Private Technical Education Institutions – A Quality Approach

Abstract: Higher Technical education is very important for the socio-economic growth of the country. Today, higher technical education system of India is confronting with major challenges such as access, quality, and faculty shortage. Since the government was not in position to share the responsibilities alone, private initiatives were encouraged and at present its share in higher technical education is more than 90%. This resulted in unethical practices, regional imbalance and commercialization. Private technical institutions can be a boon for the country if well acknowledged and dealt with supportive attitude by all concerned. Harmony amongst the trustees, faculty and students and satisfaction of these three constituencies lead to quality in a self-financed private technical institution.

M.P. Gupta
Director,
Technical Education Haryana (Retd.)
E-mail: mpg121254@gmail.com

***Index Terms**: Harmony, Satisfaction, Quality, Self financed, Technical Education Institutions, Compensation*

I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of India as a knowledge superpower in recent years is a fact that is well acknowledged around the globe today [1]. This phenomenal thrust forward has been made possible primarily due to the significant growth of technical education institutions in the country, which have provided the much needed bedrock, impetus and support structure for the development of human capital which has propelled the growth of knowledge industries both in India and aboard. It is a source of dynamism for the economy. It has provided a beginning for the creation of a knowledge society. But it would be a mistake to focus on its strength alone. It has weaknesses that are a cause for concern. The eleventh five year plan has laid focus on expansion, inclusion and rapid improvement in quality in higher technical education by enhancing public spending, encouraging private initiatives and initiating the long overdue major institutional and policy reforms [2]. There had been a increase in the higher technical education budget provision of 84,943 crore in eleventh five year plan against the provision of 9,600 crore in tenth plan. Even after this massive increase, the resource requirement in higher education is in excess of 214,760 crore out of which 27,960 crore is the resource gap for higher technical education and polytechnics alone [3]. There is no disputing the fact that the private sector has responded pro actively to the need of the hour and displayed positive growth. In the higher technical education system in India out of 8361 AICTE approved technical institutions in 2011-12, the private initiative has more than 90 % share. Resource input in private sector institutions is equally a big issue. The only source of funding in the private institutions is the tuition fee. This factor has resulted in limiting the access to higher technical education in the country due to high fees in private institutions which is beyond the reach of a majority of students. Keeping in view the fact that the Indian private technical education institutions are contributing to the development of human resources, there is an urgent need to assure both quality and equity in the education provided by them.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF PRIVATIZATION OF HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

In the 1980's, spiraling industrialization and urbanization, put considerable pressure on the central and state governments for expansion of technical education. Nevertheless, the central and state governments, despite recognizing the urgent need, found it difficult to spare financial resources for the expansion of technical education. It was in this context that some of the state governments, especially those of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, took the bold decision to permit private registered societies and trusts to establish and run technical institutions on a self-financing basis. As a result, a large number of private self-financed institutions came into existence in the above mentioned four states in the early eighties. All these institutions were established with the permission of the respective state governments and were affiliated either to the universities of the region or to the State Boards of Technical Education. Large sums of money

were collected as donations. Since the demand for admissions continued to increase and there was no effective control, the situation led to 'commercialization' of technical education whereby money and not merit became the determining criteria for admission. In late 90s and early 2000, the private engineering education started to grow in states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat also. This was the time (2006 onwards) when the Private engineering education witnessed a strong vertical movement in North Indian states like Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, UP which saw a large spurt in number of private engineering colleges[4].

