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ROLE OF ISO IN IMPROVING QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st C a lot of management institutes have mushroomed on account of the growing popularity of management courses. But the quality of some institutes is suspect; some of them were even ordered to be closed down. Quality in management education is important and determines the reputation of an institute. It is highly prized by corporate. The paper studies the reasons why quality in management education is important and how it needs to be implemented.

KEYWORDS

quality, need, implementation.

INTRODUCTION

agadeesh (2000) in his research work has mentioned that increase in demand for management education has resulted in the growth of number of management institutes in the country. However, quality continues to remain a concern due to the unprecedented growth. An article (Mint, 2014) mentions that quality of management education is related to the present and future needs of business. Sahney, et al (2004) is of the opinion that increased expectations from various stakeholders has emphasized the need for quality education. The education system has a responsibility towards the society. According to researchers (Nargundkar, et al, 2009), the image of an educational institute is the result of quality which can be measured through number of parameters such as students, employees, faculty, infrastructure, etc.

ISO stands for International Organization for Standardization. The ISO is a process oriented management framework for improving quality management and works on the principal of continuous improvement. Berghe (1997) in his book has specified the ISO guidelines necessary for management education. Waks and Frank (1999) have talked about the applicability of ISO 9000 principles in improving quality of management education. Researchers (Rao, et al, 2010) in their research have found that ISO has played a very important role in improving quality of organizations. A study by researchers (Burli, et al, 2012) have focused on the implementation of total quality management principles through ISO in engineering colleges of India. The results revealed that implementation of ISO can form the basis of improving quality of education.

There are several studies on implementation of ISO in various organizations. There are also several studies related to implementation of ISO in European business schools. But there is no significant research done on improving quality of management education in India through ISO. Researchers (Nargundkar, et al, 2009) have proposed a conceptual framework for testing the quality of management education in India. However, the framework does not relate to ISO principles. The current research seeks to test whether ISO has resulted in improving the quality of management institutes in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study by Singh and Sareen (2006) reveals that ISO benefits four kinds of stakeholders in an education system, ie faculty, students, system and external benefits. Study by these researchers reveals that the biggest beneficiary to an education system by ISO is documentation. Another study by Gamboa (2012) on vocational schools is of the view that it is an under – researched area. However, there are several benefits form implementation and ISO can be one of the critical success factor of an institute. Another study by OECD on higher education reveals that ISO can play a very important role in improving the quality of education at global level.

Another study (Alalfy, 2015) on Egyptian universities revealed the failure of ISO in improving quality. However, a further study revealed that ISO was not correctly implemented by these universities, A proper implementation in phases will certainly bring appropriate results. Another study by Chen, et al (2004) on ISO implementation at universities in Taiwan revealed that commitment of top management in implementation played a very important role in the success.

Another study by Bakti (2011) on comparison between ISO certified and non ISO certified institutes showed that students of ISO certified institutes had better perception of quality education compared to non ISO certified institutes. The research also showed that ISO played a very important role in building image of an institution.

Sir John Daniel President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning defined quality as 'fitness for purpose at minimum cost to society'. Higher education is a growing sector in India that has the potential of making India a developed country in future. The quality of higher education will definitely play a role in a nation's progress. For achieving the status of a developed nation by 2020, there is no choice but to significantly increase the access with quality in higher education for generating the 'ignited minds' (Abdul Kalam, 'Ignited Minds', 2002); the reason is that higher education generates front-line leadership in businesses. Entry and participation in higher education help to ensure the development and maintenance of a highly educated population and competitive labour force. Higher education is also associated with better access to employment and higher life-time earnings. Higher participation higher education in any economy is the need to keep growing, and therefore it is also an index of development.

Till recently, being "recognized was the only form of validating institutions. An institution was evaluated by the recognizing agency in order to find out whether the institution met the standards put forth by it. But recognition was a one-time process. Accreditation, on the other hand, is a continuous process. Higher education accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of post-secondary educational institutions or programs are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the agency". (Wikipedia). Accreditation is broadly used for understanding the "Quality Status" of an institution. This accreditation status indicates that the particular Higher Educational Institution (HEI) – a College, a University, or any other recognized Unit therein, meets the standards of quality as set by the Accreditation Agency, in terms of its performance, related to the educational processes and outcomes, covering the curriculum, teaching-learning, evaluation, faculty, research, infrastructure, learning resources, organization, governance, financial well-being and student services (NAAC). Accreditation is basically the process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or of a specific educational programme in order to formally recognize it as having met certain predetermined minimal criteria or standards. This results usually in the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision), of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity (Vlãsceanu, et al., 2007, p. 25).

