CURRICULUM REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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India, the most youthful country, is at the threshold of being the most populous country of the world, surpassing China. Being the most youthful country in the world full of so much socio-economic, geographic and biological diversity brings huge challenges as well as opportunities. Opportunities in the form of demographic dividend can be reaped only if we are able to provide appropriate skill development and capacity building programmes and courses. No programme and courses of skill development and capacity building can be effective and efficient unless and until they emphasize on the curriculum reforms which is based on the multicultural environment of the country and keeps pace with the dynamic technology-sensitive research focused work environment. A good University believes in the integration of technology, research and liberal arts in nurturing the students' talents and fulfilling their aspirations by teaching them the modern skills and developing their capacity keeping in mind, the industrial and social requirement.

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INTRODUCTION

What is University? A university is a noble place where any discerning learner of any age can discuss and deliberate upon emerging idea or thought ranging from needle to nest and from astrology to astronomy. There is nothing, and can't be anything which can't be taught and learnt in the four boundaries of a University. Even using the phrase 'four-boundaries' in the context of University would be wrong philosophically, as nothing can't be beyond the purview and scope of a University. These are those temples of learning which helps immensely in the growth and development of any society. If you wish to measure the level of development of any society, just see how many good universities are located there in that particular place. A city or town with a good university is acknowledged with high esteem. Many places have become famous and have come on the world map because of the University located there. Nalanda, Beneras, Aligarh etc. have come to be famous because of the world class Universities also.

Universities are respected in the society because of the great function performed by them. According to UNESCO, because of Universities, a large proportion of the young generation is enrolled in higher education. Universities have become mass institutions in modern societies, at least in the highly developed countries, though this is less true of developing countries and newly industrializing countries. There are five major functions which a society expects its institutions of higher education to fulfill, though others could no doubt be added. Their first function lies in providing education and training within a structure which combines research and teaching. Secondly, they provide professional training. This is not, be it said, a recent development of the post-war period-ever since the Middle Ages universities have been preparing students for professions such as medicine, teaching and the law. Thirdly, they are research institutions, responsible for carrying out research in a broad range of disciplines, including the increasing amount of interdisciplinary work, and linked to this, for training a constant supply of qualified people for all fields of employment. Fourthly, they have a part to play in regional development and also in developing international contacts. And fifthly, they have a

social function in fostering the intellectual and social development of society.

They performed great services to the society by providing facilities for teaching, research and extension activities in the form of seminar, workshop, symposium etc. They are not only instructional shops responsible for the spoon feeding of the learners, rather they are responsible for the teaching of the students. Teaching is not an easy task which can be done by anyone and everyone. It's a very delicate job involving creation of conducive learning environment so that all the learners can learn in an effective and efficient manner and can achieve the predetermined objectives as given in the curriculum framework under National Educational Policy (NEP). NEP would be based on the cherished ideals of the leaders of the country. It's only through conducive favourable NEP that we can ensure bringing Indian higher education institutions in the list of top class Universities of the world. Bringing excellence in teaching-learning process of higher education institutions is one such concern repeatedly expressed by former President of India Sh. Pranab Mukherjee during various occasions. One such concern has been expressed in the following phrase:

"We must change the reality of our universities for not figuring in the list of top universities of the world. Indian universities should aim at becoming top educational institutions in the world with global standards of research, teaching and learning."

The important step to increase quality in higher education is to ensure world class curriculum in our courses. First let's discuss the concept of curriculum.

Curriculum

The word curriculum stems from the Latin verb currere, which means to run. The Latin noun curriculum refers to both a 'course' and a 'vehicle'.

In the context of education, the most obvious interpretation of the word is to view it as a course for 'learning'. The very short definition of curriculum as a ´plan for learning', used by the American Hilda Taba in 1962, therefore seems quite adequate.

There are various definitions of 'curriculum', though it is more important to understand the concept of a curriculum as encompassing all the major characteristics, types, examples and cases concerned. The most common understanding of curriculum in education refers to the subject matter and content as presented to learners. UNESCO calls this 'formal curriculum' defined as 'the planned programme of objectives, content, learning experiences, resources and assessment offered by a school' (UNESCO, 2010).

