STUDENT PARTICIPATION AS A BEST PRACTICE FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Liberalization and its accompaniment Privatization and Globalization have had a tremendous impact on the education field. There is commodification of education, with institutions vying with each other for the best and brightest students. Students constitute the most important stakeholder and can play a crucial role in enhancing the quality. Best Practices can be considered as practices that add sizeable value to both the institution and stakeholders and are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality. In the 21st century to render quality enhancement, it is essential to involve students in quality culture and quality movement of the institution. An example of this would be regular student feedback on performance of teachers, appraisal of the academic and physical infrastructure as also provision of different services. This practice of student feedback is being followed by our college for over a decade now. Student feedback has both its advantages as well as its limitations. But it must be remembered that the participation of students in the institutional quality enhancement process is crucial because students apart from being the largest and most important stakeholders in any higher educational institutions, have a stronger voice as compared to any other stakeholders. While remaining a routine affair in many institutions it has definitely had a positive impact on the quality of teaching imparted in some institutions. What is important is striking a balance in the involvement of all stakeholders – that is students, parents, governments, policy making, funding agencies, industry, employers and society at large.

Keywords: Liberalization; Stakeholder; Student Feedback

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization and the consequent expansion of higher education have had a tremendous impact on the market as well as the student community. In a heterogeneous country like ours, higher education should provide access, relevance, utility and quality to all the students.

Students can play an important role in the quality enhancement process. Feedback from the students could be considered as one of participative mechanisms for enhancement of quality.

By participating in the teaching learning and evaluation process students take care of both quality sustenance and enhancement. Today the entire teaching learning process is based on joint exercises (that is students and teachers), discourses, partnership and dialogues. With the ICT Revolution the current crop of students are having greater access to knowledge.

In the midst of continuous changes, quality teaching has become an important issue. There have been changes in both quantitative expansion and mindset of the student body. The need of the hour is providing quality teaching. Under the present situation quality teaching which is student centered
becomes significant. The pedagogical skills of the teachers are insufficient; attention has to be paid to the needs of the students.

In this Paper an attempt has been made to look into the student feedback system as a best practice, to examine the need for student participation and to consider the case of my own institution where this Practice is operational along with the benefits and limitations of the student feedback system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The Paper has the following objectives:

1. To look into the meaning of Best Practice;
2. To consider the importance of student participation in the teaching learning process;
3. To consider the feedback procedure followed in our college, along with the advantages and limitations.

Student Feedback System as A Best Practice

Best Practices can be considered as practices that add sizeable value to both the institution and stakeholders and are considered as reliable benchmarks or standards of quality. One can safely say that institutional excellence in higher education is the aggregate of best practices followed in different areas of institutional performance.

Benchmarking is a systematic means of measuring and comparing the work process of an organization with those of others. It is used widely both in industry and service sector for measurement and improvement of quality.

Benchmarking involves:

1) Development of an understanding of the fundamentals that lead to success;
2) Focus on continuous efforts; and
3) Management of the change process to bridge the gap between an existing practice of an institution and that of class institutions, by using key performance variables. In this Paper we will look at student feedback as a key best practice for quality enhancement.

Students are central to any educational endeavor. The main objective of any higher educational institution would be broadening of the horizon and attainment of a strong foundation of knowledge and skills. In fact the aim of any educational system would to generate human resources which are capable of generating national wealth and who are transformed into performing assets for the progress of a nation.

In the 21st century to render quality enhancement, it is essential to involve students in quality culture and quality movement of the institution. An example of this would be regular student feedback on performance of teachers, appraisal of the academic and physical infrastructure as also provision of different services. This can be looked at as an eye opener of sorts which apart from enhancing quality would generate a wake up signal for the management and staff.

Generally three methods of feedback are practiced:

a) Obtaining informal or oral feedback;

b) Obtaining semester or term end feedback;

c) Academic year end feedback.

Institutions generally follow one or more of such feedbacks. Much depends on the organizational culture of the institution.
In most institutions student information is collected and tabulated in the absence of the concerned faculty. Only after the grades are assigned the information is provided to the faculty.

The need for feedback arose from:

Firstly for guaranteeing better quality teaching to the students;

Secondly for helping the institutions in identification of good quality teachers;

Thirdly, for instilling quality inputs in teaching and for updating the curriculum

Feedback from students is important for:

1) Understanding the quality status of the institution;
2) Improving educational services to the students; and
3) Entrusting the social responsibility on the institutions for ensuring quick and effective measures.

