop this concept taking into account the Indian context and also suggest a framework of the Scheme so that 100 Community Colleges are launched in the academic session beginning the year 2013.

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