

ACADEMIC AUTONOMY FOR EXCELLENCE IN CLASSROOMS

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Since independence, India witnesses the birth of a large number of polytechnics of which barring a few, majority are directly governed by the State Board of Technical Education. The state Board of Technical Education, thereby, has come under a heavy strain and seems to be not reaching out in making technician education innovative, and curricula and methods, relevant.

Recently, Govt. of India has made liberalised industrial policies to boost up the industrial growth in the country. As a result large number of Multi-national companies and NRIs have entered into the industrial arena of India. In this context, the polytechnics have to play a key role in industrial restructuring on the technology dimension by training and retraining and continuous development of quality technician engineers required by the institute. It must build excellence by improving its quality, effectiveness, equity, efficiency and culture (Malhotra, 1993). This could call for greater responsibility on the part of teachers who work in these institutions.

Although World Bank assistance has made sea change in polytechnics with respect to equipment, facilities and resources, much needs to be desired to bring excellence in the polytechnics.

1. PROBLEMS OF TEACHERS :

Presently the position of teachers in the polytechnics has not yet improved comparing to the enormous efforts made for revamping the infrastructural facilities in the polytechnics. They face large number of problems in these institutions which form a formidable obstacle in their way for effective and efficient instruction in the classroom and laboratories. A polytechnic teacher is like a person whose hands are tied and eyes are blinded (see figure - 1). Although they are highly creative and well qualified, they are not given the much desired freedom and autonomy in their institutions and thereby their creativity and enthusiasm become withered and lost. A few of the problems are enumerated as under :

- Lack of administrative support to use the most modern AV gadgets in

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FIGURE - 1



the classrooms.

- Lack of necessary supporting materials like transparency sheets, markers, other stationery items.
- Inadequate seating arrangement of students in the classrooms & laboratories.
- Lack of moral support & encouragement from the institute and department to innovate, experiment and demonstrate strategies for effective teaching.

- Lengthy purchase procedures and their subsequent delay in gathering the resource materials to be used in classrooms, labs & workshops.
- Inadequate supporting staff in the labs & workshops.
- Poor salary and promotion avenues.

All these and many other problems have tied the hands and blinded the eyes of polytechnic teachers restricting their mobility to teach effectively in the classrooms, laboratories and workshops. There is no wonder why the right type of technicians with right type of knowledge, skills and attitudes are not produced from the polytechnics to meet the ever growing demands of the world of work.

2. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY :

Conferring full autonomy, i.e., financial, administrative and academic, to the polytechnics should be done with lot of care. If full autonomy is given to a polytechnic, when it has not developed a sort of work culture and has not matured enough to absorb and use it effectively, there are chances that the autonomy given will be wasted, misused and repelled (fig. 2 - Page-62).

The rays of autonomy will not penetrate into the body polytechnic to produce excellence in the system. Therefore, a limited academic autonomy and freedom for improving classroom instruction alone can be thought of, to begin with, to strengthen the hands of polytechnic teachers and boosting up their fallen morale.

The freedom thus given would enable him to make decisions as to what to teach, how to teach and evaluate and

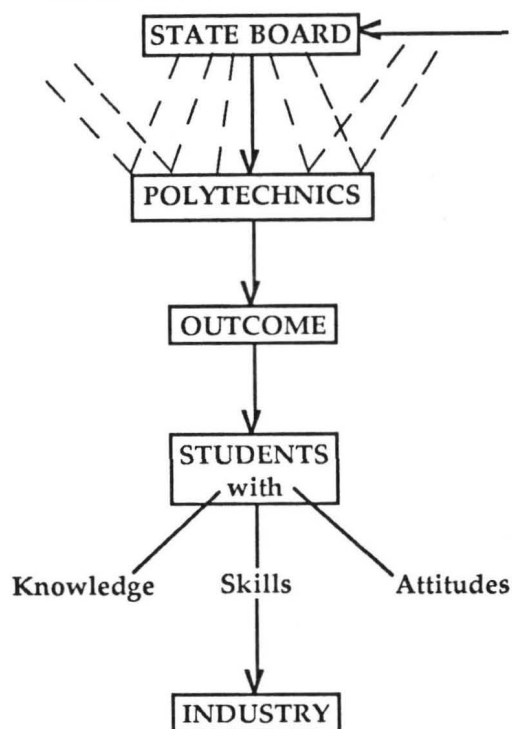


FIGURE - 2

create a climate conducive to effective learning. The Programme of Action (1986) has rightly said that the teacher is the kingpin of the system of education and no system can rise above the level of its teachers. It is, therefore, essential to sensitize our teacher and stimulate him to exercise his freedom within the four walls of the classroom, to begin with.

ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AND HODs

The principals and HODs of the polytechnics have to play a major role in this context. They should provide the much desired academic and managerial leadership by way of encouraging the teachers to take up their instructional role in an atmosphere free from fear and favour. It will be appropriate at this con-

text to mention the four fold MANTRA, suggested by Peter Drucker, to build a climate that can make a human organisation highly productive in terms of its goal achievement :

Involvement : All the people including principal, faculty and staff, and students can engage themselves in their respective tasks and activities towards a maximum realisation of personal as well as institutional goals.

Participation : Everyone in the process, however little or highly placed, should feel his/her stake in the mission, and can be encouraged to participate in its evolution, advancement and fruition.

Empowerment : Every member, possessing required knowledge, skills and attitudes should feel free to operate optimally and generate output maximally.

Understanding : Every individual must be made aware of his role in the institution; how he is stitched with others, how he should work in a team situation, and what he should realise individually and institutionally.

CONCLUSION :

A period of five years can be given to polytechnic to try out this mechanism of autonomy and the outcome can be carefully monitored and assessed. On finding that this limited autonomy could bring out the right type of diploma holders with right type of knowledge, skills and attitudes as required by the industries or field, more autonomy can be conferred to the polytechnic always aiming every time to achieve the much cherished objective, i.e., excellence in polytechnics.

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