



CHANGING PARADIGMS OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARITIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS PERCEPTION AT THE UNDERGRADUATE AND POST GRADUATE LEVELS

¹Lather Anu Singh, ²Khatri Puja

¹Prof & Dean, University School of Management Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University

²Associate Professor University School of Management Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University

ABSTRACT

The changes in higher education scenario in India are utterly fast, are phenomenal and continue to be inevitable. Private participation in professional education (specially management education, which is the most sought after option) has brought changes in the perception of the society in general and students in particular, from such education being a welfare activity to a business activity. Thus, as in other fields, the market forces have started dictating and would determine whether private institutes of higher education (also some time called as 'capital fee colleges', now known as 'self-financing institutes') as brands and students as consumers will survive, excel or go under. The study explores the expectation and perception of undergraduate and post graduate management students regarding quality and support services in their institute. It seeks to provide an insight to the responsibility bearers, entrepreneurs and policy makers of higher education by highlighting the differential perceptions of students at both the levels and would thereby aid in ensuring an impeccable higher education system.

KEYWORDS – Management education, Quality Support services, privatization of higher education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in general, and professional and technical education in particular, plays a vital role in the economic and social development of a country. It provides a wide range of increasingly sophisticated and ever changing variety of trained manpower needed in education, engineering, medicine, agriculture, management, communication, etc. It produces researchers, who through their activities, deepen and extend frontiers of scientific and technical knowledge leading to innovations, which energize engines of economic growth and development. Apart from developing human resources, higher education turns out thinkers who reflect on critical problems that affect humanity and thereby ensure its survival and growth. Thus the single most important indicator of national future can be said to be the state of his higher education.

During ancient times in India the educational system was mostly individualistic – education was being provided by a few learned persons, in their individual capacity as a matter of devotion, sacrifice and service, and education was being received by a group of individuals out of their own interest, love and requirement for learning. Teachers used to live in the bosom of nature in a sylvan with very limited needs and hardly any anxieties of life. They were held in high esteem and they devoted their heart and soul to the furtherance of education. Students were living in the Ashrams with their teachers, sharing all the rites as well as responsibilities there. In such residential institutions there

was close and cordial relations among the teachers and pupils. The pupils were gaining knowledge and acquiring learning according to their own individual interests and abilities. *Dhoumya, Sandipani, Vasistha, Viswamitra, Vyas* and so on were the celebrated “Gurus” or teachers who imparted education to their pupils with deep love, care and dedication. *Nalanda, Taxila, Mithila, Rajagrih, Rajagiri and Lalitgiri* were a few renowned seats of higher learning.

In the 10th century, India was invaded from the northwest and many founded their dynastic rule in India. Persian became the court language and the educated elites became conversant in Farsi and Arabic. The dual traditions of Sanskrit and Farsi education were kept alive till the colonization of India by the British. The British established schools to teach English and the sciences. In 1857 three universities were established in three metropolitan cities, Bombay (now Mumbai), Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Madras (now Chennai) following Oxford or Cambridge as models. Another university was established in 1887 in Allahabad. These universities imparted education in the liberal arts and sciences. The main objective was to prepare people for careers in the civil service, legal profession and in medicine. The need for technical education was also felt by the British, who established the first industrial school attached to the Gun Carriage Factory in Guindy, Chennai, in 1842. With this varied history of the higher education system, the current system is primarily modeled after the British system. (he6) Currently, it takes 15 years of formal

education to complete the UG degree successfully. Professional UG degrees (B Tech, MBBS, BV Sc, etc.) take a total of 16–17 years of formal education. If we add the years of postgraduate and research level education, one can see that a person becomes employable around 30 years of age.(Murlidhar,2009)

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In recent years Indian graduates have done well in knowledge industry and they are now at an advantageous position in knowledge-controlled world economy. Jobs, particularly in disciplines and subjects that have link with knowledge industry, have increased. The Indian youths are now looking for education that would be of quality and immediate utility. The private institutions have come up to fulfill the demand by introducing large number of specific skill oriented courses. The foreign universities are also looking forwards to encash on such demands. The Indian economy also has shown steady growth in recent years. This has enhanced the percentage of families who can afford to spend more money on education. Thus raising interest in utility oriented education and enhanced economic strength of few have encouraged the growth of private institutions and entry of foreign universities in India India is steadily shifting to a fast track of economic and industrial development, which has lead to several paradigm shifts in higher education, such as:

- From 'State Controlled Education' to an 'Open Market Economy Education'
- From 'Education for Human Development' to 'Education for Human Resource Development'.
- From 'Education for a Few' to 'Education for Many'.
- From 'National' to 'Global Education'.
- From 'Institution or Teacher Centered Education' to 'Student Centered Education'.
- From 'Subsidised Education' to 'Education for a Price.'

