

ISSN : 2347-503X

# Research Chronicler

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal



**Vol II Issue IV : May 2014**

**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

[www.research-chronicler.com](http://www.research-chronicler.com)

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A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Volume II Issue IV: May – 2014

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## Redefining 'Quality' through Student Participation: A Holistic Perspective

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### Abstract

It is our recent realization that 'education' has to be defined in terms of what it is expected to promote in larger social interest. It is a continual process of empowering our generation to reach excellence in order to contribute and belong to society. 'Quality' in Education is not an exclusive concept to be defined by the standards of established Management Principles, but it has to be understood from perspectives which include social, cultural, economic, geographical and universal dimensions. Though in the area of Management Science 'quality' concepts are interpreted from consumer perspectives, issues related to defining 'quality education' can never be dilated on the same line of reasoning. What is predominantly important in administering quality in Education is 'collective participation' of all the stack holders.

**Key Words:** Quality concepts, defining standards, feedback mechanism, instructional diagnosis

Quality in Education refers to a kind of education which serves the academic purpose of the students by adhering to the norms prescribed. It also relates to creating an environment which fosters independent learning through promoting a value system which advocates the best practices of the profession and thereby enabling the stake holders to get 'the due returns' for their investment of interest'. This can be achieved only through collaborative efforts but not through administratively controlled mechanism which is often proved to be counterproductive in the long run. Hence it is important to have a realistic understanding of the expectations of quality before we proceed further. This brings us to the question of academic policy or quality document which details not only the professional responsibility of the members involved but also other commitments

regarding social obligations and national interests.

Quality is a concept which is contemplated in the policy document of the university or college. It evolves from different factors which dominate the normal functioning of the administration. It is never imported from outside though it is subjected to the influences from extraneous factors too. Like all matters related to politics are local, quality is also 'a local concept'. The biggest challenge of any university administration is to convert the quality concept to quality culture. For which, there should be co-ordination and co-operation at different levels between the people concerned who make the system run.

In order to create such a favorable academic environment on the campus all those who are engaged in the process are expected to rededicate themselves by reminding themselves of their commitment to

profession. In this context, the most important group, which is expected to come up to the standards of expectation, is the teachers. They are often flattered as 'the pillars of an organization'. They are the people who decide, determine, deliver and demonstrate 'the quality' that an institution seeks to promote. There is no doubt that their performances in their respective contexts are 'the best' of theirs, still, it is debatable if they are matching the 'standards of expectations'.

Here we need to address two issues. The first issue is pertaining to defining 'standards' and the second one refers to 'whose standards' we are talking about. By the term 'standard' in the field of quality education we refer to 'any or all sorts of attempts and directions which are made and contemplated in the quality statement in order to give the students who have the faith in the system what they deserve'. The students' contexts should never be ignored in this discourse on 'Quality Management' in academic matters.

The students in our classes reflect the changing demographics of our nation. They are pooled in from different social and economic categories which are subjected to influences from the market forces. The students, whom we encounter every day, in social level, do have a realization and dream to get their due share of wealth by bringing 'meaning' to their lives through their quality contribution. For which, the start point is the stage in which they get education. Hence, in this context 'standard' is defined in terms of the set of skills and scope of knowledge and range of exposure which are required to get placed in the society. Nevertheless, the term

'standard' is not a fixed entity. It changes with the changing contexts and expectation. The society's expectations and the demands of the market forces contribute to the cultivation of standards in education either directly or indirectly. Hence standards of expectations are reflections of reasonable changes and demands influenced by employability factors.

To promote the expected standards in any education system there are many methods, mechanisms and procedures. Student Feedback system is one such which gives a significant insight to the administrators. Student feedback plays a crucial role in improving quality education in any given context. Though different universities have varied methods of analysis one common factor connected to evaluation is professional ethics reflecting academic objectivity. The parameters of evaluation too differ a lot in its categorization of different skill sets and emphasis.

Student Feedback is an essential input for the university administration to make decision with reference to policy matters and educational issues. The system in place works in three different levels. I would like to focus only on the aspect of student feedback mechanism and how it helps the administration to take decisions appropriate to improve the quality. Firstly, every university has a mechanism to take feedback from the students through scientifically tested methods. Some of these methods are conventional and some others are non-conventional. The conventional method includes providing each student with questionnaire which has a list of items which seek information related to teachers'

efficiency in the classroom, the content, the methodology, the materials, personal traits and any other matter which may help the administration to decide the further course of action.

However, it is to be borne in mind that the feedback obtained on teachers will also be used for academic purposes. The university is of the opinion that every teacher is expected to perform his best in the classroom and also the teacher can contribute much better if he is continually inspired, motivated, encouraged and supported. Hence feedback obtained will be referred to the quality control board which works in department wise to analyze various matters related to quality assurance and control. The data collected on the teacher's performances will help them to arrange training programs or induction programs or developmental interaction programs or any other programs appropriate for the teachers in the process of improvement. In other words, the collected information will help the Board to assist the teachers who are faltering, to motivate the teachers who are tired and to encourage the teachers who are indecisive.

It is our common knowledge that universities and colleges offer competitive packages to the teachers in expectation of quality performance. They can't afford to tolerate mediocrity on the part of the teacher. Moreover, unlike most of the Indian universities wherein the students' voice is ignored in terms of their demand for quality, in foreign universities, the students play 'the' key role. The top administration is always very much within the reach of the students at any given time. There is a system

in place which encourages the students to give feedback on any aspect of teaching on a daily basis online.

