

Universities' Performance: Need for Early Assessment

Md. Golam Salek

UNIVERSITIES are established with many objectives. With a view to achieving those objectives, universities are to perform three major functions, which may be categorized as dissemination, creation and application of knowledge. Let us see how our universities are doing compared to the functions that they are supposed to perform within the myriad of constraints.

Dissemination of Knowledge

The first and foremost duty of a university after its establishment in our country is to offer various academic programmes leading to degrees. Teaching is an important component in the process of dissemination of knowledge.

Many people think that as far as dissemination of knowledge is concerned, our universities are doing fine given the political, institutional, financial, and other constraints. They sometimes cite the examples of the reputation of a few of our graduates who have earned name and fame in different professional arenas at home and abroad. Newspaper reports sometimes flash the performance of a few talents who even outsmart many of their western counterparts in terms of their intellectual quality. There is no doubt that a handful of our graduates are doing extremely good individually in their respective fields on their own even by western standards; but the performance of the majority of the graduates are far from satisfactory.

The average performance of the majority of our graduates may be considered as a yardstick of the quality of education of our universities. Against this yardstick, our universities cannot be considered even as an average performer. Few luminaries may be an exception, not a reflection of the quality of education of the institutions concerned. It speaks of the individual merit, commitment and efforts, not of their alma mater. The teaching methodology, curriculum etc are, in many cases, archaic lacking innovative ideas, adaptation with the

changing needs of the society and devotion on the part of the faculty. So there is no reason to be complacent about the quality of teaching in our universities, although there are many good students who could do much better given the right environment.

Creation of Knowledge

Universities are required to create and generate knowledge for the benefit of society at large. The pursuit and dissemination of knowledge is attainable by way of teaching and research. One of the criteria for determining the standing of a university is the quality of its research output.

Teachers primarily conduct some research with a view to fulfilling the minimum requirements for appointments in various faculty positions. Once they fulfill those requirements and become a professor, their urge for conducting research declines, barring a few honourable exceptions. The research papers are, in majority of cases, published in local or foreign unknown journals having no or little place among the internationally reputed peer-reviewed professional ones. Many universities have their own journals where papers of their own faculty members as well as from those of other public and private universities are published without giving due consideration to the originality of the papers facilitating the fulfillment of requirements for appointment in higher academic positions.

Some potential researchers allege that there are not enough resources—both electronic and print—available for conducting quality research in our universities due to financial constraints. It has been observed that whatever resources are available, even those are not utilized adequately. Our observation can be substantiated by a simple visit to a library, specially, of a university. One would rarely find a faculty member consulting a reference journal or browsing other electronic resources.

The reputation of our uni-

versities is sometimes tainted by unauthorized use of thoughts or wordings of others, which is known as Plagiarism. "It's like lip-synching to someone else's voice and accepting the applause and rewards for yourself". This malaise has assumed a serious proportion with the easy accessibility to Internet to the pseudo researchers.

The other form of plagiarism is fabrication, which is the willful twisting of information to substantiate the so-called researchers argument. Falsification is another unethical tactic resorted to by the researchers. Sometimes, copying is deliberate. In some cases, in the absence of the knowledge of scholarly integrity, these unethical acts are committed inadvertently.

In earlier days, plagiarism was relatively a difficult task. One had to move from library to library and consult from books to books to steal ideas or to copy texts for using those in the name of the plagiarist. But now—a—days, a vast ocean of resources is at one's fingertip. Within no time, one can have access to hundreds of papers relevant to the needs of the researchers. This vast source of electronic resources has an inherent power to lure the potential researchers to plagiarism.

It has been found that some pseudo scholars have a long list of publications to their credit. Many of them cannot avoid the allegations of plagiarism. It has also been observed that while poaching from others, they sometimes even do not bother to make some alterations to the original text. The use of 'cut & paste' technology has become popular in recent times and been gathering momentum among the plagiarist that does not demand serious efforts and special aptitude.

Lack of research activities may be an obstacle to the efforts of a University for carving a niche for itself among the reputed seats of higher learning. The driving force for resorting to plagiarism by someone who has no further promotion prospect is self-

publicity and the yearning to be known as a scholar without any serious intellectual pursuits. The overwhelming urge of personal aggrandizement takes precedence over the ever-increasing need for self-actualization. Whatever may be the reasons for research and publications, plagiarizing cannot be justified. It undermines the reputation and tarnishes the image of the researchers concerned as well as that of his institution. In terms of quality research, the performance of our universities is disappointing, to say the least.

Application of Knowledge

The research findings need to be applied for the benefit of the society at large either directly or indirectly. The type of research that results in product innovation is almost non-existent in our universities. As most of our researches have no relevance to the needs of our industries, so there is hardly any university-industry linkage, collaboration or cooperation.

Overall Performance

Are we satisfied with the present status of our universities? I am sure all concerned, whether be from the teaching profession, students' community, government or the public at large, will definitely reply in the negative. Judging the overall performance of our universities against the above-mentioned criteria, those may be placed under different categories such as performing, non-performing and sick. Now is the time to embark on the serious exercise of assessing the performance of our universities. Once the nature and type of problems are diagnosed, treatment becomes less painful.

(In this article, the author's personal views have been expressed and those do not, in any way, reflect his employer's views.)

The author holds double Masters' degree, one in European Business Administration and Business Law from Lund University, Sweden and another one in Business Administration from IBA, DU)