There can be no denying to the fact that changes in higher education scenario in India are utterly fast, changes are phenomenal and changes continue to be inevitable. Private participation in professional education (specially technical and management education, has brought changes in the perception of the society, According to the results of a special survey '*Higher Education: Free degrees to fly*'(see *Economist, February26th-March 4th, 2005, pp63-65*), higher education is already a global business. The days when higher education was a matter of national policy and government regulation are rapidly fading. Higher Education provisioning is now globalised and in many ways, a commercialized affair and the way that the State had in the goings on is vastly diminished.(Kaul,2006)

FRAMEWORK OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

India with more than a billion residents has the second largest education system in the world (after china).Experts

THE PROBLEM

Education today, has very complex programs and product. The activities of higher education often involve highly

estimate that 32% of the Indian population is under the age of 15.(*the world fact book,CIA,2004 estimate*) In the Indian system of education the tertiary education or higher education starts after the 10+2 stage. The structure of undergraduate education in India is broadly similar all over the country, following the pattern of a three year programme. Colleges form the backbone of Higher Education in India since 88% of undergraduate education and 56% of post-graduate education is imparted through colleges with approximately 83.37% of the teachers being concentrated in colleges.(HE1). The UGC has formulated Regulations for the recognition of colleges under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, 1956 as per the powers contained in Section 26(1)(d) of the UGC Act, 1956 on 12th July 1974. The UGC also included colleges under Section 12(b) of its Act in terms of Rules framed under the Act. This makes the colleges available for central assistance from the central Government, or any other organization receiving funds from the central Government (he4)

The majority of institutions offering bachelor degree courses are in English medium .There are various college universities and private institutions that offer BBA /Bcom /BCAM etc. The colleges follow are yearly examination system and offer basic knowledge in specific areas. After completing a Bachelors degree the student can qualify for admission to master's degree programme in more specialized areas. Post graduate studies comprise of Master's degrees such as MA/Mcom/Msc/MBA /MD etc. These courses are offered by universities ,colleges affiliated to universities /AICTE and private universities.(HE7) Recent trends are towards growth in professional colleges both in the area of medical ,engineering and management. Other vocational courses which increase the employability are also preferred by the students .Our study limits itself to the purview of management education which actually started in India more than 50 years back. It commenced in 1950's as partime education programme for working professionals. It was only in 1990s that about 82 departments schools and affiliating colleges provided management education both at the undergraduate and post graduate kevel.(HE8).At the time of independence India lacked a network of universities and affiliated colleges that could suffice the education requirements of a diverse student base. Over the last so many years India has endeavored to provide access but have been unable to provide desired quality. Infact in order to achieve equality in terms of opportunity and creating social mobility the government has unduly restricted and has instituted strict commonalities in terms of free structure and curriculum over more than 250 odd universities.(cheney,2005)This however had restricted excellence and differentiation in the higher education industry . The present day scenario however extends the strings of Indian higher education to the private sector thereby ensuring competition ,access, and education for a price.

intangible matter. Also institutions 'compete' in market with other institutions, but do not always have similar intensity to economic and social goals. But we cannot deny the fact that

private participation in professional educational is a business and the self financing institutions comprise of an industry with students entering them as consumers and coming out after skill development as products. This being so, it raises a number of issues that guide the survival and growth of these institutes. In order to address these issues the following objectives were formulated-

- To study the importance and availability of faculty as intellectual capital enhancing quality of educational package, being offered by an institute..
- To study the importance and availability of infrastructure facilities like hostel, canteen, labs, library etc. as support services that play an important role in shaping the brand image of the institute .
- To study the level of importance for different variables relating to quality and support services at both undergraduate and post graduate levels .
- To study the level of satisfaction for different variables relating to quality and support services at both undergraduate and post graduate levels

HYPOTHESES

H01 There will be a no difference between overall importance and overall availability of faculty as intellectual capital of an institute between male and female students

H02 There will be no difference between Importance and availability, of infrastructure facilities like hostel, canteen, labs, library etc. as support services that play an important role in shaping the brand image of the institute between male and female students.

