

Students' Perception of Quality of Higher Education: A Case Study of Post Graduation Management Students at Selected Management Institutes in Delhi & NCR

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Abstract— Knowledge is the key resource for global competitiveness and a good education system equips students with spiritual, moral and material knowledge. At a time when India is poised to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend, it would serve us well to focus our attention and resources on the poor status of higher education that adversely impacts the quality of human capital in our country.

International experience has shown that gross enrolment ratio (GER) in tertiary education institutes is an important indicator of economic development. While the global average stood at 26 per cent (2012) India scored 20.8 per cent whereas China was on par with the world average. Recognizing the seriousness of the situation the government allocated nearly Rs. 85,000 crores for improving higher education infrastructure during the 11th plan period (2007-12). However, the focus of this spending was largely on increasing the number of colleges and institutions in order to improve the GER by the end of the plan period, in which they were successful. The need to simultaneously focus on improving the quality of education is being addressed in the 12th plan. It is obvious that the quality offered at most institutes of higher education in the country leaves much to be desired. This can be corroborated by the fact that Indians constitute the second largest group amongst foreign students in most leading universities in developed economies. Therefore, simply focusing on quantity will not help in improving the quality of human capital formation.

In this paper we have tried to get a glimpse into what the modern day management students, who are the key

stakeholders in the teaching learning process, think about the quality of education being imparted to them. This study included PG management students from some reputed Institutes in Delhi NCR where the respondents' opinions were sought on the perceived quality of some relevant academic and infrastructural parameters. As suggested by the findings in this study, the institutes should focus on bringing constant improvements on these parameters so that the students can realise their potential optimally and pass out as potentially employable and successful professionals.

Keywords- Higher Education, Quality, HEIs, GER, tertiary education, management education, employable

I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

At a time when everyone is talking about India's economic prospects in a positive manner and 'demographic dividend' has become a much talked about euphemism it is time to take a reality check. The increasing numbers will bear a dividend if and only if they are equipped with the right skills. Although the country has made substantial progress over the last few decades in the primary and secondary education sectors, a lot remains to be done as far as the higher/tertiary education sector is concerned.

International experience has shown that gross enrolment ratio (GER) in tertiary education institutes is an important indicator of economic development. According to an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) study (2012) those with a tertiary education earned 1.5 times more than those with an upper secondary education. A US study concluded that a college-educated individual is likely to earn

\$1 million more than a person without a college degree over a lifetime, resulting in not only an improved economic status for the individual but also increased tax revenue for the government.

After the US and China, India reputedly has the third largest higher education system in the world with about 700 universities and more than 35,000 colleges as of 2012. Public expenditure in this sector has been abysmally low, averaging less than one per cent of the country’s GDP over the last several years. Over the same period the private sector, however, has invested substantially in the higher education sector and as of 2012 accounted for 64% of all higher education institutes (HEIs). Private HEIs also accounted for a majority, 58.8%, of the total enrolments as of 2012, state government institutes accounted for 38.6% and central government institutes for the remaining 2.6%.

As per government data the total number of colleges affiliated to various universities, whether central, state, private or deemed, stood at 36,671 as of 2013-14, while the number of stand-alone institutes, including those offering PGDM, numbered 11,445.

Table 1: Government Expenditure on Higher Education (Rs. crores)

Year	State/UTs	Centre	Total
2010-11	38,489.77	24,164.41	62,654.18
2011-12	44,267.70	24,786.96	69,054.66
2012-13	50,820.02	32,739.21	83,559.23

Source: Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, MHRD

An estimated 4.18 per cent of India’s gross domestic product (GDP) was spent on education in 2012. Since the year 2000 the country has spent between 3-4% of its GDP on the sector. As far as the higher education sector in particular is concerned, although both state and central government spending on the sector has increased (table 1) from Rs. 62,654.18 crores in 2010-11 to Rs. 83,559.23 in 2012-13, as a proportion of total governmental spending it has remained nearly static at 0.86% and 0.89% respectively for the two periods.

Table 2: Growth in Number of Institutes and Student Intake: Management Vs. Overall Technical Education

Year	Institutes				Student Intake			
	Mngmnt (Nos.)	Annual Increase (%)	*Total	Annual Increase (%)	Mngmnt (Nos.)	Annual Increase (%)	*Total (Nos.)	Annual Increase (%)
2006-07	1132		4491		94704		750797	
2007-08	1149	1.50	4885	8.77	121867	28.68	907822	20.91
2008-09	1523	32.60	6230	27.53	149555	22.72	1139116	25.48
2009-10	1940	27.38	7361	18.15	179561	20.06	1408807	23.68
2010-11	2260	14.24	8004	8.70	277811	54.72	1790751	27.11
2011-12	2385	5.44	8361	4.46	352571	26.91	2046611	14.29
2012-13	2467	3.44	8598	2.83	385008	9.2	2236743	9.29