There is no single definition of the term curriculum. It generally means totality of experiences learners get while a student in some educational institution. It includes scholastic as well as non-scholastic experiences which, however, sometimes become very difficult to differentiate. Scholastic experiences provided to the learners generally in the form of classroom teaching and learning process aim at the development of the cognitive powers like thinking, problem solving etc. whereas non-scholastic experiences aim at the development of the effective and psycho-motor skills and capabilities. Non-scholastic experiences are provided outside the classroom usually but not always. For example, development of effective skills like interest in poetry, dance and drama, paintings, singing etc. require participation by the learner in such events which generally do happen in specialized literary clubs, music room etc. Similarly, psycho-motor skills like bowling or batting in cricket, bicycling, dancing etc. requires special learning places in the form of grounds etc.

Therefore, Curriculum is totality of all the experiences. It includes those experiences which have been planned by the educational administrators as well as those which are incidental, not planned but just happen. Experiences which have been well planned in advance as they have been prescribed are known as planned curriculum. Another set of experiences are known as hidden curriculum. These experiences happen because of the hidden values of the curriculum. It is always purposive and remains hidden. It's like a hidden treasure, depending upon the vision of the educational leaders. The educational institution can provide the best learning environment to its learners taking gems and diamonds from the treasure.

(John Taylor Gatto, Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum Of Compulsory Education)
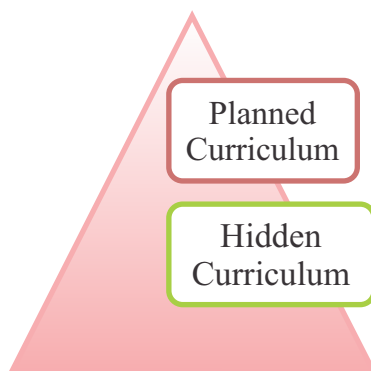

Figure 1: Curriculum Types

Emphasizing the need of hidden curriculum in the process of education, a renowned educationist and best seller author on education and pedagogy books wrote that:

"I've noticed a fascinating phenomenon in my thirty years of teaching: schools and schooling are increasingly irrelevant to the great enterprises of the planet. No one believes anymore that scientists are trained in science classes or politicians in civics classes or poets in English classes. The truth is that schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders. This is a great mystery to me because thousands of humane, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides and administrators, but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions. Although teachers to care and do work very, very hard, the institution is psychopathic - it has no conscience. It rings a bell and the young man in the middle of writing a poem must close his notebook and move to a different cell where he must memorize that humans and monkeys derive from a common ancestor."

What Function Is Performed By Curriculum?

The term 'Curriculum' has been derived from Latin term which means "a running, course" or "a quick course at full speed, swiftly, hastily". It is important to understand the Latin roots of the concept of curriculum as it was a designed experience, which means that someone or somebody, who is an expert, has to give thought to the course to be run before the actual running, and just as importantly, it had to be run speedily. Because formal education represents only a portion of a human being's life, the curriculum is not the entire life but the designed life for the students in the schools and colleges. The limitations of time itself comprise a kind of necessity to be "quick" about its use in schools.

Curriculum of any education system in a country provides a glimpse of the vision cherished by the

national leadership. For example, Lord Macaulay's (Feb. 02, 1835) vision for India is considered as the foundation stone of current education system in the country. His vision for the education system of the country, whose foundation stone was laid down by him, can be understood from the following address given by him in the British Parliament. He said that:

"I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen person who is a beggar, who is a thief such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very back backbone and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation."

From this address, we can easily infer that Lord Macaulay's vision of the education system for India was not to prepare intellectual, philosophers etc. from India but he wanted to develop an army or community of Indians who look like Indians in colour of their skin, height and weight but who thinks like English and do not oppose to their ideals and ethos. His purpose was to create group of people who can serve them better at various junior level posts and who were to be managed, supervised and administered by the Britishers at the top rungs of the hierarchy. This was the reason why pass percentage in various course was kept one third of the total marks (e.g. 33 percent out of 100 marks). His address was so impressive that afterwards it came to be known as Macaulayism. Macaulayism is the conscious policy of liquidating indigenous culture through the planned substitution of the alien culture of a colonizing power via the education system. This experience was successfully implemented in many colonies by Britishers.

