The Academic Accountability in Higher Education; Rhetoric or Real

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Abstract

The need for accountability has always been figured in education sphere in general and higher education in specific. Despite the notions about higher education as an ivory tower, knowledge for knowledge's sake and academic freedom, higher education institutions are answerable to various stakeholders in terms of tax payers' money spent for quality education, research and community outreach activities. Accountability is much more explicit on stakeholders' agendas accounting for performance. Accountability is closely related to evaluation of efficiency, effectiveness, and performance, and requires proving that higher education has achieved the planned results and performance in an effective manner. Highlighting efficiency and effectiveness and emphasizing results are the basic characteristics of accountability in higher education.

This article analyses the various aspects of accountability in higher education viz. Marco and Micro Accountability, further it elaborates the types of accountability – Administrative, Financial and Academic. Academic accountability of teaching faculties includes Professional, Legal and Student Learning Accountability. Academics have to have worked mostly within the premises of these three accountability structures, often concurrently. The first system is rooted in the adherence to professional norms, the second system stresses in compliance with statutes and regulations which are demarked in the norms and standards of education enshrined in the administration documents whereas; the third accountability system is based upon effects demarcated in terms of student learning output.

Keywords

Accountability in Higher Education, Macro accountability, Micro Accountability, Financial Accountability, Legal Accountability, Professional Accountability, Results Driven Accountability-Students Learning Output Accountability.

Introduction

Education is key for development as it moulds the future by enabling individuals and societies with abilities, perceptions, knowledge and values to live and work in a sustainable manner. Higher education institutions hold the responsibility of developing human resources right from their inception and providing prospective professionals to all sectors of economy. Nations have been investing in higher education for generating relevant knowledge and honing essential skills for sustainable development. According to Higher Education Institutions sport the new ideas, develop roots and grow tall and robust. According to Yashpal[1], higher education widens the productivity of stakeholders', thus improving national capacity and delivering a competitive edge, by giving people access to knowledge and the necessary tools to accumulate and diversify it. Higher education helps in addressing the national challenges and priorities more diligently and sensitively. The research and development activities along with teaching at higher education institutions are major instruments for change in society and quality of life. The demands for high accountability and outcome based higher education are given great emphasis in the recent policy framework and efforts are being put to monitor the accountability of the institution and the accountability of the personnel in performing their roles and responsibilities.

Educational institutions need to exhibit accountability. Gnanam Committee Report (U.G.C., 1990)[2] acknowledges that the academic community both independently and cooperatively be made accountable in implicit and explicit terms to the society and the society is entitled to demand such answerability from them. The investment in education in terms of physical and human resources has been growing exponentially over the years. Accountability is a necessary aspect of the educational system. People seek education not only for gaining employment but to liberate their mind and to achieve the state of enlightenment, which makes man free from bondage. Educational institutions have an obligation to society because they are provided with the funds and resources by society.

Over the last decade, higher education institutions have been subjected to various accountability checks to maintain or improve the quality. The common parlance of these accountability systems and the processes is that higher educational institutions need to practice highly professional engagement in teaching, research and extension. Therefore, a lot of pertinent questions are coming forth in higher education such as;

- What is the typology of accountability in a higher educational context?
- Which are the major types to influence directly to the students learning output?
- How can academic accountability make higher education institution a "learning organization"?

Accountability in Higher Education- Typologies

Accountability has been used as an alternative expression for responsibility / answerability. Generally, accountability implies answerability to a person or organization that has imposed a target or expectation. In any organization, it is the human resources who define the success through their dedicated efforts. Once an individual is assigned responsibilities and the authority to perform a certain task, S/he is accountable for the task. So accountability literally means that the need to make one's actions satisfactory to some responsible body or agency as per the set standards or expectations. According to Robert[3] accountability means "the requirements to demonstrate reasonable actions to some external constituency or agency". In recent times various types of accountabilities in higher education have come to be discussed. But from a broader and analytical perspective, accountability in higher education may be considered in two forms, namely, Macro Accountability and Micro Accountability.

