

Excellence, equity and efficiency of education :

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INTRODUCTION: Based on causal curiosity, a university is an assembly of intellects—an invisible capital more durable than plants and machines. One of its aims is induction of the young into the best that has been thought and known. A university has therefore dual role. It is force for change and improvement of human destinies. It is guardian and conservator of the past too. A university is robbed of its catholicity when it ceases to be so.

Only 7 universities, all government financed, in a country of 110 million is far from adequate by any standard. It is not surprising that only 3 out of every 100 higher education age-group population go to the universities as against 8 in India (1980) and 8-15 in the other developing countries. One of the reasons why they out distance Bangladesh is that they walk on two legs viz. public university and private university. Bangladesh trails behind in spite of the fact that the government financed universities are inundated by the waves of admission seekers.

EXCELLENCE

Excellence is a concern of higher education because the dynamics of development are entrenched in the search for and pursuit of excellence in the education system as a whole but with added emphasis in the higher educational institutions which represent the potential and realisable capacity of the system at its

ultimate point. In this sense, excellence of education is a context bound concept about quality of education, though it is not easy to perceive it in absolute terms. The necessity of judging excellence has to be aimed at, achieved, measured and promoted differentially at different stages of education and at different levels of socio-economic development of a country. Thus, as a time-free concept of excellence changes over time and as a time-bound concept maintains a logical relationship with minimum required that are relevant to discipline, needs, expectations and ideal. Excellence a complex and dynamic entity is thus difficult to define. But the pursuit of excellence has to be pursued by the norms of relevance, though these two goals could be combined in infinite ways in a two-dimensional space.

Excellence can be perceived at various levels of integration of the higher education system e.g.

I. Least Integration: (a) excellence as individual attainment of (i) students (ii) faculties.

II. Minimal Integration: (b) excellence as institutional attainments.

III. Intermediate Integration: (c) excellence as higher education systemic attainments.

IV. Maximal Integration: (d) excellence as total education systemic attainments.

Relevance is understood in goal perspectives. Individual objectives of higher education range from enlightenment, dignity, intellectual

with what is known to the subject on the one hand, and what is known with realm of the unknown that needs to be explored. This is done through integration and conversion of information into knowledge through intellectually creative process.

Institutional attainments are not mere aggregation of individual attainments. At this level, primary impact of rising social, economic and political expectation manifested in the social demand vis-a-vis education has to be encountered. This not only implies meeting increased demand of higher education and diversification of it but also requires meeting the challenge of knowledge explosion and preparedness for application thereof. Higher education must continually build capacity for adjustment, growth and change. This capacity is critically dependent on availability and use of resources in the constituent units as well as on such factors as quality of curriculum, physical facilities, work environment, intellectual enrichment of teachers, judicious administration, pedagogy and finally students.

Higher education system, comprised of constituent institutions which has the potential to reinforce each other, critically depends on feeder institutions. Besides institutional efficiency, the systemic efficiency can be enhanced through proper interlinkage exchange of intellectual exploits, joint programmes, joint appointments, research and such other actions. Pooling of resources for remedial and experimental work is always helpful.

Higher education system is a sub-system of the education system and cannot stand in isolation; a fragmented system is hardly able to meet national objectives effectively. Pockets of excellence in higher education without appropriate backward linkages can only result in inequity and sub-optimality; though resource constraint often forces upon us such a solution. On the other hand democratisation and extension beyond capacity create sub-standard institutions leading to wastage.

EQUITY

Equity has been variously perceived viz.

- (a) equal access to the education system;
- (b) equal participation in the education system;
- (c) equal attainments through education system; and
- (d) equal opportunity after completion of the education process.

Enrolment in higher education in all countries, particularly the developing countries show considerable variation caused by economic, social and demographic factors.

(i) There are disparities between regions caused by disparities in dispersal of institutions of higher learning, socio-economic condition of clientele group and demographic and cultural factors, rural-urban disparity is an example of this.

(ii) Gender inequality in higher education is said to be a product of male domination (i.e. role of women in home and productive activities).

(iii) Ethnic inequality is often explained by the absence of modernising catalyst.

(iv) Inequality of access to higher education amongst socio-economic groups is explained by the terms and conditions of higher education and perception of benefits from it. As the terms and conditions are defined by dominant groups without a conscious policy inequality gets compounded over time.

While access refers to potentiality, participation is the reality. Therefore provision of access does not ensure

advancement to employment, career building, wealth and power. National objectives have been considered to be creation and preservation of national identity and coherence, utilisation and augmentation of productive capacity, creation of capacity for reasoning to exercise judgement in national interest in social, political and economic sphere creating social consciousness to pursue goals of cooperation and justice, regenerate and preserve national culture and accelerate socio-economic transformation within the international context. One of the functions of the education system is to make goal of individual attainments consistent with national goals by making individual's urge for advancement consistent with national need for identity, preservation, change, transformation and development through appropriate policy, planning and management of higher education.

Individuals career attainment and scholastic attainments are rough indications of returns to investment and height of intellectual capital formation. But as indicators of excellence it is premised on

the assumption that students are homogeneous body with roughly homogeneous objectives. That is not so. Students are classified as (a) job seekers who look for 'skill', (b) social status seekers who are interested in acquisition of finance, dignity and statuses, (c) knowledge seekers who are interested in intellectual advancement, (d) political activists who seek broader social change through acquisition of knowledge of social dynamics, (e) disinterested or who just happen to be there and (f) anarchists who wished to defy the entire system.

Thus career development and scholastic attainments are too limited a measure for such diverse group.

Teachers' scholastic attainments are taken to be another measure of excellence. But they are also a diverse group (a) Some are primarily teachers and effectively impart existing knowledge with care (b) Some are activists and use the academic arena for propagating social, political change (c) Some are apathetic and (d) Some are anarchists as well.

An academic in order to produce excellence is required to integrate what is being taught

participation. The higher education system, differentiated as it is, is instrumental in creating control and distribution structure for intellectual property i.e. advancement in knowledge and its application. The control and distribution structure is made complicated and less accessible through establishment of finely tuned specialities that has grown in scale with the general enlargement of knowledge in society. As education, particularly higher education, is no longer a homogeneous entity, participation in coveted specialisation is more controlled and less accessible while that in traditional component is over crowded.

Equity in post educational opportunity could theoretically be guaranteed only by restricting admission at various levels and specialised action at a point where marginal returns to investment are equalised. The market system does not seem to ensure it due to rigidities, inflexibilities. The regimented system does not seem to attain equilibrium and finality after head of the standings went to the Bulgarian each of them played opponents each of the score of the determined by the score of the a better points breakdown, Gdansk but won the title on points with Poland's Jack Spasov finished equal on