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E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

VIJAY BHASKAR KOUDIKI RESEARCH SCHOLAR CANARA BANK SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES BANGALORE

K JANARDHANAM PROFESSOR & DIRECTOR CANARA BANK SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES BANGALORE

ABSTRACT

The insight, of university administration and systems in India, is considered the most common issue for all the stakeholders engaged in higher education. Given the economic development, accelerated by the expanding base of higher education may lead to the reduction of other kinds of disparities-social, regional, and political, and its contribution in stabilizing our civil society at this juncture of volatility cannot be underestimated which in turn may help the process of speedy national development. On the one hand universities are finding it difficult to promote administrative efficiency, and on the other hand the higher education programmes are becoming unaffordable to many students. It is evident that the situation in various higher education institutions differ, mainly because of the different rules, administrative complexities and academic culture. There are many reasons why higher education institutions like Universities are finding it difficult to bring in transparency, efficiency, economy and good governance. In this connection, introducing e-governance in university administration holds the promise for, growth and development of Universities.

KEYWORDS

E-governance, Transparency, Efficiency, Administration.

INTRODUCTION

arly on, it was realized that a strong, self-reliant and modern society could be built only on the foundations of higher education. Higher education has generally been recognized as a "public good". The public good nature of higher education warrants that the state should play a more active role in. Universities are the backbone of higher education and research to promote, socio-economic development of the society. The higher education system in India includes both private and public universities. Public universities are supported by the Government of India and the state governments, while private universities are mostly supported by various bodies and societies.

Universities in India are recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), which draws its power from the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. In addition, 16 Professional Councils are established, controlling different aspects of accreditation and coordination. The types of universities controlled by the UGC include Central universities, State universities, Deemed universities and Private universities. In addition to these universities, other institutions are granted the permission to autonomously award degrees, and while they are not called "university" by name, they act as such. They usually fall under the administrative control of the Department of Higher Education. In official documents they are called "autonomous bodies", university-level institutions.

In this connection, the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said "A university stands for, humanism, tolerance, reason, progress, adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duty adequately, then' it is well with the nation and the people. But if this 'temple of learning' itself becomes a Horne of narrow bigotry and petty objectives, how then will the nation prosper or people grow in stature?" (Nehru, 1950). A vast responsibility, therefore, rests on our universities and educational institutions and those who guide their destinies. They have to keep their lights burning and must not stray from the right path even when passion convulses the multitude and blinds many amongst those whose duty it is to set an example to others.

IMPORTANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The insight of 'university administration in India' is considered the most common issue for all the stakeholders engaged in higher education. Given that the economic development, accelerated by the expanding base of higher education may lead to the reduction of other kinds of disparities—social, regional, and political, its contribution in stabilizing our civil society at this juncture of volatility cannot be underestimated which in turn may help the process of speedy national development (Gurmak, 2007). Education is not a unitary concept. Diverse kinds of practices go by the name of education: gurukul in ancient India, the gymnasium and academies in ancient Greece, monasteries of Buddhist and Christians, madrasas and pathsalas, the modern west-inspired schools, colleges and universities are all institutions which are meant to sustain educational practices.

But think of the differences among them. It might, however, be said that in spite of the differences, there is yet what may be called a core idea that these diverse practices share – the idea that any educational practice must involve teaching and learning (Mrinal, 2010). While this may be true, although there may be legitimate doubts about its being so, it may at best be thought of as a necessary condition and certainly not as a sufficient condition. For, think of the teaching and learning in practices such as the pursuit of a variegated agriculture, or to take an example from our time, cyber criminality, or driving a tractor, or being an air hostess or even playing chess. Teaching and learning involved in such practices, taken just by themselves, would not, in most people's thought count as education. Value of education lies in the fact, that it is a process aimed at enhancement of the self- if this word is not acceptable, enhancement of the person. Education targets the human being as a whole and aims with varying degrees of success or failure to seek the enlargement of its unity and prevention of its fragmentation. In its various forms and in its various stages, education involves engagement of different kinds – engagements that lead to such enhancement of the self or enlargement of the person.

E-GOVERNANCE

Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizens' articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities (UNDP, 2004). Similarly, the universities are indeed larger organizations, the administration of which needs, speed, accuracy, value creation and modernity.

Information Technology (IT) is said to be the technology of 21st century. There has been a huge growth in the field of information technology. Traditionally IT was used only to provide the back office support to organizations. Nowadays it plays a strategic role in organizations supporting many business functions and also shapes new strategies in organizations. The IT field has also been introduced in the field of administration called "E Governance". The Government of India is implementing the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) with the objective of creating a transparent and accountable governance. To achieve this mission, the

Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY), Government of India is rolling out more than 100,000 Common Service Centres (CSCs) on a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model. CSCs are the front-end delivery points for government, private and social sector services to citizens of India (ARC, 2007). CSC scheme provides a framework to build over a period of time, a model to meet local developmental challenges in a manner that encourages private sector and local community participation for creating sustainable livelihoods.