Macro Accountability refers to the responsibilities of the higher education system to the society represented by the students, parents and the government. Social responsibility of higher education is key here. This has to be clearly reflected in the vision and mission of the universities and should be translated into effective action plans for implementation across the campus. Educational institutions have an obligation to society because they are provided with the funds and resources by society. Gnanam[4] has argued "Macro accountability is difficult to measure and achieve as it involves normative judgment and connotation. The present objectives of the higher education system are framed in normative context and are

expressed in quantitative terms". In this context, the Indian Education Commission (1964-66) has formulated the objectives of Indian higher education system in the following words; 'Education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values'.

University systems need to incorporate 'social responsibility' as a core component at all levels and encourage students, teachers and parents to actively take part in such activities throughout the academic year.

Micro accountability is concerned with the responsibilities and performance of each one of the functionaries within the academic system, including administration and various other bodies to the management as to what they have accomplished towards the overall objective of the university during a given point of time. According to Gnanam[4], micro accountability can be comprehended in three forms- Administrative Accountability, Financial accountability and Academic Accountability.

a) Administrative Accountability

The Vice Chancellor/ Provost of the University is both the academic and administrative head of the University and s/he presides over the meetings of all the important bodies of the University such as the academic council and executive committee. So the Vice Chancellor is expected to plan and execute academic and administrative programmes. Powar[5] has pointed out "The Vice-chancellor, therefore, needs to have personal involvement in all the activities of the university, and should visit all the departments, administrative units and examination centers regularly. There should be high accountability on the part of various managerial bodies of universities and colleges. They should not only take decisions but also implement them". To build administrative accountability into the system, definite goals should be set up for the university for a period of time, against which administrative performance could be evaluated.

Administrative accountability includes the active engagement of the administrative personnel in all sorts of managerial activities and provides administrative support for the successful implementation. Outcome based management system is the call of the government for higher

education, in which norms/standards/expectations/targets are collectively set and the appraisal systems are rigorously implemented.

b) Financial Accountability

The universities and colleges are largely financed by the central and the state governments either directly as through autonomous bodies in various forms, for e.g. UGC, ICAR, CSIR, AICT etc or? It means it is public money, which is being utilized for higher education. Hence, there has to be accountability of the educational system. The investment in education in terms of physical and human resources has grown tremendously. There has to be a mechanism for preparing meaningful and realistic budget estimates and for controlling and checking wasteful expenditure. Each and every person working in administration, teaching, research or extension should be subjected to accountability for efficient use of funds. From the viewpoint of enhancing the accountability of the educational system, it is necessary to improve the cost-effectiveness of investment of higher education. Swant & Dhonukshe[6] argued for a mechanism to improve the quality of education by using the financial mechanism and to let the inefficient departments, colleges and individuals be rooted out. Zero tolerance with regards to misuse of public money in higher education should be adopted and if necessary all such information should be placed in the public domain. Right to Information Act has increased the accountability of the system to some extent; however such practices need to be the integral part of university policy and governance.

c) Academic Accountability

Academicians form the fulcrum of the University and their role and responsibility determine the quality of higher education to a large extent. Their willful participation in the management and administration of the University is an essential pre-requisite for the success of the University. Among other things, academicians are also expected to help the University in preparing an action plan indicating the priority areas of activities for the academic year in the background of the academic plan prepared by the university, besides preparing the budget for the department. Teachers engage in teaching courses effectively and are involved in research and extension activities and perform other such incidental functions, which contribute to achieving the objectives of the university.

The teacher is the pivot of an education system. Imparting knowledge and evaluating students' performances are the primary responsibilities. According to Page and Thomas[7], teacher accountability is a "postulation of obligation for getting stated results in students". It is asserted that teachers' accountability likely touches their instructional practices, answerability and eventually the learning and development of students[8]. There are quite a number of studies on teachers' perspective about accountability[9-11]. They have acknowledged that although accountability has significant motivational consequences in terms of effort investment, perseverance, and commitment to students, it contains some personal costs for teachers such as hard work, sense of being evaluated, and spending more time for professional practices. Stiggins et al.[11] found that teachers' accountability correlated to their student achievement. Moreover, accountable teachers focus on their students' motivation, academic success[12, 13].

