

INSTITUTION BUILDING PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract *The present educational environment has witnessed enormous change in the recent times. Higher educational institutions (HEI) are facing an enormous challenge to sustain their relevance and to develop themselves as centres of excellence. Growing aspirations and needs of students and changing expectations of teaching staff and other stakeholders have posed immense pressure before academic leaders and policymakers to develop a performance-driven culture. It calls for the role of academic leaders and policymakers to relook and revisit institution-building practices, which would result in enhancing institutional competitiveness at world academic level. Keeping this in view, the present paper will make an attempt to examine the perception of 182 teaching personnel towards institution-building practices prevailing in sample select institutions, draw conclusions and suggest measures for improving and sustaining institution-building process of study institutions. The data whatsoever collected was analysed using SPSS 20 version and statistical tests were employed accordingly to suit the present study. The findings of the study though reveal that there exists a favourable attitude of teaching personnel towards institution-building practices, but it needs to be further enriched and improved for gaining academic excellence, in general, and attaining global competitiveness, in particular.*

Keywords: *Institution Building, Leadership, Academic Excellence, Teaching Staff*

INTRODUCTION

Higher educational institutions (HEIs) play a significant role in the transformation of knowledge and the development of human capital. HEIs are considered as an important pillar of nation building as they play a critical role towards growth and development of society. HEI is aimed at identifying and nurturing the talent and capabilities of individuals, which lead towards development of human capital. Bolden et al. (2012) and Jones et al. (2012) opined that institutions of higher learning are witnessing immense pressure due to internationalization of education, changing government policies and rapid growth in global economy. The role of HEI over the years has gone through massive transformation due to changes in academic environment at global level. The dynamics of educational atmosphere at world level has shifted the focus of academicians and policymakers at the national level towards rethinking and revisiting their educational policies. According to Mufeed (2018), academic institutions need to become as the centres of excellence with a focus on enriching the developmental aspects of their employees both teaching and non-teaching staff, who contribute significantly towards institution-building process.

At present, there are around 800 universities and more than 38,000 colleges imparting education among young graduates which has made India the third largest education system in the world. With a focus on enrolling more students at college and university level and to meet the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) target of 30.00% by 2030, coming up of HEIs whether private or state-funded universities or colleges is not a surprise. The point here is that just by adding more institutions to our armoury would resolve the issue of attaining academic excellence or are we just aiming the wrong target. The issue of equity, access and relevance of our higher education system can be made more effective and result oriented if academic leaders envisage a broader strategy that forgo old practices of teaching and learning and adapt more effective teaching practices with a focus on experiential learning and promoting critical thinking in classrooms, which would enhance skill development of students and make them market ready. Somanlingam and Shanthakumari (2013) highlighted that the dynamic business environment characterised with technology transformation, demand for competent employees and ever changing aspirations of society has reinforced the role of academic leaders to build and develop their students as capable and

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skilled human resource for contributing towards overall national development. Various rankings by international agencies on higher education have time and again pointed out that Indian higher education system is not focusing much in areas of teaching, research and learning, academic–industry linkages and importantly generation of employability at graduate levels, and as such are not able to attain academic excellence at global level. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt. of India, came up with the initiative of setting up of National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in the year 2016 with the purpose to ensure that universities are performing well on broad parameters such as teaching and learning, research, outreach and inclusiveness, graduate employability and perception so as to strive towards initiating and sustaining institution-building process, in general, and attaining global academic competitiveness, in particular. The development of world-class educational institutions is debated at local, national and global platforms. FICCI (2014) reported that a developing country like India needs around 3.3 billion talented and skilled human resources by 2020, who can play active role towards transforming economic competence of the country to higher levels. This requires Indian HEIs to make themselves more competitive and relevant in producing capable workforce that meets global expectations and needs. The success and failure of educational institutions lie in their ability to be proactive in managing and addressing the issues that are confronting them and how much they are competent to develop their strengths and explore their opportunities by addressing their internal weaknesses and global threats. The need of the hour demands HEIs and academic leaders to focus on institution building, which would foster a competitive academic environment and sound academic practices in terms of quality research, teaching and learning, graduate employability, academic leadership, academic–industry linkages and overall institutional culture.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