Source: AICTE statistics

*Total includes Engineering, Management, MCA, Pharmacy, Architecture and Hotel Management & Catering Technology (HMCT)

In the context of management education, AICTE figures indicate a drastic increase in both the number of HEIs offering the discipline as well as the student intake over the last few years (table 2). While the total number of institutes increased from 4491 in 2006-07 to 8598 in 2012-13, the number of

management institutes more than doubled from 1132 to 2467 over the same period. The student intake in management colleges during this period increased at an annual rate of more than 20% with the year 2010-11 registering a nearly 55% increase over the previous year’s numbers. The year 2012-13,

however marked only a 9.2% increase in student intake over the previous year.

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) estimates the Management discipline accounted for 16.92% of all enrolments in post-graduate courses as of 2012-13, second only to Social Sciences which accounted for 20.58% of PG enrolments. This can also be witnessed in the rapid increase in the number of institutes offering management programmes (table 2) since 2006.

At the undergraduate level, however, Management as a discipline accounted for only 2.19% of all enrolments.

Despite the increase in numbers, this sector remains an area of concern because of the lack of quality benchmarks. Keeping this in mind two educational institute accreditation bodies in

India, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) were set up. However, it is only in the 12th plan (2012-17) that the necessity for all HEIs to be accredited has been emphasised upon. As of 2012, 34.9% of universities and 15.8% of colleges had been accredited with only 10.8% of the former and 1.4% of the latter securing an A, the highest grade.

That students are seeking better quality of higher education can be borne by the fact that 1,89,500 Indian students, were enrolled in HEIs abroad (2012) as per UNESCO data, comprising the second largest population of students abroad after China which reported 6,94,400 students studying abroad. It is evident, therefore, that much needs to be done in the tertiary education sector in India.

As per 11th plan data, while total enrolments increased from 138.5 lakh in 2006-07 to 217.86 lakh by 2011-12. The corresponding figure for enrolments in the commerce & management stream was 22.87 lakhs and 34.34 lakhs respectively.

The report also identified certain problem areas in the country's tertiary education sector. The major ones included a shortage of well-trained faculty, outdated syllabi, low standards of infrastructure and limited use of technology. It was also highlighted that Indian universities compare poorly with international ones with no Indian institution figuring among the world's top 200.

For the 12th plan (2012-17), The Planning Commission has the following agenda in keeping with its objective of bringing an overall improvement in the tertiary education sector:

Expansion – Increasing the enrolment capacity of the system by growing existing institutions and encouraging establishment of new ones.

Equity – Reach out to the disadvantaged sections of society by ensuring equal access opportunities.

Excellence – Enhance the quality of education provided by focussing on research excellence and internationalizing the curricula.

Governance – improving how HEIs are managed by increasing autonomy and transparency

Funding – increasing government funding and making the environment conducive for private funding, but adopting a result-based approach.

Implementation and Monitoring – coordination across agencies

II. PAST IMPERFECT

A 2014 report by the British Council identified the following challenges that beset India's tertiary education sector:-

The supply-demand gap: With the Indian government targeting a GER of 30% by 2020, the challenge would be to increase capacity by 40 million in just 6 years.

Low quality of Teaching & Learning: The quality of education in most institutes of Higher Learning are adversely affected by factors such as shortage of faculty, outdated curricula and teaching methods, lack of quality standards, and non-convergence of research and teaching.

Constraints on Research Capacity & Innovation: Enrolment rates in PhD programmes are low thus leading to a paucity of quality researchers. Innovation is also affected by an almost non-existent academia-industry interface.

A 2012 Planning Commission-FICCI-Ernst & Young report made six recommendations that could drastically improve the quality of tertiary education. These include - Merit-based student financing, Internationalization of education, Enabling a research environment, High quality faculty, Improved technology for education delivery, and Employability.

III. HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S AGENDA

According to the Planning Commission's 11th five-year plan estimates less than 20% of the potential 120 million students were enrolled in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in the country, as compared to the global average of 26%. The report further estimates that the number of eligible students are expected to double by 2020 making the need to improve access to affordable higher education even more urgent.

IV. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality can be defined as an outcome, a property, or a process. Therefore it is not surprising that the phrase "quality

teaching” has been given several definitions because definitions of quality are “stakeholder relative” (Harvey and Green., 1993). Tam (2001) also found that all the stakeholders held their own view of what quality in education means to them. Some scholars define quality in higher education as the process of quality enhancement (Kumar, 2013).

To ensure that higher education, particularly professional education, is able to deal with market and technological changes coupled with global requirements, it is important for institutions offering higher education to use appropriate curricula, course materials and teaching methodologies that are not only up-to-date, but also effective from learner’s point of view (T. Sudha, 2013).