The New Education Policy demands from the teachers a higher performance and sense of dedication and devotion to their profession. Once the teacher is appointed and is confirmed, the immunity to accountability develops. Therefore, it is necessary to devise a suitable system of tools to enforce accountability for teachers. Each university should frame the norms for assessing the performance of teachers.

It is necessary to introduce some strictures for completion of the course syllabi, actual teaching performance in the classroom and laboratories and punctuality and sincerity in the evaluation of students' performance. It is necessary to introduce a proper mix of dissent and discipline in teaching community by providing the scope for improvement of ineffective teachers.

Types of Academic Accountability

Accountability suggests a statement of clarification of one's demeanor, a statement or explanation of reasons, causes or motivations. Kanika[14], enlisted the accountability of teachers as: Accountability towards the Learner; Accountability towards Community; Accountability towards Profession; Accountability towards Humanity and Values and Accountability towards Country. Betts et al.[15] move toward collective teacher accountability as a component of teachers' efficacy in their teaching preparations, internal locus of control,

commitment to all students' learning, and personal responsibility for students' learning outcomes.

In the field of higher education, there are three main types of accountability system: (a) compliance with regulations - legal accountability (b) adherence to professional norms - professional accountability, and (c) results driven - students learning output[16, 17]. Leveille[18] stated "Educators have worked mostly within three accountability systems, often simultaneously.

(a) Legal Accountability-Compliance with Regulations

Legal accountability is compliance with rules and regulations. This system demands compliance with statutes and regulations such as those embodied in the national educational system. In other words, educators are accountable for adherence to rules and accountable to the set norms and procedure. Individuals in the organizations tend to exhibit accountability in their work, if the consequences of non-performance are clearly stated and informed. Legal framework thus becomes a binding force for employees to perform.

b) Professional Accountability-Adherence to professional norms

The professional Accountability system is based upon loyalty to professional norms and practices. It is the responsibility towards one's self and colleagues. Though neither mandated nor required, the impact of the pervasive agreement on convinced principles and practices has done much to elevate education as a profession. Barton et al.[16] clarify this as "In this system of accountability, academics are responsible for adherence to standards of higher education and accountable to their peers; it is the responsibility to one's own profession and colleagues." This is also referred as professionalism. Individuals accept fully their professional standards and strictly follow them in real sense. Thus universities can become the community of professional learners.

c) Results Driven Accountability-Students Learning Output Accountability

This accountability system is based upon results, with results defined in terms of student progression and learning. The outcome based education, which requires a system of assessing the education performance monitoring task for results-based teaching and learning procedure. According to Barton et al.[16], this is the moral accountability which, is based upon

a sense of responsibility on students output; a feeling that one is responsible to ones' student community, eventually to the wide society. In this sense, social accountability of educational system is synonymous in this criterion.

It means teachers and the educational system should take responsibility for improvement in students' learning outcome and overall development to the potentials of their students. A major focus in higher education in the 21st century is, therefore, on learning outcome based education. With growing internationalization, the issue of accountability demands higher education institutions to perform not just a wheel that rotates but to do better in the competition and to produce best-talented students. The paradigm shift is moving from instructional oriented teaching to student-oriented learning, or in other words from "Teaching to learning". The students of higher education are going to be the direct contributors towards the social and economic development of the country therefore; they are the resources of the future society. Furthermore, Betts et al.[15] move toward collective academic accountability as a component of teachers' efficacy in their teaching rehearsals, internal locus of control, commitment to all students' learning, and personal responsibility for students' learning outcomes. Likewise, Stiggins et al.[11] found that teachers' accountability was positively linked to their student achievement. This is emphasized that teachers 'accountability expected to trace their instructional performs, responsibility and eventually their students' learning outcomes and performance[8]. Furthermore, accountable teachers focus on their students' enthusiasm, learning outcomes and academic success[12, 13]. Leveille[18] has argued "At present, accountability systems focus less on compliance and more on results. This changing discourse in accountability and emphasis on quality in teaching and learning etc. bring the students or learner at the central stage." It means teachers of higher education system should take responsibility for improvement in students' learning outcome and overall development to the potentials of their students.