A. The present picture

A short walk down most roads in these states is quite telling today. One finds beautiful hoardings at every corner of a city/town and colored advertisements in the news papers and television channels, advertising for admission in particular private technical education institution/university/technical campus/engineering college which are full of glamorous words and tall promises like: world class infrastructure, excellent faculty, air conditioned laboratories, hundred percent placements etc. to attract students for admission [5]. These private institutions have spawned a huge economic spin-off as admissions and placement advertisements in private technical education system have become a highly lucrative business for the media and agents. The reality behind this flashy story is quite different and very revealing. More than fifty percent seats remain vacant in many private engineering colleges in the country even after lot of spending on advertisements and rebates in tuition fee. As far as the alluring promise of placements goes, in most of the private engineering colleges, the placement performance is just on papers. Strange methods of misrepresentation are employed to veil the facts. Students are offered the appointment letters but they are not allowed to join. These ugly realities have evoked responses from concerned quarters. Human Resource Development minister has recently asked the technical education regulator to consider possibilities of blocking recognition to any new colleges. Today, the private technical education system is viewed with distrust. The general public is laboring under many apprehensions with regard to private colleges and even the students taking admission here are riddled with fears and insecurity. Despite the distressing general mistrust, the actual scenario is horrible in many institutions and even more worrying than most people realize. This is due to the mushrooming and propagation of certain undesired, unethical and unsavory practices which are discussed in brief below. These are in relation to important parameters in most of the private technical education institutions which need to be checked immediately.

B. Loopholes in Private technical Institutions-Macro perspective

There are many issues which have given rise to the present lamentable situation in the area of higher technical education. Implicit attention to these and their direct address is urgently required in order to arrest the declining standards and put the growth story back on track. These issues have been categorized under the following heading and are accompanied by a brief exposition of the causes, current situation and redressal.

Governance

There is a total absence of any policy or guidelines as to the competence of the investor in starting and managing a technical institution other than the requirement that it should be registered as a non-profit or charitable trust or society. This lacuna has been exploited by many investors, who have no understanding or experience of the responsibilities associated with technical education. The trusts or societies that were involved in the creation of many private technical education institutions largely consisted of immediate family members of the primary investors. Some of these family members have little or no knowledge of technical education.

In such institutions, Principal and other staff and faculty is asked to mind only the requirements of the university in terms of syllabus and examinations. There is no delegation of powers even those relating to day-to-day management. The trustees are working like managers and are the be all and end all with absolute decision making powers concentrated in their own hands. There is no concept of corporate governance. The vision, mission, quality policy of these institutions is on the papers only and hardly any effort is made to translate the goals mentioned in the mission statements into reality. There is lack of transparency and rampant secrecy and misrepresentation of facts. Financial management is very poor and kept as a closely guarded secret. Such institutions are being run as a business with the sole intention of profiteering.

Faculty

It is a well accepted fact that any institution is only as good as the people who run the show there. A

practice of filling a limited number of senior positions at attractive salaries, especially from other reputed institutions, mainly for contact purposes has developed. Many undesirable practices also prevail at the level of junior faculty. The teachers are asked to work in more than one institution which comes under the purview of the same management, the salary for the vacation period is not being paid, actual payments of salaries are much less than the amount signed for, impounding of the certificates, forcing the teachers to award good marks in the internal examination to the management's favorites and less marks for students who protest against illegal collections and so on. Due to such practices, migration of teachers from one institute to other institute (attrition rate) is very high which has adversely affected the sense of belongingness and loyalty of the teachers to the institute where they work.

Students

Students are the life blood of any institution, but learning to generate knowledge no longer seems to be the motto of students in most of the private technical education institutions particularly at the undergraduate level. The overall collapse of the system has affected student perceptions significantly. Students know that even if they start learning by the end of January or February (towards term end), they will be able to pass the examination with good percentage [6]. A study reveals that around 45-50 percent students studying in majority of engineering colleges do not attend the classes on regular basis. There is widespread student's indiscipline.

Today the scenario is such that any student passing out with 50 percent in physics, chemistry and mathematics at 10+2 level is able to secure a seat in an engineering college. 30-40 percent of the admitted students do not understand what is being taught. 25-30 percent students are not even interested in engineering studies. They have been forced by their parents to take admission in engineering programs. Nearly 30 percent students nurse inferiority complex mainly because of their rural backgrounds and feel lost in the urbanized setting of the colleges. Many students do not have even an iota of belongingness with their institution. Positive attitude and learning aptitude is also lacking in many students. The students and their parents are both singularly unconscious of the basics of career advancement. It is no surprise then, that the university results are very poor and employable students are not available at the time of campus interviews.