H03 There will be a no difference between overall importance and overall availability of faculty as intellectual capital of an institute between undergraduate and post graduate students

H04 There will be no difference between Importance and availability, of infrastructure facilities like hostel, canteen, labs, library etc. as support services that play an important role in shaping the brand image of the institute between undergraduate and post graduate students

H1 There will be a significant difference in level of satisfaction between undergraduate and postgraduate respondents for given variables of Cost, Quality and Support Services.

H2 There will be a significant difference in level of importance attached to different variables of cost, quality and support services by undergraduate and postgraduate students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Delhi NCR region . The sample chosen consisted of 410 respondents. The sampling technique used was multistage sampling. In the first stage the it was purposive wherein 10 management institutes were selected randomly (every second institute) from the list of GGSIPU affiliated management institutes .30 undergraduate management students and 30 post graduate students per institute were approached to fill in the questionnaire. Out of total questionnaires 410 completed questionnaires were considered for the study. The data was collected through a field survey conducted with the help of a non disguised pre structured questionnaire. using a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 =strongly disagree, 3 = neutral and 5 = strongly agree) The effort was to gauge respondents perception on different dimensions of quality and its impact on decision making for the institute. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group representative of the target population and modified as needed.

The final survey instrument took between five to eight minutes to complete. The statistical tools used for descriptive analysis included mean, standard deviation etc or inferential analysis independent sample t test was applied.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Individual characteristics of human beings is believed to have an impact on behavior and hence it is pertinent to study the effect of these characteristics of students on their perception of cost, quality, and support services available in an institute. An effort was made through research to explore and highlight the differences existing between perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students with respect to their perception regarding quality, cost, and support services of an institute.

Table 1- Comparison of importance and availability, of faculty as intellectual capital enhancing the quality of an institute between male and female respondents.

Variable (Faculty)	Male (N=237)		Female (N=173)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Overall Importance	3.45	1.65	3.57	1.61	0.75NS
Overall Availability	2.37	1.25	2.48	1.35	0.82NS

NS= Not significant

There exists no significant (NS) difference in case of overall importance (combined mean) attached to faculty as intellectual capital as a parameter of quality between male

and female students. It can be inferred that in the given scenario the differences in perceptions of the two categories is non-existent and that all respondents whether male or

female give equal importance to faculty such as intellectual capital enhancing the quality of an institute hereby accepting the hypothesis H01.

Table 2 - Comparison of Importance and availability, of infrastructure facilities like hostel, canteen, labs, library etc. as support services that play an important role in shaping the brand image of the institute between male and female students.

Variable Support services	Male (N=237)		Female (N=173)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Overall Importance	3.11	1.77	3.27	1.78	0.88NS
Overall Availability	1.95	1.21	1.92	1.16	0.23NS

NS=Not Significant

Importantly, no significant difference is found to exist between male and female students as they attach similar importance to the infrastructure and other support services. Further the mean scores are indicative that both the genders

consider being equally important. Even as regards the availability of support services facilities there exist no significant difference in the perception of both male and female respondents. Hence hypothesis H02 is also accepted.

Table 3- Comparison of importance and availability, of faculty as intellectual capital enhancing the quality of the institute between undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Variable (Faculty)	Undergraduates (N=256)		Postgraduates (N=154)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Overall Importance	3.37	1.7	3.72	1.4	2.25*
Overall Availability	2.18	1.2	2.81	1.24	4.91**

*Significant at .05 level **Significant at .01 level

A significant difference is, however, noted between the undergraduate and postgraduate students as to the importance that they attach to faculty as intellectual capital ($t=2.25, p<0.05$). The mean scores reveal that postgraduate students give greater importance to faculty as a parameter of relevance in enhancing the quality of an institute than the undergraduate students. It can be inferred that postgraduates who are more career conscious project greater seriousness about intellectual capital than the undergraduates who may have just joined an institute. Probably, another explanation

to this is the difference lies in the academic levels of these two groups of students. At the undergraduate level entrants are perhaps not yet equipped to judge the intellectual level of the faculty.