Enhancement of Academic Accountability System in Higher Education

It is essential to nurture and promote academic accountability in higher education. Greater accountability of teachers will have to be emphasized. The degree of accountability can be perceived only when the functions and duties assigned to the individuals in the system are properly evaluated.

The following criteria may be considered for evaluating teachers and ensuring academic accountability system:

- Consistency and punctuality of teachers in taking classes and their availability in the department for the guidance of students;
- Classes-taught and the degree of the effectiveness of teaching as measured by the interest generated in the students and self-thinking process created in them;
- The quality of reference books used for teaching and reference and the quality of assignments given to the students;
- The course developed and innovative methods of teaching adopted;
- The honesty and neutrality with which the students are evaluated by the teachers and the whole-hearted participation of the teacher in all the evaluation processes of the university;
- Efforts of self-growth and professional development;
- General life enrichment and human resource development;
- Contribution in resolving social issues, institutional issues; exhibiting social responsibility.
- Number of papers published in reputed journals and research projects undertaken and research advisor;
- The position of teachers as revealed by student's evaluation of teachers;
- Contribution to the growth of the university, co-curricular activities, enrichment of the campus life, students welfare etc.;
- The contribution of the teacher to the design of curriculum, teaching methods, lab experiment, evaluation methods, preparation of resource materials, students counseling and remedial teaching; and
- The extent to which the teacher follows the code of professional ethics for higher education teachers as prepared by the legal authorities.

The performance of the teachers should be reviewed in the light of the above criteria by a committee of senior educators, an incentive should be given for better performance and disincentive for bad performance; further, enforcement of accountability may begin with the recruitment of teaching staffs who exhibit evidence of continuous academic interest. This may be followed by training and retraining of teaching staff from time to time to cope with

the curriculum and trends in educational fields. To motivate teachers to put their best, it may be useful to link 'emoluments and promotion', to 'performance'. Enforcement of accountability should begin with the recruitment of teaching staff that evidence of continuing academic interest and they should be supported by research and orientation of teachers about the responsibilities towards academics and administration[19].

Accountability has a close relationship with 'autonomy' as well, which means the power and freedom to act without any external control. It includes managerial freedom in performing a given responsibility. Now the teaching community tends to stretch this freedom without considering the fact that accountability and autonomy always go hand in hand.

 The government and society should generate environments, which will drive teachers on productive and imaginative streaks. Academics should enjoy the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of teaching and activities relevant to the needs and concern of the community. Mammen[20] recommended that practitioners provide opportunities for teachers outside the classrooms to cultivate their skills through peer discussion and holding a special workshop /seminar to train them. It helps teachers to become better classroom leaders and contributes to students' learning outcome, employability and academic success. Therefore, once teachers' accountability is augmented, they try to improve their teaching techniques and strategies, offer help to particular students who need specific attention in an academic environment and seek to stimulate students in order to develop student autonomy. When the teacher accountability is augmented, they exercise effective and transformative leadership Thus, both characteristics of teachers will improve which in turn influences students' learning and academic achievement. According to Pandey[21] "A fine-tuned system of accountability must ensure that personal and professional development of the educators would continue, the mind and imagination retain the impulsiveness, experience extends in its assortment, and eventually the liveliness overspills in quickening power from the educators to the students." Essentially, self-realization is the best approach to accountability, which is linked with excellence and autonomy.

Conclusion

Accountability in education means an accounting of the performance with respect to the responsibility assigned to it. It implies the actual measurement of the responsibility fulfilled or performed by an institution. Academic accountability is an important factor for institutional effectiveness and quality education. Those educators who are highly accountable tend to exhibit the characteristics of academic leadership. Therefore, the academic leaders with a high degree of accountability can transform the learners and learning outcomes. Thus, cherishing academic accountability is the means for accomplishing quality in higher education.

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