Admissions

Due to proliferation of technical education institutions, lack of quality and the aggravation of unemployment situation deepened by the global recession, there is sharp decrease in number of students seeking admission into technical education institutions. In the session 2011-12, more than 50 percent seats have remained vacant in many institutions. Even after heavy discounts in the tuition fee and heavy spending on the advertisements, the students are not attracted to technical institutions. The situation has made many institutions unviable. This has led to other problems such as non repayment of loans, institutions being declared non productive assets by the funding agencies, sale and purchase of the institutions etc.

Institutional Culture

Lack of proper teaching-learning outlook, absence of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, poor living conditions in hostels and residences, lack of harmony and satisfaction amongst students, faculty and managements, lack of sincerity amongst every group has developed a peculiar culture in many private technical education institutions. This is not very conducive for the development of requisite competencies of the students. Many unhealthy practices such as buying of project reports, copying in examinations, question paper leakage, and private tuitions have become part and parcel of the system.

III. THE CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: A BRIEF REVIEW

It would not be inaccurate to say that as of now, India's technical education system is in shambles. Privatization of higher technical education, which was initially encouraged as it was considered as a important support to and supplement of the efforts of the government in developing higher technical education, has now come to be recognized as a separate entity. This negative connotation has emerged mainly because of the exponential but erratic and unplanned growth of the technical education system. The problems which the technical education system is facing now are very complex. In fact, on- ground realities reveal that the technical education system is facing a considerable amount of uncertainty caused due to the lack of a clear future agenda. The major concern is the ambiguity about just where the privatized technical education system is headed. If the current trends are allowed to continue,

the number of technically qualified students will decline in the next few decades. The quality of education is going down with every passing year. It is in need of a total overhauling. In its present condition, it presents a vicious circle, be it examination system, fee structure, curriculum designing, admissions, placements, teaching methods, or infrastructure facilities.

The positive side of the picture is that capitation in technical education programs has been stopped which was a major loophole being mercilessly exploited by the unscrupulous elements to mint money. A huge infrastructure in the shape of buildings is available in the country. Most of the private technical education institutions have been established in the rural areas, thereby developing them economically and socially and helping to curb the flight from rural to urban areas to some extent.

The issues which need immediate and minute attention still remain. These are the commercialization of private technical education; severe shortage of qualified and competent faculty especially at the senior level; only few islands of excellence; lack of industry-institute interaction; mismatch between knowledge, technical skills, and soft skills; regional imbalance, disciplinary imbalance, imbalance in diploma, degree, post graduate and research programmes; mismatch in demand and supply; over regulations. The major threat to the system is that quality concern needs to be addressed urgently because of the emerging competition from international players who are working overtime to attract Indian talent abroad and even establishing their study centre's here in India to facilitate higher student intake. However, the immediate concern of the public regarding technical education system relates to the aspect of credibility, equity, quality and commercialization.

IV. QUALITY IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Despite the progress that has been made through research and debate, there is still no universal consensus on how best to manage quality within higher education. As a result, the measurement and management of quality has created a number of challenges. This, in turn, has led to the adoption of a variety of quality management practices drawn from existing industry models. Although, past studies on Total Quality Management (TQM) have undertaken the identification and implementation of TQM practices successfully but still the literature on the investigation of linkage between TQM practices and organizational performance in the context of the Indian service sector is in nascent stage. In technical education, the quality notion runs into problems when its application goes beyond the particular institution involved. In a situation such as that which currently prevails in higher technical education, institutional performance evaluation is not anchored to a generally agreed definition of quality. At best, it is limited to international comparisons of institutional performance, and at the worst, inter-institutional comparisons of performance within a particular country, which give rise to a variety of problems [7]. Primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself [8]. The yawning gaps between quality standards and the actual prevailing reality in the technical institutes is borne out when general complaints from industry employers reveal that several engineering graduates do not possess the requisite engineering knowledge, skills and attitude to fulfill the industry expectations.