Therefore curriculum is the bedrock of any education system. The development or death of any nation would broadly depend upon its education system. Education system of any country would provide the cherished ideals and values which has to be inculcated among its young generation and achieved by its teachers with the help of curriculum framework.

Curriculum Framework

Curriculum Framework is the result of curriculum design and development. Curriculum design refers to the physical act of creating the curriculum for use in the schools or colleges. This process may involve the purchase of textbooks (one kind of work plan and curriculum) and/or the writing of curriculum guides (another kind of work plan), and neither may be well connected to the other. This presents a real problem in considering the alignment of curriculum to the tests in use. Education officials like to believe that teachers follow curriculum guides when in fact the research reveals they are much more likely to be dependent upon the textbook as the actual day-to-day work plan or "real" curriculum.

Curriculum Framework means the comprehensive outlines which provides for the various model courses to be studied and activities to be undertaken by the learners. The curriculum framework provides finer outlines only some of which are compulsory and some are suggestive in nature. Compulsory courses and activities are essential and teach basics of a particular programme to the learners. Suggestive activities are part of the hidden curriculum organisation of which is dependent upon the discretion of the educational administrators. Basic part of the curriculum is generally known as syllabus which, more or less remains common for many educational institutions. It is the hidden part of the curriculum which makes or mars the reputation and goodwill of an educational institution.

It is through this hidden curriculum that educational administrators like Principal or Vice-Chancellor can enrich its various scholastic activities and help the learners develop their personality holistically. Scholastic activities, unless and until enriched with the help of non-scholastic activities also known as Co-Curricular or Extra-Curricular activities, can't ensure overall development of the learners' personality. There are different audiences for the curriculum in the educational institutions: students, teachers, parents, taxpayers, accreditation agencies, government bureaus, other political bodies and even society as a whole. The selection of the written content comprising the curriculum involves determining of all the things that could be included that are the most important. It's always known that more can be taught but due to lack of time, it can't be. So more is now being tried to teach in lesser time. However this is not a good sign. It's not good to give more stress on providing more time to the actual teaching encounters rather teachers should be given more time to plan and assess properly which generally do not happen in the country.

Imperatives Of Curriculum Reforms In India's Higher Education System

Higher education system needs complete overhauling in India in order to improve it. If India wants to be a developed nation in the near future, then it would have to focus on its education system. A robust education system is what is badly needed in India. The country has almost achieved universal access to basic education and therefore now focus has to be on the higher secondary and the higher education sectors. Issues of access, equity and quality have always been challenging targets for education leaders and administrators in the country to achieve, particularly at the higher education level. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) which is the total enrolment in higher education as percentage of the population in 18-23 years age group has increased up to 25% now which was just 10% in the year 2004-05. There is gender gap in enrollment as GER of girls is marginally lower than that of boys at all India level and also in respect of most of the States. However, we are still far behind as the government of India has set a target to increase GER to 30% in 2020-21. GER was 39.4 % in China, 56.5% in UK and 86.7 in the USA. Therefore, the country needs to do more in terms of increasing GER in higher education if we wish to compete with the world powers.

India is one of the most youthful countries. The NYP-2014 has defined 'youth' as persons in the age-group of 15-29 years. The population in this age group is full of ideas, energy and passion, combined with an unmatched ability to bring about meaningful change in social behaviour and attitudes. They can challenge stereotypes, embrace good practices and think out-of-the-box. Thus, their potential to make a real difference in the time of man-made or natural disasters must not be underestimated. By 2020, India's share of youth in its total population is expected to be 34.33 per cent. Through an improved access to education along with better understanding of risks and opportunities, the youth in India can help the country and contribute towards making unprecedented leaps towards the achievement of development goals such as alleviation of poverty and injustice, reduction of disaster risks or provision of solutions for adapting to climate change.

