BEST PRACTICES IN CURRICULAR ASPECTS

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INTRODUCTION.

Education cannot be imagined without a Curriculum at all levels. Other aspects such as teaching, learning and evaluation or research and development, infrastructure and learning resources, student activities and support system, all revolve around the Curriculum. Therefore, curricular aspects and the best practices connected to curriculum design and development play a very significant role in determining the quality of higher education.

Reviewing and updating of the curriculum is the sign of a **living and happening academic** system. Dynamism must be built into the curriculum so that it assumes a momentum of its own and all those who are responsible for curriculum design have no choice but to review and update the curriculum. Designing and reviewing the curriculum to suit the requirements of the students and industry alike is important in the context of rapid changes taking place in the Indian and the world economy. **In India, academic dynamism is more or less non-existent**. However, there are exceptions. There are Universities, Institutes and Colleges of higher learning who have proved themselves as exception to the rule.

The important initiatives in the context of best practices in curricular aspects that we need to take are as follows:

1. Development of need based and socially relevant programs.
2. Emerging areas in innovative and inter disciplinary areas needs to be evolved.
3. Periodic restructuring and updating of courses to match changing needs.
4. Emphasis on ICT in upgrading content and transaction of curriculum at different levels.
5. Cafeteria approach for diversification to enhance employability of graduates (CBCS).

6. Multi skill development with emphasis on communication skills.
7. Promotion of science and vocational education.
8. Grant of autonomy to select number of colleges based on their performance record to facilitate innovations and flexibility in the curriculum.

The purpose of this research paper is to bring forward some of the best practices with regard to Curricular aspects in higher education followed by the University of Madras and Janaki Ammal College, an autonomous institution affiliated to the University of Madras and compare with the University of Mumbai and the affiliated colleges. This paper also brings forward some of the best practices followed at Dr. TK Tope Arts & Commerce College, Parel, Mumbai.

CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM (CBCS) – UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS.

The Objectives of CBCS laid down by the University of Madras were as follows:

1. To develop the curriculum with student focus
2. To promote academic excellence in the areas of student choice
3. To provide adequate flexibility in the choice of subjects to the students
4. To make the system more self-reliant by introducing the internal assessment process.

Action Taken by the University of Madras. Some of the important steps that the University took to achieve the aforesaid objectives were as follows:

1. Made statutory provision for changing the composition of the Board of Studies of the University Departments by **having 30% of external experts in the system.**
2. Consulted all stakeholders in developing the curriculum in different specializations, like students, alumni, parents, industry, social organizations and other relevant experts.
3. Established Academic **linkages with different national (11) and international (25)** Universities and had discussions with them about the scope and methodology for introducing choice-based curriculum in different degree programs.

4. Introduced **new courses of global demand** in areas like Bio-Informatics, Bio-medical Sciences, Neuro-sciences, Molecular Biology, Corporate sociology, Intellectual Property Rights, Cyber crimes and Information Security.
5. Some **e-learning modules** were developed to support the CBCS.
6. A **Student Advisor is designated** who coordinates the program and counsel the students.

Problems faced by the University in Executing the CBCS.

There was resistance from the faculty. The faculty, the students and the parents had doubts about the feasibility of the change. Therefore awareness programs and training had to be organized for these stakeholders. There was difficulty in equalization of semester duration and work load because of the holiday timings around religious festivals.

Evidence of Success.

The curriculum became meaningful to the students because of its relevance to their interests and aspirations. Emerging areas of global demand have been introduced in the system which became attractive to students. Student participation and **experiential learning** has been enhanced to a great extent. The Assessment system has become **more transparent** and overall improvement in Academic effectiveness was visible.

Resources Required.

1. Teaching staff which is committed and knowledgeable about the process.
2. Separate budget allocation for each of the department offering the CBCS program.
3. Administrative and academic reforms to facilitate change.
4. Modular type curricula along with teaching-learning tools for modern methods like audio-visual preparations, group discussions, Student seminars and internships.

CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM (CBCS) – THE JANAKI AMMAL COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), SIVAKASI, TAMIL NADU.

The Objectives. Some of the important objectives of CBCS were as follows:

1. To address all the educational domains through the curriculum.
2. To inculcate scientific temper, democratic, moral, social and spiritual values in the learners.
3. To orient learners towards self-learning and develop skills in communication.
4. To make quality education accessible to all with holistic development of learners.
5. Assisting learners to undertake research in different disciplines.

The Practice.