On the basis of reviewing past research studies, the following objectives have been formulated:

- To study the perception of teaching personnel of sample study institutions towards institution-building (IB) practices,
- To examine the perception of teaching personnel towards IB practices across gender,
- To assess the perception of teaching personnel towards IB practices across experience, and
- To draw conclusions and suggest measures for improving IB practices for achieving academic excellence.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

In view of the above-laid down objectives, following hypotheses have been drawn for the present study:

- Perception of teaching personnel towards IB practices differs significantly across gender.
- Perception of teaching personnel towards IB practices differs significantly across experience.

INSTITUTION-BUILDING PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The concept of institution building is continuously evolving and gaining immense relevance and popularity as it has an impact on overall society and nation development. According to Kalro and Sharma (2010), “Institution building is about creating sustainable organizations which overtime continues to be guided by the mission and vision of the organization and have an abiding value system”. Rao (1990) advocated that IB process in educational institution focuses on effectiveness and creativity rather than efficiency and uniformity and that former has to be towards IB practices in terms of teaching and research, performance management system, faculty development, academic culture, and shared values and vision. Gmelch and Buller (2015) stressed that it is the academic leader that has to transform institutions for better performance which would result in IB process. The educational institutions are one of the most precious assets of a nation and as such their development and progress has implications for all its stakeholders’ right from students, teachers, and employers and for community it serves. In this connection, the significance and relevance of IB practices in attaining academic excellence is discussed below.

Quality Teaching and Research

Quality teaching is aimed at using innovating and unique pedagogical tools by teachers, which encourages students to develop interest in learning and improving their performance. Ramsden (1998) pointed out that for institutions to attain excellence and match international standards of education, promotion of effective research and teaching is of paramount significance. Research in education is necessary in order to provide a basis for educational planning. It is one of the main fields that should be embedded in higher education curriculum (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Quality research is gaining immense popularity among academicians and policymakers, as it enhances the country’s resource base and results in institutional competitiveness. Quality of research is an important indicator for attaining academic excellence and enhancing the economic and social development of the country.

Curriculum Design and Development

Null (2011) and Mednick (2006) stated that curriculum refers to a continuous process of learning activities designed and planned by educational institutions and carried out by faculty members in a particular academic program with a view to increase the students' knowledge, learning outcomes and experiences. O'Neill (2015) stated that there is a growing need to redesign the curriculum as per the needs and expectations of students and employers and, in this process, it would lead in attracting students from diverse backgrounds and would also create the doors of employers open for them.

Industry Academic Linkages

Academic-industry linkages play a critical role in contributing towards enhancing nation's global competitiveness by fostering stability and change, improving skill development, and promoting technology-driven sharing of knowledge (Esham, 2008; Gumpert & Snyderman, 2002). Sebuwufuetal (2012) stated that university cannot function in isolation for creating and disseminating knowledge unless academic-industry collaboration is promoted for smooth delivery of academic operations regarding technology transfer and student's skill upgradation.

Graduate Employability

The concept of graduate employability encompasses achievement skills of individuals and understanding about their personal attributes that would increase their employment opportunities in their selected field of job and would eventually contribute not only towards their own progress but also benefit community and economy at large, Yorke and Knight (2004). Rosenberg et al. (2012) stated that need has been felt by HEIs to provide employment avenues to students by developing their employability skills.

Academic Leadership

Academic leaders are considered as institution builders as they play a critical role in articulating vision for their institutions through sound strategy formulation. They act as change agents in transforming their institution as the centre of excellence. Bolman and Gallos (2011) and Gmelch & Buller (2015) pointed out that due to the sensitivity and complex nature of environment, the significance and need for developing effective academic leaders in capacity of heads of department and deans of faculty, who have the vision and commitment in building institutions as the centre of excellence, is ever increasing. University leaders, more importantly heads of departments, must communicate the vision and purpose of the institution to their teaching

personnel and must also exhibit their skills in persuading and inspiring them for better performance and meeting the set goals.