Kara & DeShields (2004) reported that ‘faculty performance’ and ‘classes’ have a significant impact on student satisfaction. Faculty performance was interpreted behaviourally in terms of professionalism, understanding and responsiveness to student needs and feedback. ‘Classes’ on the other hand covered dimensions such as cognitive development, career programs, and business skills.

Sudharani D. Ravindran & Kalpana M. (2012) in their study conducted in higher education institutes at Coimbatore, India, found that each of the 6 institution quality factors identified – location, academics, image, infrastructure, cost and personnel, had a significant relationship with student satisfaction.

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) “is the total student enrolment in a given level of education, regardless of age expressed as percentage of the corresponding eligible official age group population in a given school year”. The eligible official age group considered for tertiary education is 18-23 years.

V. METHODOLOGY AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to evaluate the perception of post graduate management students on selected parameters, both academic and infrastructural. The study was conducted at selected management institutes in Delhi & NCR.

Convenience sampling technique was used wherein a sample size of 120 students from four reputed management institutes in Delhi NCR was taken and administered structured questionnaires. Our study used a multiple item instrument which required respondents to rate on a 5 point Likert scale their degree of satisfaction with the management institute in regard to factors such as knowledge of faculty, course content, various attributes of institute infrastructure and the institute’s role in developing students.

The data collected was further supplemented with viewpoints received in focus group interviews. The following results emerged after the data was collected and analysed :

Table 3: Student’s Responses Reflecting Their Perception On the Selected Parameters/Dimensions (All Responses In Percentages)

Dimensions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers are Competent and Knowledgeable	4.5	0	14.9	59.7	20.9
Course Content is Relevant	4.5	4.5	14.9	58.4	17.7
Focus on knowledge development	4.5	5.9	9	65.7	14.9
Focus on Skills development	7.5	7.5	16.4	52.2	16.4
Focus on Attitude Development	4.5	13.4	20.9	43.3	17.9
Facilities(common rooms, wash rooms, cafeteria)matching students’ expectations	8.9	23.9	19.4	41.8	6
Library is well equipped	4.5	4.5	13.4	52.2	25.4
Relevant workshops and Seminars being conducted	4.4	7.5	25.4	55.2	7.5
Students being prepared adequately to meet career challenges	3	10.4	26.9	50.7	9
Institute is Responsive to students’ placement concerns	2.9	29.9	13.4	44.8	9
Institute’s interaction with the	2.9	17.9	28.4	44.8	6

industry and community is well organized					
Institute puts in constant efforts to enhance its grading/rankings	4.4	11.9	28.4	46.3	9
No regrets for decision to take admission in my current institute	7.4	4.5	29.9	47.8	10.4
Overall satisfied with Course	4.4	4.5	6	58.2	26.9
Overall satisfied with institute	5.9	7.5	23.9	46.3	16.4

It was found that a majority of the students were satisfied with their faculty as they felt that their teachers were highly knowledgeable and skilful in teaching their respective subjects. They were of the opinion that their teachers were capable of delivering effective lectures and handling the classes properly. A few, however, believed that some of the faculty members focused more on completing their syllabus in a haste rather than being experimental and trying to make a value addition by moving beyond the boundaries of the set University syllabi. A majority (75%) of the respondents found the course content to be relevant whereas the rest found that it should be updated to match the present day requirements.

Though the respondents agreed that students’ knowledge development was a prime concern for their colleges, it was felt by some that adequate emphasis was not being given on developing requisite skills or bringing positive attitudinal changes in the management students. They did not find a major change in their personalities as far as the skills and attitude dimensions were concerned.

Another area of concern was that, though, by and large, the respondents were happy with the quantity or number of seminars or workshops being conducted by their respective institutes, a sizeable number of them were not sure of their relevance as they felt that quantity was being given more importance rather than quality or relevance of such co-curricular exercises.

Students also seemed to be satisfied in general with the library facilities of their colleges though some of them wanted new editions of certain text and reference books to be added. Hygiene was another area of concern which emerged in this study. Students wanted better cleanliness when it came to maintenance of the canteens, common rooms and the washrooms.

Another major Finding which seemed somewhat alarming was that almost half of the respondents did not feel that their Institute’s interaction with the industry and community is well organized. They were also not satisfied with the functioning of the placement cell and wanted it to be more proactive. Almost half of the respondents were not sure about their responses or replied negatively when asked if students in their college are being prepared adequately to meet career challenges which lie ahead in the corporate world. Respondents were also of the opinion that their institutes should make efforts towards overall improvement on various parameters, both academic and infrastructural, so as to enhance their quality grading.

The findings cannot be said to be very encouraging as almost 40% of the respondents said that they regret the decision of taking admission in the Institute/college they are studying and would not recommend others to take admission there. Interestingly enough, the students said that they were happy with the course (MBA/PGDM) which they were pursuing but overall satisfaction with the educational institute where they were studying was low.

