

## Argumentative Research Article

## Quality enhancement in higher education through sound curriculum and skill development



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**ABSTRACT**

Institutions of Higher Education are temples where gaining knowledge and wisdom by young minds shapes the destiny of future India. The overall scenario of higher education in India is dismal and does not match with the global quality standards. It does not meet the global competencies and is abysmally low in making significant contribution to the national development. The present education system, also does not match with the needs and expectations of the employment sector. However, Quality has become the key word in the higher education and is essential for surviving the global competition in education. A continuous and sustainable multidimensional strategy to improve the quantity, quality and equality in higher education is one of the prerequisite to provide holistic education. Quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the learners. It should not be regarded as a process of consumption, but as a process of interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, curriculum enhancement with special emphasis on skill development in quality education can never be a neutral process, it will always be value based. It must aim at giving the students opportunities for personal development and confidence to adapt to new situations as well as change these situations, when they find that necessary.

**KEY WORDS**

Quality Enhancement | Higher Education | Sound Curriculum | Skill development

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## **Introduction**

Institutions of Higher Education are temples where gaining knowledge and wisdom by young minds shapes the destiny of future India. The overall scenario of higher education in India is dismal and does not match with the global quality standards. It does not meet the global competencies and is abysmally low in making significant contribution to the national development. The present education system, also does not match with the needs and expectations of the employment sector. However Quality has become the key word in the higher education and is essential for surviving the global competition in education. A continuous and sustainable multidimensional strategy to improve the quantity, quality and equality in higher education is one of the prerequisite to provide holistic education. Thus improving the quality is the biggest challenge before the higher education system and access to the global economy will depend more on the quality and productivity. Higher education requires special emphasis and has major role to play in determining the quality of life and the pace of development of a nation and the world as a whole. It is the responsibility of the higher education system to ensure that dynamic curriculum, the skills, understanding and output of the students are equal to the best in the world. Quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the learners. It is the well thought out curriculum that provides students with the tools to deal with and find solutions to challenges confronting mankind. In a changing world of rapid technological advances, this means that what was considered quality education yesterday might not meet the standard of what will be understood as quality tomorrow. It should not be regarded as a process of consumption, but as a process of interaction between teachers and students. Therefore curriculum enhancement with special emphasis on skill development in quality education can never be a neutral process, it will always be value based. It must aim at giving the

students opportunities for personal development and confidence to adapt to new situations as well as change these situations, when they find that necessary.

## **Curriculum: Integrated Definition**

A curriculum is a formal academic plan for the learning experiences of students in pursuit of a college degree. The term curriculum, broadly defines, includes goals for student learning (skills, knowledge and attitudes); content (the subject matter in which learning experiences are embedded); sequence (the order in which concepts are presented); learners; instructional methods and activities; instructional resources (materials and settings); evaluation (methods used to assess student learning as a result of these experiences); and adjustments to teaching and learning processes, based on experience and evaluation. Although the term curriculum is variably used, this definition is sufficiently inclusive and dynamic to account for the many innovations in the higher education curriculum that involve instructional methods, sequencing, and assessments as well as instructional goals and content, all of which have to be implemented in order to improve learning.

## **Need For Innovations in the Curriculum in Higher Education**

Curriculum provides opportunity for personal and social development in a student. Higher education needs tailor-made curriculum in form of flexible modules that provide platform to promote interdisciplinary approach. To make education learner-centric innovations in learning is essential. Problem-based learning, Social learning, experiential learning and Collaborative learning are some of the methods that can make it possible. Assessment methods, both summative and formative can be employed in a way to have better results. Education is a dynamic phenomenon and a proper curriculum is essential for quality enhancement in higher education.

India's destiny is being shaped in the class rooms of the Higher Education Institutes, colleges and universities. Higher education institutions have to kickstart quality enhancement to survive in the global competition in the field of education. Though the various stakeholders of higher education i.e. the government, the managements, the teachers, the students and the parents play a major role in the quality enhancement procedure, it can be best achieved through a proper curriculum. Curriculum design has to be intricate high-level process which defines the learning to take place within a specific programme of study, leading to specific degree of credit or qualification. The curriculum design process involves consideration of resource allocation, determining the learners' final outcomes and destinations, as well as general learning and teaching approaches and requirements.