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Accreditation is important because

- 1. the institution knows its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through an informed review process;
- 2. there is an identification of internal areas of planning and resource allocation collegiality;
- 3. institution can identify and initiate innovative pedagogy;
- 4. it gives a new sense of direction and identity for the institution;
- 5. it makes available reliable information to employers about the quality of education received by the new recruits;
- 6. it enables intra and inter –institutional interactions (Source NAAC).

Different countries have different quality assurance models for their educational institutions. In India, higher education has several in-built quality controls like the University Grants Commission's guidelines and NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council). The latter was established in 1994 in order to improve the quality of Indian higher education and to be a quality assurance agency in the arena of international education. The accreditation process strives to establish a quality conscious system in higher education wherein relevance to business needs, excellence, contributions to economic growth, and international competitiveness in the education field (Sahay and Thakur 2007).

Dey (2011) reviewed the benefits of accreditation in Indian higher education. The study found that institutions learn of their strengths and shortcomings and can take appropriate action. All the stakeholders namely, the government, students and employers benefit form the information and analysis of institutional performance.

Mangnale et al (2011) studied the role of Internal Quality Assurance Cell in managing quality in education in Maharashtra State, India. The researchers found that both students as well as institutions wanted a more constructive role from IQAC in protecting the quality of higher education. Institutions were provided academic activity that reflected their aspirations in the form of highly qualified faculty, focus on research, library services and community services.

Accreditation is a prominent method of evaluation in higher education in Europe (Stensaker 2011). In India, accreditation for universities is mandatory by law unless the university was created through a Parliament Act. The Ministry of Human Resources regulates the functioning of all Indian Universities chiefly through its main regulatory body namely University Grants Commission. The other government regulatory bodies are All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (Prasad and Stella, 2004). All three have been active in ensuring the quality of higher education in India.

In Europe the national assessments of higher education normally result in public reports. The public reports are seen as important information to students, authorities and society in general. Education that crosses national borders, mobility, competition as well as the commercialisation and internationalisation of education are reasons why a country's trust in the level and quality of its own national higher education is no longer sufficient in itself. The challenge is to demonstrate quality in an understandable and reliable way, to the outside world as well. Audits are based on enhancement led evaluation. An audit focuses on the quality management procedures and their effectiveness. To evaluate the quality system, the audit focuses on:

1. The quality policy of the higher education institution

- 2. Strategic and operations management
- 3. Development of the quality system
- 4. Quality management of the higher education institution's basic duties namely,
- a) Degree education
- b) Research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities
- c) The societal impact and regional development work (incl. social responsibility, continuing education, open-university and open university of applied sciences education, as well as paid-services education)
- d) Optional audit target
- 5. Samples of degree education: degree programmes
- 6. The entire quality system

The current trend is one whereby quality concerns are increasingly focusing on the total effectiveness of an education provider, whether that is a vocational school, a university or a private training institution. The current concerns for quality in education are no isolated or temporary phenomenon, but are part of broader macro-economic trends. The new approach to quality assurance and management in higher education are characterized by the following:

- a shift in emphasis in schools, from a focus on the quality of the teacher towards the performance of the institution as a whole;
- the introduction of new or additional quality control mechanisms in higher education;
- the creation, for the first time, of quality assurance systems and performance related mechanisms in continuing education and training.

Today there is an increased concern for the performance of the learner (the effectiveness of learning) and the effectiveness and efficiency of the provider as a whole. ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is the world's largest developer and publisher of International Standards. ISO is a network of the national standards institutes of 161 countries, one member per country, with a Central Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, that coordinates the system. It is a non-governmental organization that forms a bridge between the public and private sectors. On the one hand, many of its member institutes are part of the governmental structure of their countries, or are mandated by their government. On the other hand, other members have their roots uniquely in the private sector, having been set up by national partnerships of industry associations. Therefore, ISO enables a consensus to be reached on solutions that meet both the requirements of business and the broader needs of society. "ISO" is derived from the Greek 'isos', meaning "equal". Whatever the country, whatever the language, the short form of the organization's name is always ISO.

Implementations of ISO 9001 will have the following benefits:

- a. Enable the institute to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for its functions and activities. These SOPs are codified in a Quality Manual and procedures.
- b. Compare and benchmark these standard operating procedures with other similar organizations.
- c. Identify areas for improving functioning of the institution.
- d. Codify institutional and personal memories and experiences for future generations. Hence, when a person leaves, he or she will be able to leave behind SOPs for others to follow and improve.
- e. Bring in transparency and accountability in the operations of the institution.
- f. Allow the institute to audit itself against the ISO 9001 standards.
- g. Allows the Institution to focus on strategic issues.
- h. The annual third party audit keeps the educational institution on its toes.
- i. The potential for losing the ISO 9001 certification during the audit every third year allows the system to sustain itself over time.