❖ **Curriculum Should Be Futuristic**

A world class curriculum should be futuristic. Unless and until, we keep in mind the long term demands of the country, its society, economy, industry etc. we can't compete with the international higher education. Futuristic curriculum would adopt learner centered approach which helps the learners to be life-long learners. Life-long learners are more empowered citizens as they can accommodate themselves in a more intelligent way in the increasing complex world. The aim of educational process at V.B. University is to make pupils life-long learners.

❖ **Curriculum Should Be Techno-savvy**

Technology is everywhere. There is no place on earth where technology is not available. It's a great enabler for the human beings and help people to do tasks in a better, effective and efficient manner. Technology has made our lives much easier and efficient. World Economic Forum has predicted that by 2020 most of the jobs will be lost increasing the existing gender and class gaps. However, one thing here we need to understand is that technology (having artificial intelligence) can't totally replace human beings as they lack natural capabilities endowed by nature to the man. But human beings should never stop to be life-long learners otherwise time is not far when human resources functions would be taken over successfully by robots.

❖ **Curriculum Should Be Industry Centric**

The national leaders starting from the President of India to Prime Minster to other officials in the government and corporate houses, everybody is concerned about the quality of education being provided by the educational institutions in the country particularly in the higher education sector. The reason is that there is huge gap between what is taught in the colleges and universities and what is required by the industry, corporate and business houses in the country from the perspective employees. This gap between employees skills and employers expectations from them can't be eliminated unless and until there is close cooperation between industry and academic institutions. Fortunately, importance of this cooperation is being realised these days with the initiatives take by the government.

❖ **Curriculum Should Be Research Based**

Curriculum of a course should be based on the researches done in the field previously. Research based curriculum would keep only those contents as the subject matter which are scientifically proved. An ideal curriculum should not promote superstitions and blind faith. It would, therefore promote scientific attitude and aptitude among the learners.

❖ **Curriculum Should Promote Multi-culturalism In The Society**

Human society everywhere is full of multiculturalism. There are no institutions in the world which do not have people coming from different socio - economic-geographic background, following different faiths, customs and traditions and speaking different mother languages. Therefore an ideal curriculum should promote values of empathy and appreciation of different points of view. This becomes more important in the rights-based approach being followed by the various governments which believes in providing various socially needed goods (food-grains, medicines, books etc.) and services (education, health, sanitation) to people below the poverty line and belonging to the Socio-economic and educationally backwards classes.

❖ **Curriculum Should Promote Multi disciplinary Approach To Teaching-learning Process**

Various bodies of knowledge are not isolated disciplines developed from nowhere. A medical practitioner can't be a successful professional unless and until he/she understand society wherein he/she is practicing, technology needed by him/her in her profession, knowledge of law related to medical sciences is also important. So teaching and learning following multi-disciplinary approach becomes important. This is the reason that modern education is heavily dependent on the multi-disciplinary approaches. An approach to curriculum integration which focuses primarily on the

different disciplines and the diverse perspectives they bring to illustrate a topic, theme or issue. A multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline. Frequently multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary are used as synonyms describing the aim to cross boundaries between disciplines.

❖ **Curriculum Should Promote Eco-centric Practices And Values Promoting Sustainable Development**

Eco-centric practices and values are those values which promotes nature and environment protection. According to 'Deep Ecology' by Devall and Sessions (1985), the content of values associated with deep ecology include: harmony with nature, all nature has intrinsic worth, simple material needs, what the earth supplies is limited, appropriate technology, doing with less/recycling, minority tradition/bioregion. Unless and until we follow eco-centric practices which take care of natural environment along with the economic growth, we will not be able to survive much. Therefore curriculum which promotes eco-centric values leading to sustainable development becomes important.

Reforms in curriculum of higher education system in the country, is the need of the hour. Unless and until we try to bring changes in the curriculum, we can't ensure quality education. It's a difficult task, no doubt but not certainly an impossible task. What is needed is the political will power and the cooperation of the academic world. If it is done, we can ensure reforms of curriculum being taught in the country's higher education institutions and subsequent improvement in the image and status of the Universities.

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