

Promotion of Research in State Universities in Gujarat: Challenges and Prospects

Supriya Korgaokar Raithatha

Faculty, Christ College, Rajkot

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of knowledge society, service sector and knowledge based industries have dominated global business and economic order. Its profound sociological and cultural impact is no more a matter of academic debate. Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) have a major role to play in strengthening knowledge society and related economic activities in the world. Universities are viewed as a hub of creating, disseminating and applying knowledge for the welfare of mankind. Timely, relevant and useful knowledge creation by universities through the process of research has been a game changer factor for the world. Therefore, it is imperative that Universities be strengthened in Research as its core function. This paper aims at identifying challenges Universities of Gujarat face to perform their crucial function of knowledge creation. It also provides suggestions to promote research in Universities.

Introduction:

Emergence of service industry and its contribution to economy is no more a matter of news, debate or discussion. India's Growth Rate in GDP during 1995-96 and 2012-13 were 7.29 % and 4.47 % respectively. Industrial GDP, Agriculture Sector GDP and Services sector GDP grew in the years 1995-96 and 2012-2013 at 11.29 %, -0.98 %, 10.11% and 0.96 %, 0.91 %, 6.96% respectively. During the years 1951-52 and 2012-13, share of Agriculture, Industry and Service sector was 50.67%, 15.79% and 33.59% and 13.95%, 29.25% and 58.79% respectively. Service Sector contributed 52.9% and 55.2% in India's Gross Value Added in the year 2015-16 and 2017-18. Growth of Service Sector was expected to be 8.3%. Services Exports and Services Imports were 163.1 US \$ bl and 95.7 US \$ bl. Research and Development Services grew at 17.5% and 41.1% in the years 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively. Share of services sector in GDP and its growth rate have been evidently proving the fact that services sector has grown at a rapid pace. This is indicative to the fact that knowledge based economic activities are dominating in the world. Creation, dissemination and application of knowledge have been primary functions of knowledge institutions in general, and universities in particular. Therefore, it is extremely important for universities to perform adequately in creating knowledge through the process of research. This paper attempts to identify major challenges faced by universities in Gujarat for performing in research and provides suggestion to improve research performance.

Research Performance:

Research performance include publication, book writing, Funding received for Research Project, Number of Patents and Licenses received, Citation Index, Number of collaboration for research projects, number of students supervised for Master's and Doctoral Programmes, Conference and Seminars participated and papers presented therein etc (Creswell 1986, Olorunfoba and Ajayi, 2006, Hadjinicola and Soteriou, 2005). Several indicators are practiced by universities for evaluating research performance of individuals and universities.

Challenges:

Though, Research Performance of Universities in Gujarat in recent, past has been quite encouraging. Yet, there is a need for consolidating their efforts towards Research Performance as a proactive measure. While some university departments have outperformed, majority departments of several universities have remained poorly engaged in research performance. This section attempts to identify major challenges these universities face in Research Performance.

Wide-spread Mediocrity: Indian Higher Education is characterized by islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. Universities in Gujarat also face severe challenge of intense and deeply rooted mediocrity. Culture of excellence, performance and continuous improvement is alarmingly missing due to mediocrity. Proactive planning, monitoring, culture of quality and vibrancy in universities have been arbitrarily existing. Some departments and segments of universities have been outperforming, yet, they face severe challenge in maintaining consistency. Organizational Mediocrity negatively impacts universities, bringing not only all kinds of barriers to development and excellence, but also several wrong precedences and traditions..

Excessive Teaching: A university teacher is expected to perform three fold role; creation, dissemination and application of knowledge. Existing legal framework necessitates a teacher to excessively teach, neglecting research and consultancy. Paradoxically, research performance is one of the important criterion of API for teacher's recruitment and promotion. Yet, excessive teaching work hampers the growth of teachers and universities in research performance.

Institutional Research Capabilities: Teacher Research Capacity: Basic skill, knowledge, orientation and attitude of teachers towards their role as a researcher is alarmingly poor. More alarmingly, poor research capability of researchers have not been attended, measured and corrected. Lack of scientific and effective training to research students and teachers entering into university have not been adequately planned. Inadequate attention has been paid to vital skills like; analytical skills, data collection skills, skills for constructing and validating data collection instruments, skills for report writing styles etc.

Inadequate Research Infrastructure: Many departments and teachers at these universities suffer from non-availability of adequate research infrastructure including Research Journals, Research Instruments, Equipments, Research Laboratories, Software, research supervisor mentors. Access to good quality journals is limited to a very small number of teachers and scholars. Lack of awareness, paucity of funds, inability of its use through internet, mediocre power dynamics in the universities have played a very vital role in maintaining research infrastructure, a neglected issue in universities.

Lack of motivation for research performance: Except integrating research work into API in UGC Guidelines for direct recruitment and promotion of teachers, there does not exist any comprehensive, sustainable mechanism which can provide motivation to teachers and universities for improved research performance. Congruence of Goals among teachers, department and universities for research performance is ineffective.

Lack of Strategic Planning by Universities: Universities in Gujarat have not been found adopting long term Strategic Planning for their development. Planning for long term sustainable goals are missing at both, university level and department level. In absence of proactive Strategic Planning by Universities, it is observed that Universities fail in identifying Strategic Goals and Priorities and subsequent initiative, programmes and activities. It is observed that Universities work more reactively than pre-determined plans and design.

Lack of Research Performance monitoring System: Universities have not been found practicing the use of performance monitoring system in general and research performance monitoring systems in particular. Inadequate or poor planning for and absence of, research performance have created a culture of indifference and non-performance in universities.

In spite of large scale poor performance by universities in research, surprisingly, several faculty members and university departments have out-performed in research. Challenges as described above are general comments on the reasons of poor research performance.

Suggestions:

Creation of a culture of research performance: Universities have been trapped in the shackles of a wide-spread mediocrity. It is essential for universities to reject mediocrity and infuse a culture of performance in general and research performance in particular. Mediocre systems, processes, traditions, precedences, individual tendencies must be removed and be replaced by a culture of performance and excellence. Mediocrity that is deeply rooted in individual leadership, statutory bodies and teaching and administrative systems must be removed replacing a culture of excellence.

Balanced Workload of Teaching and Research: Excessive teaching hampers both, quality of teaching and research performance. Universities need to balance suitably work load of teaching and research. Alternatively, universities should identify teachers focusing in teaching exclusively and recruiting separately teachers for research performance only. Both, asking teachers to teach excessively and also expecting teachers to perform in research simultaneously is not feasible.

Investment in Research Capabilities: Universities need to proactively invest into research capability building of teachers and teams, through regular training-cum-exposure visits, teacher- mentoring and university-mentoring system. Training for Research Skills and Knowledge seems very essential.

Creation of Research Infrastructure: Universities may spare significant funds for creation and updating of research facilities and infrastructure including instruments, equipments, software, journals and databases. Access to, and use of, research infrastructure is most essential in universities.

Research Performance Monitoring Systems: Universities must proactively empower Internal Quality Assurance Cells for developing and implementing performance measurement and management systems, both individual level and university department level. Well designed action plan, both for short term and long term Strategic Plan is a key to excellence. Strategic Planning processes must be initiated at both, individual and institutional level.

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