Performance Management System

Srivastava and Yadav (2015) viewed performance appraisal as an effective tool in properly utilizing the efforts of human resources in attaining strategic goals of organization by providing them a proper and timely feedback. Bayo-Mariones et al. (2013) pointed out that Performance Appraisal System (PAS) is an effective tool in the hands of organizations to recognize and appreciate good performers and to identify, train and improve weak areas poor performers. However, in educational institutions 360-degree appraisal system can be more productive and result oriented where each faculty member or employee would be assessed by his superiors, head of departments, peer groups, through self-appraisal and from students (Mufeed, 2006).

Training and Development

Training and development are very critical in enhancing employee adaptability, flexibility and motivation towards his job and thereby increases his work performance. Olaniyan and Ojo (2008) enumerated that training is vital as it increases skills and develops attitude of individuals, enhance productivity and improves quality of work life in the organizations. Shaheen et al. (2013) in their study of HEIs in Pakistan opined that training is essential in improving student's skills and knowledge. They further elucidated that training and development programs should be at par with international standards where focus should be made on leadership development programs for enhancing their knowledge and professional skills.

Institution Culture

Bartell (2003) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) viewed that the characteristics of organizational culture are projected through its infrastructure, faculty development, student participation and interaction. Vasyakin et al. (2016), in their study on organizational culture in HEIs, focused on developing human capital in terms of teacher and student resources by enhancing their knowledge and professional skills and by providing developmental climate which would eventually increase durability, strength and quality of organizations and enhance its overall performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The present study is exploratory-cum-descriptive in nature and was based on both primary as well as secondary data.

The primary data was collected from the respondents through a structured and well-administered questionnaire. Secondary data was obtained from the sample study institutions and research journals in this field. The data whatsoever collected was tabulated and analysed. Moreover, interpretations were drawn up from the data after applying statistical tests such as mean, percentage to mean score, standard deviation, ANNOVA, and inferential statistics.

Questionnaire Design and Development

A well-structured and well-designed questionnaire was prepared and administered in to the teaching staff of the sample selected institutions to get the primary information, regarding the various IB practices under study. The perception of respondents towards existing IB practices prevailing in their respective universities was gathered through identification of variables on the basis of past research studies and by collecting information from the subject experts regarding the same. Accordingly, a questionnaire was developed to elicit information from the respondents. The items of the questionnaire have been selected to suit the present study and reliability test was done before administrating to the respondents. The questionnaire comprised of two sections, section A and section B. Section A consists 36 items pertaining to IB practices while as Section B seeks the demographic information such as gender, designation and age. The

questionnaire is a five point Likert scale, which varies from 1 to 5 as; 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Sample Selected Institutions

Four universities were selected for the present study, which included two central and two state universities: 1) University of Jammu (JU), 2) University of Kashmir (KU), 3) Central University Kashmir, and 4) Central University Jammu. The selection of sample study institutions was made purposively while keeping into consideration 1) Age of institution (operational academic activities for more than 10 years), 2) Area of institution (covering two major regions of Jammu and Kashmir separately) and 3) Type of institution (includes both State as well as Central Universities).

Sample Selection Procedure

Simple random sampling method was used to collect data from the respondents. A total of 250 questionnaires were administered among the respondents out of which only 196 questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 78.40%. Out of 196 returned questionnaires, only 182 questionnaires were fit for final analysis and the rest were found outliers and half-filled and, hence, were discarded. Teaching staff comprised of professors, associate professors and assistant professors of sample selected institutions, consisting of 104 male and 78 female teaching staff.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Perception of Teaching Personnel Towards IB Practices

Constructs	Mean Score	% of Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Quality Teaching and Research	3.28	65.60	0.76	2 nd
Academic Industry Linkages	3.08	61.60	0.70	8 th
Curriculum Design	3.19	63.80	0.67	5 th
Institution Culture	3.27	65.40	0.64	3 rd
Graduate Employability	3.23	64.60	0.79	4 th
Academic Leadership	3.14	62.80	0.81	7 th
Performance Management System	3.16	63.20	0.76	6 th
Training and Development	3.32	66.40	0.83	1 st
Institution Building	3.20	64.00		

Note: Higher the mean score, higher the level of satisfaction.