V. A QUALITY APPROACH

Education quality is an institutional activity. Education quality involves the characteristics of input, process, output, and strategic constituencies of an education institution. As a system, the input, process, and the output of an educational institution, and the feed-back from the output to the input form a close-loop system, where the performance of one part influences the other. In this close-loop system, the educational institution continues to improve and develop itself in all important aspects through learning from its errors. Every institution may have its own criteria of education quality and may try to achieve all of them. Because of constraints such as limited resources; limited timeframe; environmental; etc., it is often difficult to achieve all the criterion of quality. However, an institution may choose to focus its strength on certain aspects of quality which seems to be critical at the moment. Some institutions may focus on scarce resource input; some may focus on management of the internal process; some may focus on satisfying the needs of the strategic constituencies. Because of the different approaches, different models are used in managing the quality in education. According to the concepts of total quality management, quality in education can be totally ensured if an educational institution can involve and empower all its members in functioning, carry out continuous improvement in different aspects of internal process, and satisfy the requirements, needs, and expectations of its internal powerful constituencies even in changing environment [9]. In private technical institutions, the changing environment is obvious in terms of financial

management; quality of the human resource-students, faculty and trustees; competition; and role of governments and regulatory bodies. Thus, managing input; processes; output; and satisfaction of internal powerful constituencies can be a good approach for quality achievement in private technical education institutions where inputs refers to human resources, financial resources, and infrastructure ; processes refers to governance, teaching-learning and supplementary processes; output refers to satisfaction of internal powerful constituencies which are: the students, the faculty and the trustees.

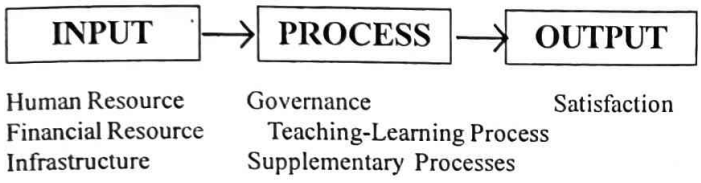

Fig. 1: Private Technical Education Institutional Framework

VI. QUALITY STANDARDS

Quality technical education embraces the activities through which a technical institution satisfies itself that the quality of education it provides and standards it has set are appropriate and are being maintained. Some of the quality indexes of technical education institution are: Human Resource; Infrastructure; Financial Resource; Governance; Teaching-Learning Process; and Supplementary Processes. These standards are discussed in brief as under:

A. Human Resource:

Human resource is a major source of strength and an asset to any organization. Although the quality of raw materials, machines ,tools and techniques, departmental procedures among others help in the synchronization of operations, it is people "in and for the organization" who can make best use of resources. Underutilized machines, infrastructure and facilities are the end results if people are not capable of singing to the tune of the TQM culture. The trustees, the faculty and the students (who constitute the major human resource), are to be competent, committed, sincere, truthful, and responsive. All these people should have positive attitude and have complete belongingness to the institute. It is the responsibility of the students to explore the atmosphere given to them and come out with the contributions at national/international level through research projects, technical paper presentations, their universities' results and campus recruitments [10].

B. Infrastructure

An institution must have adequate land, necessary building, residences and hostels, supporting facilities, canteen, transport, banking, postal and medical services, library, well equipped laboratories and workshop, availability of teaching aids, seminar halls, conference rooms and advance computing facilities with internet connection. These facilities are prerequisite for technical institution to ensure proper functioning like that of a technical institution. Buildings and grounds, utilities, laboratories, shops, equipments and materials are adequate to enable the institution to fulfill its stated purposes and objectives. Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each offered program[11].

C. Financial Resource

Since the financial resources of an institution influence, in, part, the quality of an instructional program, an institution shall present evidence that financial resources are available to achieve and maintain the objectives of the institution. In self-financed private institutions, the trustees are responsible to arrange the finance for capital cost; they deserve not only the cost recovery but the genuine profits as well. The governments must legitimate the provision. The recurring expenditure has to be met out from the tuition fees. Students have to pay higher fees for quality. The government should grant large number of scholarships for the constitutionally declared underprivileged students.

