

FACULTY'S MEANINGFUL ROLE IN THE QA PROCESS

Dr Kennedy Andrew Thomas

*Professor of Education, School of Education
Director Centre for Education Beyond Curriculum (CEDBEC)*

and

*Former Director Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)
CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore*

University initiatives to empower Faculty

Quality assurance cuts across curriculum design and development, teaching and learning, student support, leadership and governance. There are two of ways setting internal standards or in other words, quality assurance within an institution. While the notion of quality assurance is internal to an institution, assessments relate to the perception of quality from external accrediting agencies that include, media ranking, such as India Today, National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) etc. Therefore quality assurance refers to 'conscious desire' to promote quality to meet standards.

On the other hand, assessment refers to meeting specific benchmark criteria set by external accrediting agencies. The former is more potent as it acts as a self-declaration and self-assessment process of quality assurance and challenges institutions felt need to assure quality standards. The latter only meets to comply with specific external standards. Hence the university, through its various means analyzes the strengths weakness, opportunities and threats, strategic planning process within a timeframe, are initiated into the process of driving quality in the University. It is through these methods as mentioned above, the entire faculty being part of the department and institution get involved in quality assurance process of the University.

The deeper understanding of quality assurance has enabled us to consciously promote quality assurance as a powerful internal exercise in the process of lending itself to be exposed and examined by external agencies to assess our performance.

Hence all aspects of quality assurance have been through building competencies of the faculty through enhancing teacher quality and Quality enhancing strategies. Quality initiatives are mainly carried out through a range of Faculty Development Programmes (FDP) and consciously

encouraging and driving the internal quality assurance and self-improvement mechanisms voluntarily at the institutional level.

The University strongly concurs to comply with National Assessment and Accreditation Councils (NAAC) idea of “Teacher quality” that refers to a composite term to indicate the quality of teachers in terms of their qualification, teacher characteristics, adequacy of recruitment procedures, faculty availability, professional development and recognition of teaching abilities. Teachers take the initiative to learn and keep abreast with the latest developments, to innovate, continuously seek improvement in their work and strive for individual and institutional excellence. Therefore involving teachers in the quality assurance process is driven through a conscious and strategically planned Faculty development culture of the University.

Below are the excerpts of this culture based on my article titled Catalytic role of faculty development Programmes in institutional growth and development in Fostering higher education half a century in service 2019 published as part of our golden jubilee celebration over the past 50 years indicate glimpses of how FDPs has empowered faculty to imbibe the spirit of quality culture and quality assurance.

An inspirational Culture

The current concept of the Faculty Development Programme (FDP) at CHRIST (Deemed to be University) has evolved over the years. As it stands, an academic practice initiated by the administration in the early years proved critical in its successful functioning to date.

Faculty development at CHRIST consciously started after becoming an autonomous institution in 2005. The Center for Education Beyond Curriculum (CEDBEC) was set up with a clear mandate to focus on nurturing and developing the faculty members. When an institution becomes an autonomous body, it has the freedom to introduce new programmes, design its own curriculum and set its own standards, all of which have to be framed with great responsibility. Clear direction has to be in place to progress towards the goals of the institution with the vision and mission as the guidelines. The head of the institution provides this inspirational direction.

Faculty development is an inspirational culture at CHRIST. FDP is powered by the Vice Chancellor's address that becomes the guiding principle for all academic deliberations and

decisions carried forward by deans, heads, and faculty members who discuss and actualise the 'inspirational notion' for the academic year.

Faculty development in CHRIST has evolved with a comprehensive range of professional development programmes organised by CEDBEC aiming at updating and developing faculty to contribute to the quality of higher education. Here, faculty development is considered an ongoing process, a systematic approach that is designed to serve, orient, train, and develop the faculty. The departments work together with the skills necessary to deliver quality service as required by an emerging and competitive environment.

Constant reinforcement by the Vice Chancellor in all meetings, impetus and incentives given towards research, seminars and presentations, played an important role in being the support system for FDP to establish itself as a culture in the institution. Annual FDP I & II that are based on strategic themes - futuristic in its vision and sustainable in its mission, Quality Improvement Programmes focusing on relevant areas, institution's focus on all-round developmental aspects with respect to curriculum, research, teaching-learning, personality, Holistic Education train the trainers concept etc. are the Unique Selling Points (USPs) that CHRIST boasts about.