Foreign universities have begun appreciate the involvement of students in enhancing standards. In most of the foreign universities including those located in Gulf Regions every student has been provided with an online account where his details regarding the courses he takes, course materials, learning resources, the course instructor's information, assignment topics and other information related to academic policy matters will be found. There is an open online forum which can be accessed by anyone wherein the student can post any question or raise any doubt related to teaching or content. These will be administered by a moderator whose job is only regulate such postings if found 'offensive' or with 'mala-fide intentions'. But, such comments or opinions will never be counted by the administration, but they serve as 'a hint' for the teacher, if he finds anything 'worthy of attention'.

The universities by and large are found to be very much influenced by the opinion that some of teachers fail to recognize the need for improvement. They tend to think that they are already doing a good job. This perception reduces their academic interest. No matter how good a professor is in his classroom, still there is room for improvement. This is the spirit expected of in order to bring the best out of student feedback.

There is a misconception that needs to be addressed here. There is a popular belief that student feedback is the only source through

which information about teacher's performance can be obtained. This is not true. The student feedback mechanism will work smoothly only when a few others measures corollary to it are also followed. There are other sources such as classroom observation, self- appraisal, and evaluation of sample of instructional material, course plan and course description. These sources help the quality control office to get a perspective on the teacher's performance in an indirect way. Also, the teacher too is aware of the expectation on a daily basis. Hence, obtaining information in such ways normally prepares the teachers to accept student feedback in a realistic manner.

The second misconception is there is a standard or ready-made feedback form available to all the departments irrespective of the courses. This is also not all true. Every course has its own constituents and the best judge of what constitutes a course is the subject teacher. Hence, the quality control department normally places a request with the teacher concerned to prepare 'parameters' of evaluation for the courses he is teaching. The teachers can decide on the set of questions to be included and how the feedback form is to be structured.

Every feedback form includes four sections. The first section has a list of questions which can answered in terms of 'yes' or 'no' or in terms of 'agree' or 'disagree' or grading with '1' or '2' or '3'. This is called diagnostic feedback section wherein the students will be asked to give the facts about certain things. The third area related to 'subjective' feedback. In this section, the students will find a lot of open-ended

question related to teacher's performance and traits the third section is 'the space' given to the students to write about any matter related their experience of being students.

The following is the list of items on which teacher's effectiveness in the classroom is evaluated. It is based on the Oklahoma Criteria for Effective Teaching Performance. There are five broad areas on which evaluation is done and each of the five has a few sub-categories. They are as follows:

1. Teacher Management Indictors
  - a. Preparation
  - b. Routine
  - c. Discipline
  - d. Learning Environment
2. Teacher Instructional Indicators
  - a. Establishes Objectives
  - b. Stresses Sequence
  - c. Relates Objectives
  - d. Involves All Learners
  - e. Explains Content
  - f. Models
  - g. Adjusts Based on Environment
  - h. Guides Practice
  - i. Provides for independent Practice
  - j. Establishes Closure
3. Teacher Product Indicators
  - a. Lesson Plans
  - b. Student Files
  - c. Grading Patterns
  - d. Student Achievement Indicators
4. Professionalism
  - Performs duties on time
  - Responds professionally to administrative requests and direction
  - Participates in college related activities

- Cordial relation with students and colleagues
- Exhibits professional growth
- Demonstrates progress in utilizing the resources

#### 5. Personal Attributes

- Meets difficult situations directly
- Demonstrates self-control
- Demonstrates patience and empathy for others
- Uses sound judgment
- Displays enthusiastic /positive approach

There are some matters on which student feedback does not count. The area wherein professional knowledge is required such as information about the course material or about a text used in the class is kept within the closed circle. Instead, the students may be asked to give their opinion such what they have learnt from a course or what they think about the ability of the teacher to communicate or if the students find any instance of objectionable behavior on the part of teacher or whether the teacher generates any sort of research interest so and so forth.

It is to be noted that formal feedback on teacher is taken three times in a given semester. The first one is on the beginning of the course after a few weeks of instruction; the second one is just before the end of the semester and the third one is after examinations are over. Each feedback contains a set of twenty questions covering four sections which include information related to the course content, course material, assignments and projects, and teacher performance. These feedbacks are

generally used for both improving teaching efficiency and to provide rationale for personnel decision.

Apart from these formal feedbacks there are also some non-conventional methods that are also used. They include:

1. Interviews
2. Student Evaluation Committee
3. Quality Control Circle
4. Small Group Instructional Diagnosis
5. Student-Visitor Program.

The interviews are the accidental encounters with teachers by the students. They may meet the teachers on different occasions and they share their experience of interaction through a channel provided to them. The student evaluation committee is formed within a class which looks into the general concerns raised by the students while following lectures. Quality control circle is a team formed within student affairs committee with a representative from each class. Small group instructional diagnosis refers to 'having a small group' of students who have been normally selected by the teacher based on his previous knowledge from whom the teacher solicits feedback for improvement. Student visitor is one who is an outsider but a special invitee (on the teacher's request). But, the feedbacks obtained through these channels do not hold any serious merit except to facilitate the teacher towards understanding the changing dynamics of his classroom expectations.

To conclude, in order create a culture for quality there is a need for an open-minded academic dialogue on the part of all the stake-holders. Quality in education can be obtained only through the democratic



process of accommodating the interests of all those concerned. There should be firmness in our objectives towards quality

education but flexibility in our approach to reach them. Only then, the quality we all aspire for would become a reality.

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