Abstract

Transparency today has become indispensable in every realm of governance and has evolved from a concept where only visibility was imperative, to a term that has encompassed the growing importance of inferability too. The Higher Education system in India calls for high quality of Institutional Governance. This desired level of Institutional Governance can never be achieved without creating transparency in its functioning for all its stakeholders. It is in this context that this study assumes importance. This paper studies the need for transparency in Higher Education and the probable areas where educational institutions could create greater transparency. This study concludes with two suggestions for institutions, which, if implemented could help in achieving the desired results through transparency.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, transparency has attracted attention in almost every area of importance—business, politics, public affairs, communication, law, and education is one of the newest entrants. Transparency dispels opacity and addresses asymmetries that prevent reliable information from reaching the right persons. Transparency is dependent on two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: visibility of information and its inferability (Michener & Bersch, 2013). Transparency has evolved from a concept where only visibility was imperative, to a term that has encompassed the growing importance of inferability too. Transparency no longer is to be limited to making information visible
but also to aid in making inferences, rather, verifiable inferences. This reliable, verifiable, inferable, information that is generated through transparency is bound to create greater accountability. Accountability holds strong promises of fair and equitable governance. (Frolich 2010). High accountability implies high transparency, as reporting output data in a transparent way promotes answerability (Bovens, 2005). Greater accountability undoubtedly assists in informed decision making by various stakeholders.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
This paper proposes to study the following:
I. To study the need and relevance for transparency in Higher Education
II. To identify the probable areas where educational institutions could create greater transparency
III. To suggest techniques for creating greater transparency in HEIS.

3. METHODOLOGY
This paper is descriptive in nature and is purely based on secondary data which, was collected from various research articles, journals, magazines and websites especially from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, department of Higher Education, the University Grants Commission and the Government of India. Further latest contributions of various experts on the subject have also been referred.

4. TRANSPARENCY- THE NEED
Transparency is a necessity to fight against Organizational and Individual irregularities. It reduces corruption, promotes good governance and rests upon a non-negotiable right to know, made explicit in article 19 of Universal declaration of Human rights. Transparency in public affairs creates greater accountability, it reduces the chances of funds being intended for basic services such as education and health being lost, misused or misallocated. Transparency in financial policy is bound to make markets more efficient and less volatile. Transparency in parliamentary debates, the functioning of statutory committees creates greater scope for participative governance. Transparency in disclosure of the use of taxes, cess and other public money dissuades citizens from tax evasion. Transparency in the corporate sector, prevents mis-governance, fraud and helps in averting major financial crises. More importantly, transparency in all walks of life and the demand for it from various stakeholders will push Ethics and Compliance up the list of priorities for all.

4.1 Transparency in Higher Educational Institutions- Need and Relevance
The Indian economy is undergoing structural transformation. Very soon, 90% of India’s GDP and 75% of employment will be generated by the manufacturing and services sector. This structural shift in employment is bound to generate greater demand for skilled workers. India with its increased graduates and massive workforce is poised to clinch this advantage only if it is able to create a “globally relevant and competitive”
higher education system that serves the requirements of both the domestic as well as the
global economy and one which is accountable to each of these aspiring young minds
entering the portals of Higher Educational Institutions. This concept of accountability
has been evolving over the last few decades. In public organizations, the concept of
accountability has evolved from compliance with rules to production of results (Burke
2005a). In higher education, these include accreditation, assessment, academic audits,
market forces, reputational ratings, performance budgeting, performance reporting,
student-alumni surveys and standardized tests (Burke 2005b). Dramatic changes in the
governance framework for higher education in areas both internal to institutions as well
as areas external to institutions is imperative in building institutions that are globally
relevant and competitive. It is in this context of governance framework that transparency
in Higher Educational Institutions takes center stage. High quality of Institutional
Governance could never be achieved without creating transparency in its functioning for
all its stakeholders. A few areas where an Educational Institution could exercise
transparency for the benefit of its stakeholders are:

- General Infrastructure
- Infrastructure for Specific Programs
- Admission Policies, Fee structure, Financial Aid, Scholarships & Freeships,
- Teacher: Teacher – Students Ratio, Teacher Qualification and Experience
- Curriculum Construction and Transaction Methods
- Students Teaching and Learning
- Students Assessment/ Evaluation Methods
- Students Support Service including Technology Support
- Learning Needs for Special Groups
- Students Diversity
- Students Completion Rates, Learner Outcomes
- Service Quality