FDP as an empowering practice more emphatically started after CHRIST was granted the University status in 2008. The establishment of the Academic Staff College (ASC) in 2011 was the beginning of a more systematic and focused FDP era in CHRIST.

The ASC was established with the purpose of creating awareness among the faculty members about the significance of higher education. It facilitates acquisition and enhancement of necessary skills of teaching to achieve goals of higher education in general and the mission of Christ University in particular. The programmes of ASC help faculty keep abreast of the latest and contemporary developments in their discipline, create awareness about pedagogic and evaluation tools and build research competencies among faculty members. The Academic Staff College organises induction programmes, orientation programmes, workshops and quality improvement programs on a regular basis.

Once the ASC took full responsibility for the training and development of faculty, it kept its focus on facilitating discipline wise programmes. Meanwhile, CEDBEC shifted its focus to organising FDPs at the institutional level for all the faculty of CHRIST and extended its functions to offer consultancy services to other institutions. Its services also included the organisation of various seminars, conferences and workshops such as 'Consultation and Discourse on the Teaching of Fresh Teachers in Colleges and Universities', as well as many other programmes involving Chancellors, Vice- Chancellors, educational philosophers, executives, entrepreneurs, social activists, deans, librarians, administrators and teachers. Since 2013, CEDBEC has facilitated more than 41 programmes for other institutions in the form of FDPs, Seminars on Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness for Principals and Teachers, Seminars on Leadership, Work Culture and Autonomy, Seminars on Preparation for University Status, Orientation Programmes, Refresher Programmes, Capacity Building Workshops and Academic Retreats and so on, thus catering to the development of higher education in the country.

A Transformational Process

The quality of faculty is central to the effectiveness as the institution was developing, and a people-centred approach was pertinent to leverage change and capacity building. The quality of faculty capacity building thus depended on designing effective faculty development programmes. Equipping faculty requires that they are trained, and a system is put in place to ensure that their skills are continually being monitored. This is achieved through departments organising short term Quality Improvement Programmes (QIP) in the emerging areas of the subject and discipline-specific topics, focused workshops for domain-specific skills, symposia in collaboration with industry and the like. The main objective of the programme is to upgrade faculty members' expertise and skills, to understand the subject from a broader perspective, to identify research areas, methodologies, and new pedagogical practices. The areas also covered contemporary and strategic initiatives responding to fast changes in the academic environment. Faculty development thus became a matter of investment; a way learned that contributed to transforming faculty to gain professionally.

Next, the University realised the challenge for 'faculty to develop' to affect institutional change. Paramount was in deciding to make a shift in strategies from traditionally used to unconventional

approaches. Initially, external experts facilitated as resource persons for FDPs at CHRIST. But the transformation seemed slow-paced, and the ownership was marginal. Gradually management envisaged that to enhance ownership, commitment and speed up the transformation process, the over-reliance on external resources should be curtailed. The new approach involved in-house individuals and groups in self-training to facilitate institutional commitment and leadership in diverse areas of academics. Methods used were to convince the academic community that they need and should expect growth in and outside their fields. Thus began the real empowerment of individual faculty members.

At CHRIST strategic attention is paid to the personal development of individual faculty to ensure that they are prepared in a way to enhance their sense of fulfillment in themselves, which should enhance their ability to better perform their role in the realisation of the institutions' vision. Therefore, when problems arise, they address new challenges to ensure that they develop the ability to function competently and efficiently. Individual development of faculty focuses on three dimensions - teaching competency, research competency, and self-efficacy.

Training and learning from colleagues and developing ideas in a manner to benefit both the University and particular department mutually became the core essential. This experiential approach has created a space for knowledge development and to put the same to good use. Collegial feedback and collaborative effort are worthwhile, but it is even more important to re-invest the knowledge gained to good use in the workspace. The provisions and support for the personal development of faculty became essential and has been addressed systematically. Over the years faculty development has been consistently organised to transform faculty into a dynamic academic and psychological entity to research, provide consulting services and network with industry to translate this experience into dynamic teaching.

Conclusion

Besides these effort has been to expose faculty to overseas universities to imbibe their academic culture. Faculty participation in seminars workshops and conferences, improving faculty qualification through Doctoral studies, empanelment as research guides, undertaking major research projects and consultancy services constantly drive quality assurance at the university.