Also, there exists significant difference in the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students ($t=4.91, p<0.01$) as regards the availability of faculty in the institute. The mean scores reveal that postgraduate students perceive higher availability of faculty than the undergraduate students. Hence hypothesis H03 stands refuted.

Table 4- Comparison of importance and availability of infrastructure facilities and support services that play an important role in shaping the brand image of the institute between undergraduates and postgraduates students.

Variable Support Services	Undergraduates (N=256)		Postgraduates (N=154)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Importance	3.07	1.82	3.35	1.68	1.54 NS
Availability	1.86	1.19	2.07	1.18	1.18 NS

NS = Not Significant

No significant difference is, however, found to exist between the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students as to the importance of infrastructure facilities and other

support services in shaping the brand image of the institute and its availability. Relative mean scores reveal that lot of importance is attached to infrastructure facilities in shaping

brand image of the institute both by the undergraduate and postgraduate students. But there are not perceived to be available as desired. Hence hypothesis H04 is accepted.

Table 5- Comparison of level of satisfaction between undergraduate and postgraduate respondents for given variables of Cost, Quality and Support Services.

Level of Satisfaction	Under graduates (N=237)		Post graduates (N=173)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Academic qualification of faculty	2.79	1.28	3.08	1.19	2.25*
Experience of faculty	2.74	1.21	2.97	1.02	1.95*
Industry exposure of faculty	2.56	1.17	2.72	1.05	1.34 NS
Special/expert lectures and seminars	2.64	1.31	3.01	1.13	2.92**
Teaching aid and other facilities available	2.70	1.26	3.14	1.04	3.67**
Teaching methodology adopted by the faculty	2.74	1.24	3.03	1.01	2.42**
Industry interaction arranged by the institute	2.40	1.18	2.68	1.14	2.37**
Updation of course vis-à-vis current requirement	2.58	1.19	2.88	1.15	2.49**
Facilities offered vis-à-vis cost	2.50	1.15	2.77	1.08	2.33*
Research activity in the institute	2.36	1.19	2.32	1.13	0.32 NS
Innovative teaching and learning practices	2.44	1.23	2.61	1.08	1.40 NS
Remedial teaching and counseling activities	2.41	1.17	2.55	1.09	1.15 NS
Arrangement of industrial training	2.37	1.22	2.71	1.19	2.71**
Student teacher relationship	3.10	1.32	3.34	1.19	1.8 NS
Syllabus covered	2.72	1.35	3.33	1.13	4.69**

NS Not Significant

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

There exists significant difference between the perception of the two groups as far as expert lectures/seminars conducted (t=2.92, p<.01) industry interaction arranged by the institute, (t=2.37, p<.01) and updating of the course vis-à-vis current (t=2.49, p<.01) is concerned. The mean scores show that

postgraduate students are relatively more satisfied with special lectures conducted, industry interaction arranged by the institute, and updating of the courses than the undergraduate students.

Both the groups are less satisfied with respect to research activity in the institute. As shown by the mean scores significant difference exists between the two groups with respect to teaching aids and other facilities available ($t=3.67, p<.01$) and teaching methodology adopted by the faculty ($t=2.42, p<.01$). Postgraduate students are comparatively more satisfied with teaching aids and other

facilities available and teaching techniques used than the undergraduate students. It can be noted from the mean scores that satisfaction level for facilities offered vis-à-vis cost is higher for postgraduate students and that there exist significant difference between the two groups regarding the above mentioned parameters ($t=2.33, p<.05$). Hence hypothesis H1 is partially accepted and partially rejected.