Many of the curricular innovations and reforms reflect three shifts in emphasis: (1) from learning goals that focus on mastery of content and content coverage to demonstration of broad competencies; (2) from learning in disparate disciplines to integrative learning experiences across the curriculum; and (3) from changes in subject matter as the primary means to improve learning to innovations in instructional methods and assessments as integral to curricular reforms. Diversity and global competency have emerged as major curriculum issues, as well. Thus significant changes need to occur in higher education generally and in the subject and discipline curriculum in particular. Together they provide the momentum to enable higher education to make unprecedented strides. Educational leaders debate whether these changes are primarily additive and limited to small scale programmatic innovations or truly transformative for institutions and higher education.

What has changed are the goals for learning—from emphasis on knowledge of disciplinary facts and concepts (what students know) to broadly defined competencies (what students are able to do with

what they know) to ensure that graduates have the skills needed by citizens in the everyday life.

### **Integration and Curriculum Coherence**

The courses that require collaborative teamwork and projects; the courses that emphasize ethics and civic engagement; and the integration of technology, information literacy, and multiculturalism are best achieved by a well-designed curriculum. To be a balanced curriculum, emphasis should be given to cognitive development of the student and consideration on student's individual needs, abilities, interests, potentials and developmental history. Apart from this, personal and social development, self-understanding and various levels of life skills training have to be included in the curriculum. In response to mounting criticism that the undergraduate curriculum is fragmented, burdened with too many isolated bits of information, and lacking coherence, institutions have developed strategies and structures to help students integrate the disparate elements of their college experiences. One strategy has been to clarify, tighten, and sequence requirements so they provide greater coherence. A second strategy has been to provide educational experiences calibrated to the developmental learning needs of students at different stages of their collegiate lives. The most prevalent model is the first-year program, often comprising orientation programs, orientation courses, cocurricular offerings, developmental courses for underprepared students, access to academic support services, first-year seminars, courses of which many are interdisciplinary, and learning communities. Besides the basic academic and cultural subjects, there should be appropriate weightage for learning areas in personal and social development. The aim should be to provide a holistic education.

Learning communities comprise curricular models that link courses or course work to reinforce their curricular connections, maximize opportunities for students to collaborate with each

other and their instructors, and provide interpersonal support. Although often designed for first-year students, learning communities now appear throughout the curriculum. They are designed to build communities of learners, and in many cases, provide the structure to promote interdisciplinary study and integration.

In addition, faculty across the disciplines use innovative pedagogies and course structures that promote integration and interdisciplinary perspectives, such as academic-service learning, multidisciplinary group work, internships, fieldwork, and study abroad.

#### Innovative Instructional Methods In Curriculum

Innovative instructional methods are proliferating in higher education and are integral to curricular reform efforts. Supported by research on how students learn, instructional innovations emphasize active and experiential learning (i.e., learning by doing); inquiry, discovery, and problem-based learning; collaborative and cooperative learning in groups; writing to learn; undergraduate research; academic-service learning; and instructional technology. Although lecture and small group discussions are still the dominant instructional methods, active and collaborative learning is now commonplace in higher education.

In addition to providing opportunity for personal understanding and development, curriculum should orient the students towards social development. Understanding the neighborhood, community and society are important in having harmonious interpersonal relationship and proper attitudes towards social life. Understanding of local customs, traditions and political systems can make an individual a responsible citizen. Curriculum should be encouraging one's concerns for human and natural environment. Higher education should be a preparation for integration into society.

The adaptation of a curriculum according to the academic standard and the need of the student is

called curriculum tailoring. Curriculum tailoring may be an extension or a cutting-down of the core learning area of a subject. According to individual needs of the development of multiple intelligences, students must be given the appropriate options from a diversified curriculum. Then only they can acquire the abilities to meet the basic requirements for further study or employment.