Under the CSC Scheme, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)has been formed, so that the Government can progressively migrate to an e-Governance platform and enable services through the CSC network. The SPV named as 'CSC eGovernance Services India Limited' has been incorporated under the Companies Act 1956. The primary role of CSC SPV is to monitor the CSC Scheme and its outcomes on behalf of the Government at the National and State levels. CSC eco-system comprises of 1,00,000 Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) spread across the country, 24 Service Center Agencies (SCAs), and 35 State Designated Agencies (SDAs).

As of 31st December 2012, over 1,00,000 CSCs are operational in thirty-three States and Union Territories. Among these, 100 percent CSCs have been rolled out in eleven States (Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Pondicherry, Sikkim & Tripura). More than 70% of the rollout has been completed in nine States (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttarakhand and West Bengal). In about six States (Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Lakshadweep, Odissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) implementation of CSCs have crossed halfway mark. In the month of October 2012, 48,549 CSCs across 25 States and 21 SCAs are reported to have completed 119 lakh transactions worth about Rs. 245 crores.

The main aim of e-governance is to enable the government agencies to improve the relations with citizens and businesses by the use of modern information technologies like wide area network, mobile computing and the internet and also to facilitate better communication between various arms of the government. E-government uses information and communication technologies to promote more efficient and effective government and makes government more accountable to citizens. It facilitates improved access to government services and allows greater public access to information. The modern information technology services like the internet, mobile communication, wireless devices and a mix of other technologies are used to implement e- governance solutions. E- governance plays an important role in providing services to citizens and industry by providing easy availability and access to the information, for efficient management and making governance more accountable and transparent to the citizens.

E-GOVERNANCE IN UNIVERSITIES

The main purpose of introducing e-governance in universities is to, promote transparency and efficiency in administration, improve service quality to students and other stake holders, provide educational access to larger sections of the society, and offer affordable education to the needy. The advancements in the information technologies, internet and the mobile communication provide opportunities to transform the relationship between university and students in new ways, thus contributing to the achievement of good education goals. The implementation of information technology may increase the broad participation of the students in the process of achieving good education goals at all levels by providing the possibility of online discussion groups and by enhancing the rapid development and effectiveness of the learning methods (UNESCO, 2005). Advantages for the administration involve that it may provide better service in terms of time, making governance more efficient and more effective. In addition, the transaction costs can be lowered and the services become more accessible.

Implementing e-governance in higher education institutions will enable effective monitoring of academic standards. Fry (2001) proposes that if universities are to compete in a global higher education market, they must introduce the technological advancements and use them as a strategic tool, capable of transforming educational and business practices. E-governance in education sector enables improved, learning, service delivery, student participation in the decision making process, thus making the administration transparent and effective and give universities a new channel of educational deployment (Naim, 2009). The effective use of IT services in educational Sector can greatly enhance efficiency of the existing system, decrease the costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments.

In a broad sense e governance in educational sector provides better service delivery and the distribution of information to students and faculties using electronic means. This IT based E governance has also been introduced in the field of higher education. The implementation of e-governance in higher education has led to broader innovations (Sami & Mohmed, 2012). E-governance has enabled universities to expand their current geographical reach, to interact and serve the prospective students all around the world and to establish themselves as global education providers. E-governance can also be an important tool to the governing body of universities. In general, it provides following advantages to the administration namely; empowerment of faculty members, students by encouraging their participation in governance; transparency and clarity in administration, governance and admission process; and increased efficiency in learning outcome.

According to Sami & Mohmed (2012), The possible areas of implementation of e-governance in educational sector are:

E-administration: It involves the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in order to improve administration processes and internal working of the departments within an educational organisation.

E- services: The main aim is to improve the delivery of services to students by providing services online. Some examples of interactive services are: requests for documents, certificates, reading material, admit cards and id cards.

E-Participation: It promotes greater student, faculty and other stake holder participation enabled by ICTs in the decision-making process.

The use of Information Technology (IT) in every aspect of life has resulted in faster, easier and much better delivery of services by redefining the fundamental principles of delivery of services and operation of service sectors (Pradeep, 2000). Universities and higher educational organisations all around the world have started to use IT for providing better services to students and faculties. The information technology imparted, e-governance when applied in education will create huge impact on the functioning of the educational sector by revolutionising the way knowledge and skills are assimilated and transmitted. As a result, a wide range of IT applications are being custom developed and delivered in various educational organisations. Some of the areas of which have been immediately impacted are as under.