VI. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be understood that developing successful future managers is not an easy task. Higher education involves very specific quality parameters and an educational institute should constantly work on improving on these parameters to make a worthwhile contribution and ensure sustainability in a cut-throat competitive scenario. The following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

Faculty members should think of some creative and innovative ways of imparting knowledge instead of sticking to the traditional teaching pedagogy. It is important to supplement the university syllabi with some latest content, information and examples which will enhance the knowledge base of the students. Moreover, it is essential for any good institute to have a judicious mix of full-time and part-time faculty members. The full-time faculty team provides the continuity and monitoring that is required over the two-year period, apart from providing any hand-holding required by students. The part-time faculty team can give students the much needed external exposure, contacts in industry, and access to real time projects.

Similarly, Pedagogy should be such which focuses on skill development and cultivating a positive attitude rather than just focusing on theories and the ‘knowledge’ dimension. Discussions, open interactions, Management games and analytical case study sessions should be a regular part of the curriculum. Focus should be on shedding the inhibitions and developing Confidence and better communication and decision making skills in the students which are the keys to success in the corporate world. The teaching techniques must, whenever and wherever possible, try to simulate the work environment that students will find in their profession. As such, the goal should be to find ways to develop professional experiences while students are still enrolled in education. The purpose should be to create teaching tools which can provide knowledge about the activities and roles that management graduates will have in the corporate world.

VII. CONCLUSION

While arranging events like Seminars, Conferences, guest lectures or industrial visits, the focus should be on the intended value addition, relevance and practicality of these as such activities go a long way in providing invaluable inputs and building the KSA set of the students. Students should play an integral role in both planning and execution of such events and quality rather than quantity should be focused on at every stage. Unfortunately most of the private institutes are focusing on increasing the number of such activities to have a loaded prospectus and to create an impression on the stakeholders without paying much heed to the quality or relevance concerns, which is not an encouraging trend.

Another seemingly minor but a very important suggestion pertains to the hygiene concerns of the students. The institute's canteen, common rooms and wash rooms should be maintained properly and cleanliness should be ensured so that the health of the students and staff does not suffer. Physical infrastructure and the availability of a well-stocked library, modern computer centres, well maintained classrooms etc., go a long way in reflecting the quality of education the institute is providing.

A very important dimension which needs to be worked on is the Industry-Institute interphase. A factor that need not specially be emphasised is the reputation a given management institute commands and the image it perpetuates in the industry. While it can be said that it is natural for older institutes to have a better reputation than the ones that have started recently, it cannot always be generalised. Institutes have to work proactively to enhance interactions and liaisoning with the industry so that the students derive the maximum exposure and benefits. Regular industrial visits, short term trainings and inviting experts from industries to interact with the students would go a long way in providing the much needed 'feel' of the real corporate world to the students who would benefit a lot from such planned interventions. It should be remembered that students opt for a management course as it gives them a competitive edge in their career and helps them in advancing their career at a rapid pace, and their expectations should be met.

Placement concerns of the students should be addressed seriously. In fact having a good liaisoning with the industry is the key to effective placements. With management institutes mushrooming all over the country students are not taking institutes' placement claims at face value, and scrutinising them more closely.

Also, to ensure proactive interventions, constant feedback from the students should be sought where they can talk about their definitions of 'Quality Education and Quality experiences'. Students' viewpoints have to be found through discussions and observations of what gives them joy of learning, and not just enjoyment without learning. If the teaching and learning process conforms to their ideas about what is Quality education, students would certainly enjoy learning.

It has to be understood that the quality of Higher education is instrumental in creating successful professionals who can add value to their organizations and the society at large. High quality and relevant higher education is able to equip students with the knowledge, skills and core transferable competences which they need to succeed after graduation, within a high quality learning environment which recognises and supports good teaching.

Stakeholders need to have confidence in the quality of higher education. Every higher education institution should have a rigorous system of internal quality assurance. Also, within higher education institutions, student satisfaction and retention is a critical factor that warrants much attention and devotion of resources due to its significant impact on the overall success of these institutions.

As suggested by the findings in this study, Management institutes need to gear up to meet the expectations of their students and make them more employable. The perceived value of a particular course and an institute is important in attracting and retaining loyal and motivated students. The institutes should focus on bringing constant improvements on various academic and infrastructural parameters so that the students can realise their potential optimally and pass out as potentially employable and successful professionals. Standard of education has to be regularly monitored and upgraded so that the goodwill of the Institute enhances and the alumni become its proud ambassadors who encourage fellow peers to enrol and to seek education at their alma mater. The aim of an Institute should be to realize all benefits through loyal students/graduates and in turn to provide them all benefits rendered from programmatic excellence.

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