

Role of research in academic institutions

BED MANI DAHAL

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Learning and teaching are based on this hymn from the 'Upanishads' "If one does not know one's way, one asks of a person who knows it. With the help of the knowledgeable, one reaches one's destination". Academic institutions are considered the places where one can find the knowledge, and the knowledgeable one. The transfer of knowledge is very old practice though establishment of government schools and colleges started only some two hundred years back in Nepal. Now there are five universities, hundreds of colleges, thousands of schools and millions of students. There are also many other education-related training, research, and consultancy organizations throughout the country. Certainly the education system and educated people are in a large number, and are helping for the overall development of the society.

The newly established private institutions may appear to be the solution to the growing need of education. In fact, they are also following the same old tradition but are particular to class hours and exam timing. The only thing novel about them is the introduction of new, technical subjects that have a high demand in the market. This has attracted commercial institutions to invest in academic programs. Anyone can think of quality product of such institutions, where a lot of students are equated to a limited resource.

Certificates or degrees are delivered generally with little concern for quality, originality, creativity and relevance to work. Quality management implies managing human beings to produce quality work. It is all the more needed in educational institutions because presence or absence of quality in teaching is critical to students and teachers to enjoy education. The results of good learning may be affected by time for study, congested class environment, and overall grasping capacity of the group.

We have to change the spoon-feeding system to self-learning method by encouraging extra activities like workshops, seminars, training, field visits, lab works and research. Admission process should fall at the same time in all the institutions throughout the country in all the similar academic courses. Intake number of the institution has to be defined before the admission on the basis of increment of the facilities like faculty member, lab, classroom, library, hostel, bus etc., and not on the basis of number of applicants. That has to be checked by certain board, government or parents' society.

It will create a great problem to all when one institution does not follow the laws of the country. The condition becomes worse when there is not any provision or policy of recruiting the specialized graduates in governmental or other organizations for specific task, and people from other field take their opportunity. For academic institutions, teacher-student ratio is the most important factor for quality. For example, Harvard University is a benchmark for educational institutions the world over, owing to the ideal teacher-student ratio maintained for over more than three centuries.

In Nepal, many new academic institutions are flourishing, whereas old ones are struggling for sustenance. The old ones are unable to cope with changes, whereas new ones do not want to learn important lessons from the old ones. Both are wrong in the sense that both have resisted change in the learning process and no research has been carried out to find the specific needs of the society.

The main problem faced by the new or old academic institutions is financial support. Government is biased; it supports some with huge resources and others are almost ignored. The government should provide funds to the needy and deserving students in any of the educational institutions in the country. Many private institutions are run by the self-financing courses that students are ready to pay for. These institutions are taking fee from students, calling teachers to teach and making certain profit for the service. They sometimes do not have a full time faculty or space. How to retain the best teachers for long is the difficulty for them. Administrators love to recruit any one in daily wages to oblige those who matter. Because of this attrition and violence prevail instead of healthy teamwork.

There must be a well-defined system to check these non-academic and unethical activities. Otherwise that will ultimately ruin the institute. The newly established or private sector institutes should avoid the lapses already made by others.

Without conducting and promoting resource-generating researches, neither can academic institution sustain for long, nor can academicians upgrade their knowledge and livelihood.

Imported and modern techniques and technologies can not be the ultimate solutions to the problems plaguing out regions as we cannot afford or they wouldn't suit to our environment. We have to develop technology that is economically feasible, culturally accepted and practically applicable for us. Western society will not do that research for us since that is not their headache.

Till now, our academic institutions research have not considered research as a part of learning and as a tool to overcome the demanded problems. Generally, there is neither a trend of conducting demanded research in higher academic institutions nor a culture of reward for exceptionally good research. Unless we become serious in these areas, educational institutes will not flourish, in the true sense.

(Writer is a lecturer at Kathmandu University)