Procedure of Feedback from Students in Our College

Since the last decade annual feedback from the students has become a regular feature in our college. The method is increasingly used, by our institution, as a tool for gauging the teaching prowess and competency of the faculty – inclusive of both confirmed and contract teachers in both the aided and unaided sections. The process is applicable to the undergraduate students of our college.

In the middle of the academic year a list of questions is prepared by the IQAC team of the college, under the supervision of the Principal. 30% to 40% of regular students of each of the arts, science and commerce streams as also the self-financing courses are selected. Care is taken to see that students with different mental abilities – that is bright, average and below average are represented. They are first briefed of the procedure. After ensuring proper assimilation students and then taken to the Computer Lab for online feedback.

Simultaneously the list of all teachers lecturing in the different classes is made. Students are then asked to evaluate the respective teachers. Care is taken to see that teachers from the related streams are not present at the time of the feedback process. Students are then asked to grade their Professors.

Once this is complete what is most important is the outcome. Initially the same was generated in the college itself through installation of the requisite software. But since the current academic year it is being outsourced.

Once the results are out and the feedback outcome ready, the same is given to the Principal, who along with the IQAC Committee members scrutinize the same. Teachers with outstanding grades are appreciated and lauded, while those with poor grades are reprimanded and given a stern warning and asked to improve their teaching skills. A fact worth mentioning is that consequent to the first result; teachers with poor grades have shown vast improvement in their performance in the subsequent feedback results

Advantages of the Feedback System

The general student characteristics are changing. This can be attributed to three factors:

i) Students and their families are more concerned with their investment in education and what they get in return; consequently when they enroll students in a particular institution they are concerned about whether their awards are given good quality education. This practice we feel can serve the purpose;

ii) It facilitates the process of self – assessment. As mentioned earlier It is an eye opener of sorts, where the dawn of reality can remove complacency that exists among the staff. This will also enable them to retrospect themselves and work on their shortcomings.
iii) It helps in improving the teaching skills of teachers. It can make the faculty think back on their positives and weaknesses, while simultaneously trying to work on their negatives.

iv) It provides the students with the necessary insights into the terms of course content, delivery mechanism, teacher competencies etc;

v) It creates a feeling of involvement among students as they realize that they are a part of the teaching learning process;

vi) In this era of Information and Technology online feedback forms would help in making the students computer savvy.

**Disadvantages of the Feedback System**

The student feedback as a mode of quality enhancement has its own limitations:

1) There is a general belief that students cannot make judgments of the instructions on account of their immaturity and inexperience. Teachers with adequate qualifications and publication records can teach with quality;

2) Current students with less than five years of learning in the college may be incapable of making judgments of experienced teachers who have served the field commendably;

3) Student rating forms may be unreliable and invalid. In view of the large classes sampling is resorted to which has its own imitations. This may affect rating. In addition higher ratings could be given to teachers who are more popular than those who are capable and competent;

4) Grading is also affected by the level of course. Generally upper class students tend to rate their instructors more favorably than their lower class counterparts.

In the midst of all this it must be remembered that the participation of students in the institutional quality enhancement process is crucial because students are the largest and most important stakeholders in any higher educational institutions, having a stronger voice as compared to any stakeholders. Their views are important for:

a) Arriving at a fair judgment of quality status of institutions;

b) Augmenting educational services for students;

c) Taking up social responsibility associated with the task of ensuring quick and effective corrective measures to meet the challenges of the 21st century;

d) Feedbacks in the form of questionnaires and oral responses are invaluable inputs in the quality enhancement activities of higher educational institutions.

While remaining a routine affair in many institutions it has definitely had a positive impact on the quality of teaching imparted in some institutions. It is not so much the student feedback but rather the desire, organization and management of the feedback process which plays a vital role in laying down global trademarks towards quality teaching.

What is important is striking a balance in the involvement of all stakeholders – that is students, parents, governments, policy making, funding agencies, industry, employers and society at large.

**CONCLUSION**

The best practice benchmarking approach focuses on practice and continuous improvement. Every institution should aim at being ‘the best’ and the stakeholders can contribute differently for this purpose. While policy framers should ensure an effective framework management it also has to guarantee adequate infrastructure and effective governance system.
Student evaluation and feedback have been the most practiced principle universally. Teachers play a crucial role in building future generations. They are required to follow best pedagogic practices; while more importantly students should desire and demand the best.

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