D. Governance

The governance in a technical education institution play vital role in its functioning. It includes the major responsibilities such as setting objectives for the functioning of the institution, formulating policies and programs to achieve it, and controlling all the functions which directly or indirectly affect the efficiency. Good governance in a an institution must meet the requirements like well defined mission, goals and objectives, sincere efforts to translate goals into reality qualities of leadership, transparency in working, delegation of powers to appropriate persons, participation of faculty in management of the institute, monitoring, feedback and corrective approach towards feedback, and the financial management. In private technical education institutions, governance has gone relatively unrecognized and it is underrated as a principal factor influencing educational quality. The system of governance should

facilitate the successful accomplishment of its mission and purposes [11]. The emphasis at most private educational institutions is on manager ship rather than leadership. The fact is that there is need to differentiate the role of a leader and a manager.

E. Teaching-Learning Process

The most important aspects are the teaching-learning activities. Teaching forms the backbone of any educational system. Apart from classroom lectures, more innovative teaching can be imparted through other modes including discussions case study analysis, presentations, field projects, role play, simulation methods amongst others [12]. The issue of what constitutes high quality teaching and learning is one which is of prime importance in the development of quality assurance systems, and one which is often not explicitly addressed [13]. The primary responsibility for the development and improvement of educational programs lies with the faculty [11]. Teaching and learning are the two sides of a coin. The most accepted criterion for measuring teaching is the amount of student learning that occurs. A teacher's effectiveness is again about student learning only. Effective teaching is that which produces beneficial and purposeful learning through the use of appropriate procedures. The faculty strives to become more effective teachers so that students can learn better, and many teachers explore methods to improve their teaching practice. Depending on the nature of subject, number of students, student's diversity, and the facilities available, there are different methods teachers are using in the class room. Various methods which are commonly used are: lecture, Discussion, role play, case study, brainstorming, and assignment.

F. Supplementary Processes

Engineering graduates should bring along cultural awareness, should be team workers. The institutional culture should be pro-active in developing the requisite competencies of students and help in the development of their overall personality. Good education in its totality must include the overall development of the student and must not restrict to training in a specialized discipline. The institution must organize various extra- curricular activities like arranging group discussions, debates, technical quizzes, extempore, guest lectures, seminars, and promote NCC, NSS, sports, games, cultural and co-curricular activities. These co-curricular and extra-curricular activities enhance and improve the inherent capabilities and soft skills of students. There should be a special focus on the improvement of communication skills of the students. Institution needs to create a good network with the industry, academia, regulatory bodies, parents and society. Conduction of entrepreneurship development programmes is very important for developing the engineers as entrepreneurs. Lectures of reputed academicians, people working in industry, successful personalities, alumni's, and religious leaders should be arranged.

VII. SATISFACTION

According to Cheng and Tam, 1997, education quality relates to satisfaction of all powerful constituencies, provided demands of the constituencies are compatible and cannot be ignored, the likely outcomes are satisfaction of management board, teachers and students. In a self-financed private technical education institution, the powerful constituencies are the trustees, the faculty and the students. The genuine cause of the satisfaction of these constituencies could be cost recovery and genuine profits for the trustees; good human resource policy including faculty development, career path and welfare for the faculty; and value for money for the students. Further, there has to be harmony amongst the three constituencies. If an emphasis on quality is geared to Improving cooperation among all the stakeholders in education, from trustees to faculty to students, its objective is certainly worthwhile [14].

VIII. CONCLUSION

Private initiatives have a share of more than 90% in higher technical education in India. Private technical educational institutions in the country can be a boon if dealt by the government and all concerned with supportive attitude. Quality is an institutional activity. Trustees, faculty and students play very significant role in a private technical institute. All of them have certain deliverables and they deserve certain entitlements. Their harmonious efforts towards standards result into quality and fulfillment of their entitlements lead to their satisfaction.

REFERENCES

(1) P. B. Sharma (2006), Role of technological institutions in technology innovations and their impacts on national security, the journal of engineering education, Vol 19, No. 3 & 4.

(2) National Knowledge Commission Report to the Nation 2006-2009, Government of India, 2009.