Data Compiled by the Author for the Present Study

As is evident from Table 1, the teaching personnel of sample study institutions have reported above average satisfaction level towards IB practices with the overall mean score of 3.20 and % mean score of 64.00%. It is depicted from Table 1 that among IB practices, teaching personnel have shown

highest satisfaction level towards training and development with mean score and % mean score of 3.32 and 66.40%, respectively. Moreover, institutional culture and quality teaching and research have been viewed favourably with similar mean score and % mean score of 3.27 and 65.60%, respectively. However, teaching personnel have reported least satisfaction level towards academic-industry linkages with mean score and % mean score of 3.08 and 61.60%,

respectively. Similarly, among IB practices, teaching personnel of sample institutions showed low satisfaction level towards academic leadership and performance management system with mean score and % mean score of 3.14 and 62.80%, and 3.16 and 63.20%, respectively.

Overall, it can be observed that teaching personnel have showed above-average satisfaction level across all IB practices, which depicts that they are more or less having favourable attitude towards existing IB practices prevailing in their respective institutions.

Table 2a: Perception of Teaching Personnel Towards Institution Building Practices Across Gender

Constructs	Mean Score		Total Mean Score
	Male Teaching Staff (n = 104)	Female Teaching Staff (n = 78)	
Quality Teaching and Research	3.32	3.24	3.28
Academic-Industry Linkages	3.05	3.13	3.08
Curriculum Design	3.16	3.22	3.19
Institution Culture	3.34	3.20	3.27
Graduate Employability	3.29	3.17	3.23
Academic Leadership	3.22	3.06	3.14
Performance Management System	3.20	3.12	3.16
Training and development	3.26	3.38	3.32
Institution Building	3.23	3.17	3.20

Note: Higher the mean score, higher the level of satisfaction.

Data Compiled by the Author for the Present Study

As is evident from Table 2a, the male staff of sample study institutions have showed higher satisfaction towards IB practices with overall mean score of (3.23) as compared to female staff with overall mean score of (3.17). Male teaching staff has viewed quality teaching and research (3.32), institutional culture (3.34), graduate employability (3.29), academic leadership (3.22) and performance management system (3.20) more favourable as compared to

female teaching staff. However, female staff showed higher perception level towards academic-industry linkages (3.13), curriculum design (3.22), training and development (3.38) as compared to male teaching staff.

To know whether the difference in respondent group ‘gender’ is statistically significant or not, an independent samples test was employed. The results showed that the difference in the perception of female and male staff towards IB practices is statistically insignificant as the p value is more than .05 (Table 2b). Therefore, hypotheses 1 is not empirically supported and hence rejected.

Table 2b: Independent Samples Test (Gender)

Construct	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference
Quality Teaching and Research	.566	.309	-1.192	180	.332	0.08567
Academic Industry Linkages	.466	.383	-1.367	180	.076	-0.08745
Curriculum Design	.641	.323	-1.177	180	.056	-0.06522
Institution Culture	.509	.266	-1.198	180	.087	0.12677
Graduate Employability	.566	.398	-1.233	180	.155	0.14366
Academic Leadership	.617	.245	-1.688	180	.622	-0.16777
Performance Management System	.496	.229	-1.293	180	.177	0.08122
Training and development	.655	.345	-1.755	180	.255	-0.12654
Institution Building	.544	.591	1.355	180	.098ns	0.06016

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study.

* p < .05; ns = not significant)

Table 3: Perception of Teaching Personnel Towards Institution Building Practices Across Experience

Factor	Dependent Variable	Group	(N)	Mean Score	ANOVA	Sig*
Experience	Institution Building	> 20 Years	61	3.27	3.871	.039*
		10-20 years	76	3.21		
		Less than 10 Years	45	3.12		

Note: *P< .05

Source: Data compiled by the author for the present study.