Education must be learner-centric rather than teacher-centric. Students must be offered with different learning methods. Problem-based Learning should be encouraged as it is linked to learning through inquiry, though is also usually focused on producing an output. A teacher-defined goal to develop the skills of inquiry or problem-solving is the basis. Knowledge and concepts being learned to be selected and applied by the learner. Learners may work individually but often work in pairs or groups.

Social learning or more appropriately also referred to as 'social constructivism' need to be adopted in higher education importantly because it emphasizes the social character of learning. In order to comprehend someone else's idea or theory the learner has to articulate and exchange their own conceptualization of it, as this requires and motivates the construction of the concept. It is therefore closely associated with learning through discussion.

Experiential Learning is learning through practice, and constructionism. It is designed to locate conceptual learning in the learner's experience, enabling them to make the appropriate links between theory and practice. It is therefore closely associated with learning through practice.

Collaborative Learning combines social learning with experiential learning in the sense that learners work together in pairs or small groups to produce an output of some kind. It could be something as extensive as a report, or as specific as a problem-solution, or an explanation. Its value is that it combines the value of all the other

approaches. It is therefore closely associated with learning through production .Each learning approach explained here prioritizes different roles for teachers and learners. Each type of approach has its own advantages and disadvantages and hence a mix of learning approaches is the best option for most courses.

Subject areas can be pooled under core subjects and groups of elective subject structured short programs or modules. Majors or Core subjects have to be taken by all students within specified time duration. Elective subjects may be selected from a group of modules depending on the needs of students. The elective modules may be subject-specific, inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary. The advantages of adopting modularised curriculum include (i) well structured curriculum to avoid redundancy in content, (ii) flexible arrangement in time-tabling, grouping and staffing deployment, (iii) each module with its specific objectives in terms of concepts, skills and attitudes to be achieved, facilitating more successful learning experience, (iv) providing flexibility and choice.

### **Impact of the Curriculum Assessment on Student Learning**

Widespread efforts to assess student learning are also having an impact on the curriculum. While multiple choice tests are still widely used, new evaluation methods provide opportunities to assess and to promote higher-order critical thinking skills and the competencies now valued in higher education. Methods include self-assessments, student portfolios, student journals, case studies, simulations, poster sessions, group projects, and technology-based innovations, among others—all of which reflect the shifts from content to competencies, from fragmentation to integration, and from passive to active modes of learning. Increasingly, assessment results are being used to improve programs and promote the ongoing process of curricular reform.

### **Skill Development and Enhancement**

The expanding list of proficiencies commonly identified by colleges and universities include: critical thinking and problem-solving; multiple modes of inquiry in the natural sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, and arts; communication skills, including writing, speaking, and listening; technology and information literacy; sensitivity to diversity, including multicultural and intercultural competencies for participation in a pluralistic democracy; civic, global, and environmental responsibility and engagement; interpersonal skills, including teamwork and collaboration; self-awareness; moral and ethical reasoning, and integration of knowledge from diverse sources.

Skill enhancement by Diversity learning is a high priority, including multicultural and intercultural understanding. Although variably defined, diversity learning often refers to sensitivity to difference, including race, gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability.

### **Conclusion**

Education without vision is fruitless and education without value is meaningless. Also education is ever evolving and ever changing dynamic phenomenon. It must recognize the changes in the environment and more importantly respond continuously to the growing demands and challenges posed to it . The design of a curriculum for such a dynamic system will be often a challenging task. Periodic review of curricula is required and institutions must have a permanent mechanism for identifying the curriculum requirements based on national needs and international trends. Education and training must be incorporated to successfully tackle the challenges of technological advancements. As the education system is expanded continuously, we must develop a management system capable of incorporating such changes otherwise enhancement of quality may not be possible. The

curriculum with vision to make education meaningful and valuable will contribute to the overall development of the system of higher education of the country as a whole.

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