Improved education system: The quantity and quality of output from education system has been substantially improved with the introduction of e-governance in this sphere. However, in order to be really effective, the e-governance system deployed needs to go beyond mere computerisation of records or processes (Sachitanand, 2010). The implementation of the e-governance has been able to provide the management of educational institution information about the areas of concern so that adequate action can be taken. An integrated e-governance system can enable the authorities to analyze the performance of one of the best performing institute in related field and compare it with other colleges to identify the gap areas. This will allow all the lesser performing colleges to reduce the gap with better performing institutes. It will help in betterment of higher education and increase the number of employable students.

Enhanced teaching tools: There has been rapid development in learning technologies so as to turn them to advantage in learning. A student who is learning in a way that uses information and communication technologies (ICTs) is using e-learning. With the introduction of new technological initiatives, the structure of higher educational institutions has changed over the past decade. Scott (2000) supports this opinion that eLearning is now facilitating a more flexible learning approach. The impact of eLearning initiatives has direct effects on the future structure of universities on both strategic and tactical levels. The changing role of lecturers, the changeable learning environment and the design of eLearning facilities all contribute to a potentially more flexible organisational structure. The future delivery of education will be based through eLearning technology providing lecturers with superior teaching tools. The online methods enable more effective education and offer significant advantages over traditional teaching methods. This has been possible by technological implementation based environments such as bulletin boards, virtual lectures and eLibraries. In eLearning environment, lecturers can offer constant educational support, as students are able to communicate with classmates and lecturers, visit web sites and view course material regardless of their time and location.

Multi-user centralised information: E-Governance has provided electronic information infrastructure to simplify service delivery, reduce duplication, and improve the level and speed of service at a lower cost. It allows for creating, managing, and sharing information electronically among the various university departments and the different courses offered by them. That is, information captured once can then be shared and re-used by all authorized users. This avoids manual transcription and re-entering of the same information repeatedly whenever a student goes to a new department of the University/ College, for some other service.

Integrated services: Different types of services offered by different departments like collecting fees, granting admission, providing access, monitoring attendance, teaching courses and conducting examinations etc., can be availed at one place (Shajee, 2010). This greatly facilitates the students by allowing them avail most of the services, as a single window concept to interact with instead of a number of unrelated entities, operating at different locations in different buildings.

Anywhere, anytime information: Delivery of public-domain information to students can be done without any official and student interaction. Students can obtain information related to university processes and procedures through an on-line system without interacting with any university official. In fact, e-governance allows any student quick, interactive access to a vast array of information, through computers at home or work or through kiosks in convenient public locations, because this access to information can be available at many different locations, around the clock, and hence there is no pressure on stakeholders to physically visit a university office.

Cost reduction and affordability: E-governance saves cost to universities and makes the education affordable to students. Putting services on the Internet gets rid of the wasted time that is spent on getting the services that otherwise would have been available only in the university. University/college websites are managed through a content management tool. This tool makes it easier to make changes on university web pages. This, in turn, reduces the time and energy required to keep university web pages up-to-date. E-Governance also provides hardware and software needed to create and update websites. This results in reduction of licensing fees and increases the ability of the university to maintain its online presence.

Improved decision making: The ability of e-Governance to provide centralised information helps the governing bodies, and other decision makers to perform extensive analysis of stored data to provide answers to the queries of the students and other stake holders. This facilitates taking well informed decisions for student facilitation and assessing their impact over the intended section of the students. This in turn helps them to formulate more effective strategies and policies for betterment of governance.

Protection of information: The centralised information approach of e-Governance keeps all information at one place in electronic form. This approach of making information secure prevents it against any theft or leakage. Information backup system helps in protecting the information from getting lost due to natural calamities such as fires, earthquakes, and floods.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The authors of this paper are conducting a larger study to understand, whether introduction of e-governance can be a strategic management tool for the Universities. This is the first study of its kind and therefore there is a need, first to create a conceptual framework. Hence this exploratory study was conducted, to develop a conceptual framework, so as to figure out the parameters, and characteristic features needed for the e-governance facility, for effective administration of universities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors, after detailed review of the available research, visited 14 universities in Karnataka state of India and interviewed, 140 respondents, out of which, 40 students, 34 teachers, and remaining 66 are administrators like deputy registrars, asst. registrars, office superintends, and clerical staff to understand the characteristic features of effective e-governance model if introduced, for effective administration of the universities. All the respondents were asked the same set of predetermined questions, to elicit descriptive data. Using the theme emerged from this descriptive data the conceptual framework for e-governance of universities was prepared which is described as under.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR E-GOVERNANCE OF UNIVERSITIES

Front end features: Front end features of e-governance software for universities, shall have accessibility through multiple devices like, computers, tablets, mobile phones and televisions. Front end features should provide opportunities to the users, for referring information online, for downloading information and for uploading the information. Users should have simple identity and passwords, which they can remember easily, say their mobile phone number and their names. In order to avoid, misuse of identify and passwords, every time an attempt is made to login, a sms alert should be sent to the registered phone number or one-time password is sent to the said phone number. It should be user friendly, capable of guiding the users on how to navigate it. It should be user driven, in which the user is able get all he wants online without having to call the support staff.

