

Pedagogical Innovations in Higher Education

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Abstract:

Higher Education plays a crucial role in the economic and social development of any nation. The participation level in higher education is indicative of the aspirations of the people for enhancing their quality life. It is also significant for national development as the skills, creativity and research developed through higher education provide for national prosperity. The emergent knowledge based economy has resulted in tremendous technological changes and liberalized competitive economies which have called the classroom activities into question. The fact that the young graduates are not employable has called into question the practices and proceedings of a classroom which has been the indisputable domain of a teacher. Why not the 'formal education' be customized to make our students employable? What is the relevance of a teacher in the changing face of technology aided learning practices that have emerged in the world today? Teacher can no more be an animal tethered to the peg called the textbook. ICT and Beyond-the-curriculum have taken the sheen out of the extempore lectures that teachers have always prided on. A teacher has no continuously innovate and make room for skills and student centric methods of teaching learning so to make the students employable and meaningful.

Introduction

Higher Education plays a crucial role in the economic and social development of any nation. The participation level in higher education is indicative of the aspirations of the people for enhancing their quality life. It is also significant for national development as the skills, creativity and research developed through higher education provide for national prosperity.

The emergent knowledge based economy has resulted in tremendous technological changes and liberalized competitive economies have put enormous demands at the doorsteps of

the centers of higher learning. Things have come to a stage where the job market demands custom made graduates to suit its requirements. In a country like India which has always laid great stress on traditional ways of imparting knowledge which is again traditionally looked at as 'holistic', these demands of the industry have made the system look irrelevant. We have witnessed a trend where mushrooming of 'specialized centers' which donned on the responsibility of providing 'alternate' system of education and training. Institutes which claim to render the graduates 'employable' by providing different kinds of skills and we have also witnessed a mad rush of graduates to the 'finishing schools', as if they change their life drastically.

General Degree Education in particular and tertiary education in general have been looked at as 'insufficient' in chiseling young grads who can be directly employed by the industry. Indian higher education has always laid stress on knowledge and students were expected to equip themselves with a host of skills through the process of learning in and off the campus. Interaction with the teachers and peers was expected to equip the students with communication skills, interpersonal and intra-personal skills besides a host of other skills necessary for a person to be a responsible citizen besides being efficient to cater to the national goals and demands necessary for the workforce. Raising numbers in the classroom, excess burden on the infrastructural resources of institutions, poor quality of teachers and over emphasis on the examination system have jeopardized the higher goals of the traditional education system.

The expectations of the industry and the job-market have put the higher education in perspective where it was seen as insufficient and sometimes irrelevant. The reasons are obvious. Universities have concerned themselves more with affiliation and examinations rather than doing anything in terms of quality and academic improvement. There are times when the concerned Universities have done nothing other than extending affiliation and conducting examinations and more often than not the Colleges have become the source of revenue for these Universities. Cumbersome system of affiliation, long delays in effecting changes to the curriculum, absence of interaction among the academic peers in Universities and Colleges, over-emphasis on examination and evaluation, long delays and muddle some procedures involved in evaluation and results announcement have all contributed to the maladies of these higher educational institutions.

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All these and more have called the very process of higher education into question. The classroom which has always been the autonomous space of the teacher where the teacher and the taught have quietly intimately interacted and learnt together is being looked at as irrelevant. Technology and drastic changes in the Information Technology have changed the very process of learning. Teachers are being more and more looked at as obsolete individuals trying to muddle up the very process of negotiating with the text. It is true that in a classroom of 120 students, the teacher and the taught have no space for personal interaction or attention. The traditional means of negotiating with a text have put greater strain both on the teacher and the taught. Today the teacher is caught up in the dilemma of the text first or the test first. The process of learning has taken a backseat because the teacher is virtually left with neither time nor space to interact with the students. The process of 'chalk and talk' has become not only the popular mode of interaction but the inevitable means of completing the syllabus and preparing the students for examinations.

The fact that the young graduates are not employable has called into question the practices and proceedings of a classroom which has been the indisputable domain of a teacher. Why not the 'formal education' be customized to make our students employable? What is the relevance of a teacher in the changing face of technology aided learning practices that have emerged in the world today? Teacher can no more be an animal tethered to the peg called the textbook, are some of the questions and issues which haunt us today. Teachers are under great stress to 'adapt' to the changing times and changing roles. Today teacher is not merely a source of knowledge or rather the only source of knowledge. Students have umpteen numbers of avenues for knowledge and information. That's what has made the teacher's role more broad and varied. Today a teacher is a counselor, guide, mentor and a person who is endowed with the responsibility of finding suitable job for the student.

ICT and beyond the curriculum have taken the sheen out of the extempore lectures that teachers have always prided on. A teacher has to continuously innovate and make room for skills and student-centric methods of teaching-learning so as to make the students employable and

meaningful. There is an imminent need to lay greater emphasis on making curriculum more relevant and engaging relevant delivery mechanisms to make value addition to the curriculum. Curriculum has to be updated in tune with the requirements of the job market besides focusing on all the relevant core-competencies that have always enjoyed favour with the curriculum makers.

ICT should find greater space in content delivery in a classroom situation more often than not to make it student centric and learning centric. Innovative and pedagogical methods and strategies should be evolved to make learning a meaningful and fruitful experience for the student. Pedagogical innovations should enable students to acquire contemporary professional/managerial skills, ideas and concepts. Developing the ability of a student to apply conceptual ideas to practical situation should be the order of the day. Providing a comprehensive learning experience in the classroom designed to meet the global expectations/standards should be emphasized upon. Facilitating learning through complementary networks of students, faculty and professionals should be the priority area in the process of teaching-learning in a classroom situation.

To realize these goals, teachers need to evolve effective strategies that focus on issues like: why, what, how and when in terms of curriculum designing and development. Content should focus on elements like: Disciplinary content, Graduate Capabilities, Authentic Learning. Under these broad areas focus should be laid on preparing a student for the process of learning in terms of acceptance, preparation, submission, retention, reformation and higher order intellectual abilities. Content should not only focus on broad disciplinary content but also should aim at inculcating skills like writing, speaking, enquiry/research, critical thinking, creative problem solving, team work, information literacy and ethical awareness. Learning should specifically focus on empowering students to embark on a journey of self-learning. Teaching-learning should always aim for real world relevance and empower students to perform complex tasks over a period of time. It should facilitate students to handle different perspectives, collaborate with others and ability to reflect, refine and innovate. E-content development, e-learning and virtual classrooms should be the priorities of all the stakeholders in the changed scenario of higher education. At a time when classroom focus should be more on student enabling processes, e-

content and web-based learning/projects and teacher assisted Internet experience, teachers and curriculum should make room for such innovations and drastic changes in pedagogy. Teachers should start negating themselves from classrooms limiting their role to that of being a facilitator and guide.

Conclusion

Traditional methods in classroom negotiations have always given edge to the teachers resulting in immense satisfaction to the teachers. Teachers were in control of a classroom and students. A teacher has always been the monarch of his turf which he virtually controlled for thousands of years. Modern means and methods should restrict the role of a teacher to a counselor, guide and facilitator. Teacher should focus on shifting the role of control to the taught. The student should start deriving the pleasure of classroom proceedings through his participation.

It is here appropriate to remember these age old saying:

“A mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, superior teacher demonstrates, a great teacher inspires”

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