Table 6- Comparison of level of importance attached to different variables of cost, quality and support services by undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Level of Importance	Under graduates (N=237)		Post graduates (N=173)		t Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Academic contents of the course	3.05	1.63	3.34	1.37	1.81 NS
Educational value of industrial training	3.24	1.62	3.43	1.47	1.20 NS
Maintaining time-schedule of examination	3.09	1.54	3.29	1.30	1.31 NS
Fairness of internal assessment	3.15	1.54	3.41	1.36	1.72 NS
Sound and effective evaluation system	3.15	1.54	3.31	1.39	1.09 NS
Interaction with faculty	3.17	1.58	3.47	1.31	1.94*
Field trips and industry training	3.26	1.53	3.31	1.46	.37 NS
Exposure of student to corporate sector	3.16	1.64	3.24	1.48	.51 NS
Placement facility in the institute	3.12	1.64	3.35	1.51	1.41NS
Institute brand image in the society	3.06	1.60	3.37	1.32	2.02*
Efforts by Institute/faculty available for overall personality development of student	2.99	1.64	3.29	1.55	1.8 NS

* Significant to .05 level ** Significant to .01 level

No significant difference exists between the undergraduate and postgraduate respondents as regards the academic contents of the course. Both the groups give high importance to fairness in internal assessment and sound evaluation system. There exists parity in terms of the level of importance attached to the field trips and exposure to corporate sector (as is visible from the mean scores) between the two groups. Significant difference is noted to exist between level of importance attached to brand image of the institute in the society ($t=2.02, p<.05$). The mean scores show that postgraduate students give comparatively more importance to brand image than the undergraduate students. The relative score position shows that placement is

considered to be most important parameter by postgraduate students after brand image. Significant difference also has been noted between the undergraduate and postgraduate students as regards importance of interaction with faculty ($t=1.94, p<.05$). The mean scores show that postgraduate students give relatively more importance to interaction with faculty than undergraduate students. However the postgraduate students have 1.55 SD score for efforts by Institute/faculty available for overall personality development of student while the undergraduate students have SD score as 1.64 for efforts by Institute/faculty available for overall personality development of student and also for exposure of student to corporate sector and

placement facility in the institute. Hence hypothesis H1 is partially accepted and partially rejected.

CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

While universities and the academic community in general would like higher education to be viewed as a public good, the prevailing argument in the WTO Secretariat is that higher education is akin to 'private consumption' directly benefiting the consumer by way of higher income. (Kaul, 2006) However, overtime the perception of higher education as a commercial service is gaining acceptance world wide

Over the last 50 years, the Government of India has provided full policy support and substantial public funds to create one of the world's largest systems of higher education. These institutions, with the exception of some notable ones, have however, not been able to maintain the high standards of education or keep pace with developments in the fields especially in knowledge and technology. Over time, financial constraints with exploding enrolments, and a very high demand from primary and secondary education has led to the deterioration in the financial support provided by the government. On top of this, an overall structure of myriad controls with a rigid bureaucracy has stifled its development. The need to realize this fact and act accordingly is not only growing but poses problems as well. The knowledge of the beneficiaries perception, in private set up is therefore gaining impetus. The common sense principles of survival in a free market economy tell us that quality, price and support services are the three corner stones for survival of any service organization. Whether and to what extent these common sense principles apply to the students (consumers) of management education self-financing institutes is a million dollar question. Knowledge about these will help the providers of education develop such strategies as will ultimately help in offering quality education including support services expected by them. It has been observed through research that quality of the faculty is perceived to be very important at both the levels hence impetus should be given to retain the best intellectual capital. Higher education institutions are unable to attract and retain qualified and trained teachers. Besides unattractive compensation packages, recruitment procedure is lengthy and working environment not conducive to retention. The need today is to realize and makes education more 'demand driven' to meet the emerging needs of the economy (World Bank Report 'India and the Knowledge Economy; Leveraging Strength and Opportunities' (Report number 31267-IN, April 2005) It may also be observed that students at the undergraduate levels are callus in their attitude and relative importance they attach to faculty as intellectual capital. The need is therefore more to develop a positive attitude for this group who are just out of school and are not able to understand the importance of the course they are enrolled in . Most of them attach great degree of importance to infrastructure facilities and support services for assessing an institute. It may also be noted that the satisfaction levels of the undergraduate students is very low

in terms of special lectures conducted, industry interaction arranged by the institute, and updating of the courses. Much needs to be done in this regard as it is evident that the providers of education are only concentrating on improvising the quality of the post graduate courses in their institutes where as the under graduate courses are relegated a back seat. There is much scope in conducting future research in terms of finding out the students perception for quality and support services in technical institutes. A comparative can also be drawn between perceptions of technical and management students.

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