4.2 Transparency in HEIs- Suggested Techniques

In the probable areas discussed above, a higher educational institution could exercise
transparency, by adopting some simple but strong policies. A few techniques that could
be followed in achieving an enhanced level of transparency is discussed below:

- Participative Governance:

A sure way of increasing transparency for the various stakeholders and thereby
enhancing the accountability of the institution is by adopting participative governance. If
the stakeholders are involved in various facets of decision-making, it is bound to create
greater transparency. Parents could be involved right from admissions in tracking the
progress of their ward. Information could be shared to the parents regularly about the
attendance, marks and other activities in which their ward shows interest, in addition to
regular parent-institution meetings and interactions. Students could be involved while
framing the rules and regulations applicable to them, making them accountable to the
same; they could be involved in certain stages of syllabus formulation, so that the student is an active participant in the education process, making the role of a professor a facilitator rather than an instructor. Faculty could be involved at every level of decision-making in the institution through a participative process.

- **Digitization of Processes:**

  In today’s environment the use of IT has become a strategic imperative for all. Digitization of processes is bound to create greater transparency. As an Educational Institution, transparency could be created in the admission process, through digitization, by opting for online applications for various courses, so that manual sale of application in the campus is eliminated and the number of applications issued is made known through the number generated in the application forms. Online payment of fees would too undoubtedly create greater transparency and scope for enhanced financial accountability. Use of IT in student related initiatives such as assessment, evaluation, updating of attendance, marks, release of hall tickets, option for choice of subjects etc will increase the visibility of the objective processes followed by the Institution. Digitization also provides the management and teachers with greater scope for analytics. Online analytics created through digitization of processes provides faculty with data on how and at what pace each student is learning enabling them to provide personalized support to aid student-learning outcomes.

- **Multilayered feedback mechanism**

  Once the Institution lays processes in place for transparency by creating visibility on its admission policy, selection policy and payment of fee, then institution level rules and regulations could be made available to the students through simple documents such as an academic calendar or a student hand book. Clarity of the functioning of the institution would be a pre requisite for inviting feedback from the students and various stakeholders. A strong and effective multilayered feedback system could be established through the use of ERP where students could login using their register numbers to post their feedback on anything related to the institution on a regular basis. In addition to this, end semester course and teacher evaluation, annual student’s satisfaction survey and exit interviews from final year students could create greater transparency and larger scope for the management to redress grievances and to take corrective action.

- **Policy formulation level:**

  Reforms at the policy framework level governing higher educational institutions would aid in transparency, reduce ambiguity and promote self-regulation. It is imperative for the government to promote disclosure of information by all higher educational institutions to make the system accountable and transparent. This could be a possibility by ensuring that regulators and accreditation bodies comply with service standards and deadlines set for them to perform their roles. The regulators and accreditation bodies could be asked to resort to public accountability reporting based on pre-defined frameworks. Installation of an ERP system across all higher educational institutions to capture key information related to governance in a standardized format and using this to
create a centralized database which can be assessed by all to access information on individual higher educational institutions could also be done. These initiatives by the government exclusively for the educational sector would undoubtedly increase transparency.

5. CONCLUSION

The transparency and accountability obligations of a HEI are multidirectional in nature. On the one front, it is accountable to the state, on another to the general public, while on another to the students and alumni and inwardly to the faculty and professionals employed within. To conclude this study, two suggestions are put forth: one, all educational institutions must devise a framework that clearly details roles and responsibilities of not only the top management but also the faculty, students, alumni, employers and other stakeholders in Institutional governance. This framework of clear roles will increase the accountability of the stakeholders in ensuring effective governance. Two, institutions should devise a transparency strategy. A strategy that details the quantum of information to be disclosed, its authenticity, its verifiability, its infer-ability and the purpose this disclosure would serve. Once this strategy is devised, the top management should lead this strategy and enable the successful implementation of the same. It is recommended through this study, the use of IT in digitizing processes for implementing the transparency strategy. The term transparency has itself gained prominence with the emergence of Information Technology. IT has rendered information more visible to all stakeholders associated with any organization. A transparency strategy adopted by HEIs dominated by the use of IT will change several processes in education and will create greater transparency to its stakeholders.

6. REFERENCES


Pasquier, M., Villeneuve, J.P.(2007).“Organizational barriers to transparency: A typology and analysis of organizational behaviour tending to prevent or restrict access to information”, International Review of Administrative Sciences 73(1) 147.