Table 3 examines the difference in the perception of teaching personnel regarding IB practices on the basis of variable experience. It is revealed from Table 3 that teaching personnel who have more than 20 years of teaching experience are having highest perception towards IB practices with mean score of (3.27) while as teaching personnel having experience of less than 10 years showed least satisfaction towards IB practices with overall mean score of (3.12).

The perceptual differences of respondent employees regarding IB practices is statistically significant when the differences were examined on the basis of experience factor (ANNOVA = 3.871; $p < .05$). Hence, hypothesis 2 is accepted, indicating that there exists a significant difference among teaching staff across experience (sig = .039*).

STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present paper was aimed to gather responses of teaching personnel of four universities from within the state of J&K regarding their perception towards existing IB practices prevailing in their institutions. The results of the study revealed that respondents have overall perceived favourable attitude by showing above average satisfaction level towards IB practices. Further, it was revealed from the study results that among IB practices, teaching personnel have shown higher satisfaction level towards quality of teaching and research and institutional culture, whereas their satisfaction level towards IB practices such as academic leadership, academic-industry linkages and performance management system was seen comparatively low. The purpose of paper was also to analyse the perception of teaching personnel towards IB practices across two demographic variables i) age and ii) gender. The results of the study pointed out that though there exists no significant difference in the perception level of teaching personnel towards IB practices across gender, there is a significant difference in the perception level of teaching personnel towards IB across experience, which highlights that teaching personnel having more experience perceive favourable satisfaction level towards IB practices as compared to teaching personnel having comparatively less teaching experience.

SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results obtained from the present study have certain significant policy implications which, if properly addressed, can help universities to focus their resources in an effective manner in order to achieve desired outcomes and yield better results. The following implications can be drawn for immediate management attention, in order to improve the IB practices in the select study universities for attaining academic excellence.

The main implication of this research for leadership practices suggests that there is a plenty of scope for further improvement and development in the sample study universities. The academic leaders (HODs/Deans of Faculty) of the universities and HEIs need to communicate the mission and vision of the institution among its staff so that they share and accept the same for their individual and institutional development and, moreover, it would help in sustaining the institutional excellence.

The HODs/Officers must create an innovative culture by holding brainstorming sessions at workplaces where teaching personnel should feel encouraged to express their ideas/viewpoints for the overall benefit of the department in general and university in particular.

The study findings suggest that focus should be made to enrich and promote standards of teaching and research in academic institutions with focus on creating research-driven culture, which encourages critical thinking at classrooms and research labs. Further, teaching pedagogy needs to be more enriched with focus on experiential teaching and learning. Teaching should be student centric rather than teacher centric.

The findings of the study suggest that curriculum design and development has to be continuously updated and made more effective in meeting industry expectations.

The other implication of the present study highlights that academic-industry partnership needs to be promoted with sharing of expertise, knowledge, exchange of staff, student internships, which would enhance competencies and capabilities of teaching staff and will also develop employability skills of young graduates.

The finding of the study suggests that performance management system needs to be more effective and result oriented. It calls for introducing 360-degree appraisal system which would be more holistic in its approach to examine, evaluate and differentiate between good performing teachers and poor performers.

The other implication need to draw the attention of academic leaders and administration to facilitate training and development of their teaching personnel. As these activities, refresher courses and faculty development programs provide a platform in addressing the developmental aspects of teaching personnel in terms of their skills and knowledge, and making them abreast with latest developments in teaching and research.

To conclude, findings of this research study highlight the importance of IB practices for attaining and sustaining competitive advantage, thus making institution as centre of excellence.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study is faced with some limitations. Firstly, the study targeted only four universities and as such findings of the study cannot be generalized to whole population. Therefore, future research can include more universities from other parts of the country as well in order to cover wider geographical representation. Secondly, the present study gathered information from respondents at only one point time; therefore, future research can be longitudinal in nature that will provide more holistic picture about the study institutions. Thirdly, the present study analysed only select IB practices and, therefore, there is a scope of selecting and analysing other IB practices which could add more insights to present research in future.

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