The curriculum has a **three-tier structure** consisting of:

1. **Hard Core Papers**. These are compulsory papers for a degree course.
2. **Soft Core Papers**. These papers **are inter-disciplinary and application oriented**. Learners are given options to choose from a list of Soft Core papers provided by both parent as well as other departments.
3. **Optional Papers**. The learners opt to choose from the main discipline as well as from other departments. There is a unique course called "**Prospective Course**" available for the Under Graduate learners. They have the choice of opting for one paper from a total of **27 self-employment oriented courses** offered during the sixth semester.

The Post Graduate Level.

The total number of credits to be earned by a post graduate learner to qualify varies from 72 to 80. Out of these, the learner has to earn 12 credits (Four papers of 3 credits each from a total of 66 papers offered) through Soft Core papers and 9 credits (Three papers of 3 credits each from a total of 46 papers offered) through Optional papers. Learners are permitted to take up any Soft

Core and Optional paper offered during a semester irrespective of their year of study, **leading to both vertical as well as horizontal movement**. There is a Mandatory Extra Credit Paper on **'Spoken English'**, which carries 1 credit and an Optional Extra Credit Paper on 'Personality Development', which carries 3 credits. All the Post Graduate learners are required to earn their credits in these two Extra Credit Papers for the award of the Degree.

The Under Graduate Level:

The total number of credits to be earned by an under graduate learner to qualify varies from 115 to 120. Out of this, the learner has to earn 15 credits (Five papers of 3 credits each from a total of 80 papers offered) through Soft Core papers and 18 credits (Six papers of 3 credits each from a total of 104 papers offered) through Optional papers. They can also earn extra credits by taking 'Advanced Paper' and 'Project and Viva Voce' offered by their parent department.

Problems Faced.

Some courses become very popular and others are chosen by a few. There are always problems encountered in timetable framing and assigning the workload.

Evidence of Success.

The CBCS was proved to be effective for student's overall progression. The learners have reported superior performance in the various competitive examinations. The system has widened the scope for employment as seen from the activities. Many learners have become first generation entrepreneurs after successful completion of their Degree Program.

Resources Required.

There is a need to provide for extra class rooms and faculty members, which result in extra financial resources. Faculty orientation and workshops should be held regularly. Separate budgetary allocation is also necessary.

INTRODUCTION OF THE CREDIT, GRADE & SEMESTER SYSTEM (CGSS) IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI AND ITS AFFILIATED COLLEGES – A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT.

The CGSS is in the second year of operation in the Mumbai University region. In comparison to the CBSS followed by the University of Madras and other colleges in the country, the CGSS as implemented in our system is found to have the following limitations:

1. Absence of choice of subjects and therefore absence of flexibility.

2. Internal Assessment process is bereft of transparency and lacks uniformity in Question Paper patterns across papers and faculties. The marks awarded for class participation and overall conduct (5 + 5 = 10) lacks objectivity and is therefore arbitrary. The project work/assignment is meaningless because of the impracticability of handling 500 to 600 projects by a single teacher.

3. The curriculum and syllabus designing is far from being desirable. It is an exercise in manipulation without any substantive changes. The constitution of Boards of Studies needs a thorough re-look. The members of Board of Studies and Chairman Board of Studies must have proven academic credentials for being eligible to be elected or selected to the BoS. The BoS in Mumbai may also have 30% external experts. All round consultation must take place for designing the curriculum and syllabus.

4. A paper on 'Spoken English' may be introduced in the University of Mumbai either in the form of an additional choice or by replacing it with Business Communication/Communication Skills.

BEST PRACTICES FOLLOWED BY DR. TK TOPE ARTS & COMMERCE COLLEGE, PAREL, MUMBAI – 400 012.

At our College, we have been following the following best practices since our accreditation 10 years ago and particularly since our re-accreditation a couple of years ago:

1. Preparation of comprehensive study material containing model question papers, case studies, objective and subjective questions along with answers and University question papers along with syllabus so that it becomes a single point reference material for the students.

2. Use of ICT on a regular basis by the faculty and the students.

3. Preparation of free e-learning resources in various subjects and their uploading on the college website.

4. Linking the ten marks allotted to Overall-conduct and Class participation to regular attendance. As a result, there has been a substantial improvement in the attendance.

5. Increasing the availability of internet facility to the students by setting up the UGC Network Resource Center in the college.

6. Organizing field visits.

Reference: Curricular Aspects, Case Presentations, NAAC Publication, 2008.