Quality in higher education - a comparative study of campus and virtual education

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ABSTRACT: A reasonable comparison has been made between the status of conventional campus mode education and virtual education. Issues that concern higher education in both campus mode and virtual mode higher education are discussed here. Issues that had a greater impact on the quality of higher education in the current knowledge era have also been listed. One would be surprised at the system being constantly eroded with respect to time in terms of quality. In order to arrest the quality erosion, issues and concerns listed on each side have to be addressed independently. As this subject is time-dependent, continuous care is needed for each of these issues, keeping in mind the rapid technology evolution. If properly addressed, one can bridge the gap that exists between the two systems.

INTRODUCTION

There has been consistent demand for opportunities in higher education for everyone. The awareness in the third world countries due to the Internet has forced every country to expand their higher education system. On the other hand, the multi-pronged attack on the quality of higher education is a serious threat.

Expansion of higher education has occurred in campus mode and in virtual education. The present system elaborates on the gap that exists between the two. Due to rapid technological advancement, the system goes out of gear due to the obsolescence that engulfs the system. System degradation takes place due to the obsolete methodologies being used in both these modes of education [1-4].

In particular, the advent of the Internet has put every system out of gear, on the one hand, due to human subjectivity and, on the other hand, due to the obsolescence in the gadgets and technology that are used in the systems. This paper addresses the above two issues and a possible approach to solve the issues and bridge the gap between the two modes of education.

Following are the areas through which we foresee the systematic attack on the quality in higher education:

1. There is a considerable increase in the demand for higher education;
2. There is a mushroom growth of disciplines in higher education;
3. Universities roll out more opportunities for higher education keeping an eye on raising resources for better administration of the system;
4. Private participation in educational administration brings in a commercial angle of evaluating anything and everything in higher education;
5. Insufficient mechanisms are in place at the government level to check the slip shots in education system;
6. Year after year, the credibility of governmental machinery to check on quality decreases;
7. Able administrators in the educational system, both private and public, face incompetence due to obsolescence;
8. Institutions face obsolescence in infra-structure and equipments;
9. Teachers face obsolescence in their knowledge domain due to rapid advancements in the respective fields;
10. Education providers have resorted to various methods of delivery of instructional methodology, keeping in mind the cost of delivery by foregoing the quality;
11. Pervasive growth in Internet usage resulted in easy access to more information;
12. Pervasive growth in Internet usage made the learning process simpler;
13. Growth in one field due to the invasion of the Internet and its influence on another field has brought in obsolescence;

14. The student who is the main subject in the whole education process is not the same student that we have earlier defined;
15. Students' expectations are completely different;
16. A student with a new dimension trained with new gadgets at home has a different expectation in the learning process in higher education;
17. A class-room with chalk and talk method has disappeared;
18. Evolution of *class-room engineering* with Internet protocol has revolutionised class-room education;
19. Dramatic change/understanding has come into being in the face-to-face meeting between the teacher and the taught;
20. Expectations of the student from the teacher *beyond the curriculum* are much more complex phenomena;
21. The teacher has a complex problem of meeting the students of the Internet era;
22. The conventional library gives way to modern library with on-line journals and on-line lecture materials;
23. Conventional laboratories give way to modernised laboratories that give precise demonstrations of various practical classes that conventional laboratories could not provide;
24. Virtual laboratories offer a variety of experiments for practice without wasting specimens and materials.

With the growth in multimedia and information technology, there is greater awareness among those who look to undertake higher education. The Internet has had a greater impact on the student community in opting for the right mode of education. In any case, when the student makes his/her choice, he/she does not take into account the issues raised here.

Universities that offer educational programmes concentrate on increasing their reach by resorting to on-campus education and distance education/virtual education.

The persons who occupy the leadership positions (presidents, vice chancellors and administrators of higher education) do not always place top priority on the quality of higher education. With the mushrooming of private universities and with the poor funding for higher education from governments, the presidents, vice-chancellors and administrators of higher education resort to generating funds for successfully administering the university. In pursuit of generating resources and reaching more students, the universities resort to substandard methodologies for offering certificates and diplomas.

There is higher awareness of higher education for many reasons. This is due to the liberalisation of the educational system, due to the participation of the private sector in the education system, due to the poor understanding of education and educational administration by the government, due to the advent of the Internet, due to the obsolescence in technology, due to the obsolescence of teachers and administrators, due to the changed expectations of students in classrooms, due to the introduction of the virtual mode of education, due to the expectation of students beyond curriculum and due to such other changes that have taken place in various components of educational systems. The quality degradation in higher education has penetrated, whether it is campus mode or virtual mode of higher education.

The following questions are centred on to deal with the university education for both campus and virtual modes of education:

- Does distance education provide the same ethics and morals that campus education provides?
- Greatly spoken academic freedom; how far this is achieved in conventional campus and in distance education?
- Does distance education provide any new threat in terms of morals for students?
- Does the conventional system absorb the new challenges in the growth of science and technology?
- Does distance education have the flexibility to absorb the growth and challenge in science and technology?
- What are the new issues that pose a threat to the party of campus education and distance education?
- Is the system provider equipped with state of art development for both campus education and distance education?
- What are the ills and limitations in distance education learners?
- Does the learner have avenues to learn beyond the curriculum in campus mode, as well as virtual mode education?
- What is the impact of the Internet on the academics dealing with campus mode education?
- What is the impact of the Internet on the academics dealing with virtual mode education?

Though there has been continuous research and new findings in educational methodology, the gap that exists between campus and virtual modes of higher education continues to enlarge. The advent of the Internet has increased the gap further between the two modes of education. On the one hand, the Internet makes some personnel obsolete; and on the other hand, the same Internet provides solutions for many of the problems that could not be solved without it. Intense research is needed to address all issues and concerns with campus mode and virtual mode higher education in the light of development in Internet technology.

There are other issues worthwhile exploring in relation with this matter:

- Students' participation in the library differs in virtual learning compared to campus mode education.
- Learning through laboratory practice is missing in the virtual learning.

- Interactions among the learners in physical form are reduced to nil in the virtual mode education.
- A campus stay provides wider opportunities for a greater cultural understanding among the students; this aspect is completely missing in the virtual mode of education.
- Easy accessibility for students to discuss social issues with academic staff are greatly facilitated in the campus mode education. This aspect is greatly missing in the virtual mode education.

Comparisons of the lives of students in the campus mode and virtual mode have been discussed. Solutions found through the Internet and further intensive research with the help of the Internet would provide an effective bridge between the two modes of education.

CONCLUSIONS

A comparative study on virtual education and campus mode education have been outlined. Factors that affect the quality of higher education are also listed. Detailed research is needed to identify the methodologies for reducing the influence of these factors that affect the quality. A separate study on the virtual mode could lead to the ways by which the limitations cited here could be reduced, and the gap between the campus mode and virtual mode education could be reduced.

With the present day education system, there exists a wider gap between the campus and virtual mode of higher education. There are many opportunities for a student perusing campus mode education to improve his/her knowledge. However, virtual mode education with the help of the Internet offers a variety of new opportunities for students. Even the present day classroom no longer follows the chalk and talk method. Teachers have become facilitators and classroom instruction has become more like virtual education brought in through case studies and failure analysis made through the Internet and Web portals.

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