Back end features: The system should be able to establish and store the identity of users, for the purpose of security. There should be zero downtime and the facility should be active around the clock every day. There should be multiple security layers, to prevent the attack from viruses and hackers. Data should get copied concurrently either in a second server at another location or in the cloud, for quick and safe retrieval. Back end staff should be on duty around the clock to attend machine problems and user queries.

USER FACILITIES

Information access: Any administrative information *not classified as private and confidential* should be available to stake holders free of cost. Such information should include the facilities available, the cost payable, faculty details, library services, reading material, courses, syllabus, research and consultancy, university calendar, statutory approvals, funds received and spent, balance sheet, accreditation etc. Such information should be authentic and updated.

Admission facilities: Students should be able to, access the course details, apply online for admission, upload the photo, signature and certificates for this purpose, pay the fees, take the admission test, face the interview and get admitted to the course online, without having to visit the university or the college.

Online learning: Students should have the option to attend the classes either online from home or by coming to the college/ university. Lectures in respect of the absented class hours should be available in the portal for access. The reading material, the case studies, the power point slides, the class timings, the lesson plans and other details should all be updated regularly and made available around the clock.

Monitoring facilities: Those who fund the education like, parents and guardians shall have the option to monitor online, the attendance and academic performance of the student. For this purpose, the college / university shall update the attendance, test scores, internal assessments, and final marks of the students from time to time and provide access to the parents.

Examination facilities: Students should be able to enrol for examination, pay the examination fees, take online examination, and get the results without having to do it manually.

Interlinking the affiliated colleges: If the university has affiliated colleges or multiple campuses, the data base of all of them should be interlinked so as to make available all the information at one place.

Student welfare services: The portal shall provide services about student welfare facilities like, hostel, mess, scholarship, medical and ambulance, security alert, distress call facility, facilities for special groups (like differently able, sexual minorities, foreigners), protection against ragging or sexual harassment, internet, laundry, sports and entertainment etc.

Exit facilities: Students should be able to complete all the exit formalities, like applying for the transfer certificate, official transcript, cancellation of admission, midway discontinuation etc., without having to visit the college/ university.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Introducing e-governance in universities need standard infrastructure, like hardware, software, broadband connectivity and trained staff. The benefits of e-Governance are not easy to achieve and must go far beyond mere computerization of education processes. The successful implementation not only presents technical challenges but also asks for a fundamental change in the manner in which the education sector operates today. In fact, the challenges that are most likely to occur would be how to adapt with reinvention of the Education processes and functions and related issues of new responsibilities for employees, faculties and students. It also raises important questions in terms of protecting information from unauthorized changes and safeguarding personal privacy. Proper user authentication

and access control mechanisms need to be implemented in order to ensure that only authorized users can have access a particular piece of information. Another important issue is the cost involved in implementing the e-governance. Lack of trained staff is another important issue in implementing the e governance system. Hence training is of vital necessity in familiarizing users with computer and internet technology.

CONCLUSION

The most important driving force behind e-governance is innovation. To achieve a world class standard in education, it is imperative to have an improved and innovated means of access to information all over the world which is possible only by the introduction of information technology based e-governance in educational institutions. For achieving the goals of efficient administration and to meet the challenges of globalisation, international competition and technology development, it is necessary to implement effective and responsive e-governance into education sector. The way in which higher education is designed, implemented and delivered is changing with the introduction of e-governance. Higher educational institutions have been traditionally static in their functioning and delivery of programs. However as there is an increased demand for quality learning, there is a need for higher educational institutions to broaden their geographical limits to introduce e-governance initiatives. E-governance provides higher educational institutions, the competence to face competition and exceed expectations.

The ways to enhance learning by enabling access to universal information are possible with the introduction of e governance initiatives. For lecturers, e governance programmes represent a change in the way teaching was imparted. For students, e governance has provided an alternative to the ways learning was done by implementing the means in which learning can take place outside the lecture hall. E governance will change the way Students relate to institutions as much as it changes how students relate to each other. It will bring forth, new concepts of governance, both in terms of needs and responsibilities.

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