ISO 9001 is not a substitute for results. It is a complement. ISO 9001 guarantees that the internal processes will be of a certain quality. It is an internationally recognized and most widely adopted Quality Management System. On the other hand, IS 15700 has been developed by Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and is not known outside India. Even in India, it has not yet been adopted by a significant number of organizations. ISO 9001 can be certified by a large number of highly reputable Indian and foreign certification bodies. In comparison, IS 15700 can be certified by only BIS. ISO 9001 covers all aspects of a management system namely, management processes, core processes and support processes. On the other hand, IS 15700 covers mostly service delivery aspects of the organization. ISO 9001 is periodically updated based on lessons learnt worldwide. In a globalized world, India needs to be at par with the best. There is an internationally approved standard (ISO 17021:2011) for ensuring the quality and competence of certifying bodies across the world. BIS is not required to adopt such a standard.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF ISO

The study was done on a prominent management institute of India which had implemented ISO 9001:2008 standards since 2009. The procedure for implementation includes preparing standard operating procedures, documentation, feedback mechanism followed by internal and external audit. ISO emphasizes on continual improvement. The various respondents involved are students. Faculty, staff and Director of the institute. Interaction was done with various departments on what change in quality has taken place because of implementation of ISO. The internal and external audit reports for last five years were studied. Based on the study, the following improvements were observed.

- Academics dept: The Academics department had moved from a manual system to an online system. Attendance, time table, daily correspondence was 1. carried out through an online mechanism. This eliminated the paperwork. The department took continuous feedback from the students every semester based on which the curriculum was improved. The feedback was also shared with the faculty so as to enable them to deliver better to the students.
- Library: The library had moved from a manual system to an automated system. Over the years, the library offered a host of services such as inter library loan 2. service, referencing, archives, newsletters, starting of a library club by students, feedback analysis and implementation and usage of various research databases. The library portal was linked to the university portal for access of various books and journals.
- Research: A research department was established with a research and advisory committee in place. Over the years, the institute was in the forefront of 3. publishing research papers. Research conferences were organized every year and an inhouse research journal with ISSN was also established. Faculty were encouraged to attend research oriented FDPs to enhance their research potential.
- 4. Exam department: The exam department processes were streamlined and lead time in declaration of results was reduced tremendously. There were no complaints of leak of paper or any major complaint from the exam department. The students and faculty were satisfied with the overall conduct of the department.
- IT department: The IT department had taken sufficient efforts over the years to make the department more energy efficient. The IT infrastructure was 5. enhanced and upgraded computers were purchased. An IT cell comprising of students was established to handle student issues and give suggestions on improvement. An online public information system was established to provide information through television to all in the campus. Training on various IT softwares were given to faculty, staff and students.
- Placement department: The placement department, over the years has shown consistently 100 % placements for students. There has been a significant rise 6. in the number of salary packages per student and also pre-placement offers. Implementation of ISO has therefore helped in continual improvement of the placement department thereby getting accolades from the student community.
- Alumni department: Through streamlining of ISO process and ensuring continual improvement in the process year on year, the alumni department has been 7. able to engage the alumni in institutional development activities.
- Administration department: The administration department has taken significant initiatives to provide efficient and effective support to other departments 8 through continual improvement. Standardization of procedures has made the department more user friendly.
- 9. Infrastructure: The infrastructure comprises of academic building, hostels, mess and canteen There are various standard operating procedures and feedback mechanism to provide infrastructure support to students and other employees. There are also standard operating procedures for ensuring safety and security of the campus.

FEEDBACK OF STAKEHOLDERS

Each department has a feedback mechanism and the detailed analysis is discussed at various forums. The feedback of each department reveals a higher level of satisfaction amongst students, faculty, staff, alumni and recruiting organizations.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

The study on ISO on a management institute has shown the benefits in terms of quality improvements in all the departments involved. The stakeholders ie students, faculty, staff, alumni and corporate organizations have indicated their satisfaction towards quality improvement through the feedback mechanism. The overall good image of the institute is a result of quality. This is in line with the views of other researchers (Nargundkar, et al) that ISO plays a very important role in quality. The study also validates the research of Singh and Sareen (2006) that ISO plays a very important role in the satisfaction of stakeholders.

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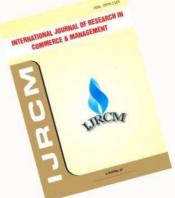
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