



Factors Influencing the Sustainability of Human Resources in Public Universities in India

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ABSTRACT: Human Resource is considered a valuable asset in achieving its goals for any modern business organizations and universities are no exceptions to the same. A large volume of past research studies in the area of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices pertaining to Higher Education Institutions are already available. But there is a scarcity of data relating to Higher Educational Institutions dealing with human resources. Universities are key drivers for bringing change in the knowledge-based society by cultivating values and awareness among the learners. Quality human resources of any Public University would pave the way in achieving laurels and imparting quality teaching and research to the students. The sustainable HRM is aimed to prioritizing long-term goals over short-term goals in an organization. The present study explores the factors influencing the Human Resource practices in centrally funded public funded universities in India.

KEYWORDS: Public universities, Human resource management, Sustainability, Higher education system, Public university.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources (HR) are recognized as the foundation of a company's competitive advantage. HR is also seen as a vital resource for businesses due to its significance in cost optimization, productivity enhancement, and quality control. To encourage cooperation and coordination between the many parts of an organization, human resource management, or HRM, should organize into functional groups. The importance of HR competencies for an organization's growth and sustainability is emphasized by new strategies. Researchers define organizational sustainability as meeting the needs of current and future stakeholders while avoiding the direct or indirect demands of stakeholders. They also thought that since the 1990s, the idea of sustainability has evolved. Its capabilities in HRM haven't been fully identified by academics, though. By considering the "triple bottom line," which combines social, economic, and ecological factors, sustainability can help establish fresh views and determine both theoretical and practical links in human resources.

Public Universities in India

Public universities are shouldered with the core responsibility of providing quality education with access and equity among the masses in India. Though some of the southern states in India like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and some north eastern States are able to achieve the gross enrolment ratio (GER) over the national average, several other states are struggling to improve the access to the under privileged and minority students. Education is considered the single most contributors in providing intrinsic and instrumental value to both individuals and society and acting as transmitter of intergenerational advantage or disadvantage. It is the foremost duty of the Administrators of the Public Universities to make policy and plans for the development of human resources by providing periodic training, technical support and place a mechanism for the accountability of their jobs as well.

Funding by the Government

Of late, the government is focusing on four 'I's viz. Investment, Infrastructure, Inclusiveness and Innovation and to bring economic development and improving the quality of life of people in India. The successive governments have made a large investment on higher education by setting of new Central Universities, Institutions of national importance – IITs, IIMs, NITs, NIDs in the past one decade and created a moderate infrastructure to accommodate more and more students in these higher educational institutions (HEIs). The government through a parliament legislation brought mandatory reservations for women, under privileged, disabled students aiming to bring inclusiveness, yet the elite institutions like IIMs and IITs are still struggling to get adequate number of students.

The consistence academic performance of an institution in turn attracts the best teaching and non-teaching staff because of social reputation. But the dilemma faced by several newly created universities and higher educational institutions, both public and private is based on the fact that several of them especially public funded are not located on urban areas. Several of them still lack permanent buildings and infrastructures despite of availability of land and financial resources provided by the Government. In some cases, lack of commitment and leadership issues at the top-level management are to be blamed for the state of affairs. The other factors, obstructing the academic progress of some of the Centrally Funded Higher Educational Institutions (CFHEIs) are lack of diversity and inclusiveness. The success of CFHEIs is largely dependent upon the sustainability of its human resources and its stakeholders. A sound human resource policy in a public funded university can greatly contribute for its effective performance and improve its public image in the society.

Importance of Human Resource Management in Public universities

Human Resources are considered the most vital pillar for the success and development of any business organization. The employees are considered as most precious asset and the development of any organization depends on the performance of the employees. The success of an organization wholly depends upon the efficiency of its employees. Human Resource is an important treasure of an organization than the capital and other physical resources. It is important to manage the employees in such a way to achieve organizational goals. The competent employees are the backbone to the success of any organization. Without the competent work force, the organization will not be able to perform its functions efficiently. In India, many privately funded universities and deemed to be universities are faring well in terms of rankings because of its strategic human resource policies.

In general, performance of universities is influenced by various factors such as quality of teaching-learning practices, faculty publication, quality faculty hiring, and effective performance review. At the initial stage, recruitment of efficient and competent teaching and

non-teaching staff on merit basis plays an important role in achieving organizational performance in Public Universities. If the University Administration in Public Universities gives preference to merit in selecting competent and efficient teaching faculty and non-teaching staff, then the output would be increased and it would help to achieve its goals. One of the purposes of the existence of universities is creation and dispersion of knowledge which helps them to drive innovation. Post Covid era brought immense opportunities to the HEIs across the globe and changed the way of teaching-learning space. In today's digital environment dominated by technologies, sustainable HRM is the key to success for universities in India because it has to cater a vast population with different socio-economic backgrounds. Universities offer a variety of knowledge bases services to the students and industry where the human resources play a pivotal role. Past studies proved that a good Human Resources Management (HRM) practice is the key to success for the public universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Human Resource Management

Sustainability essentially refers to preservation, regeneration of economical, ecological and social resources of the business eco-system. Sustainable HRM is considered as key to modern business eco-system and to strike a balance between the business interest one side and the economical, ecological and sociological interests on the other side [1] & [2]. "A sustainability oriented human resource management as a management of human resources that meets the current needs of a firm and society at large without compromising their ability to meet any future needs" [3] & [4].

Sustainable HRM advocates for adoption of various human resource related strategies and practices to meet the financial, social and ecological goals of a business. In order to implement the sustainable strategy, the literature review suggests three approaches namely (a) The Paradox theory advocated by Ehnert; (b) The Theory of negative externalities and stake holder harm by Mariappan Dar [5] and (c) the Stakeholder theory by Guerci [6] & [7]. The sustainable HRM is aimed to prioritizing long-term goals over short-term goals based on the assumption that the short-term goals of an organization may negatively affect the livelihood of workers and their dependent family members and the communities at large. Sustainable HRM also involves strengthening internal and external stakeholders of an organization besides the education system and ecological environment (Ehnert, 2009 and Kramer, 2014. HR sustainability is involving human skills which include employee motivation, imbibing values and creating mutual trust to avoid any detrimental effect by adopting a fair treatment of employees and its stakeholders at workplace [1].

Strategic Human Resource Management

The strategy and objectives of an organization is to be aimed to translate the human resources (HR) polices into generating competitive advantage [8]. It is especially true in the digital based economy where the innovation and intellectual property (IP) is the major driver to sustain the organization. It is true in the case of universities across the globe where the Ivy League universities generate revenue through major projects undertaken by its faculty members and researchers [9] & [10]. The strategic HR management involves designing, developing and implementing a set of proactive policies and practices ensuring the human capital contribute for the betterment of the organizational objectives [11]. In a Chicago university-based study undertaken by a group of researchers in 2006, it is found that strategic HRM practices plays a significant role in shaping the organizational effectiveness and improved teaching-learning process [12]. In a study undertaken in Iranian universities in 2013, it was found that the Strategic HRM practices due influences the intellectual capital of the teachers and staff [13].

The study also revealed that the strategic HRM would enhance the intangible assets of a university and contributes positively towards organizational development. According to Bergquist, when strategic HRM is “properly positioned, effectively structured, sufficiently funded, adequately staffed, organizationally supported, and well managed, the tripartite mission of any college or university— teaching, research, and service—is more likely to be effectively and efficiently attained” [14]. Employee retention and succession planning are important component of the strategic HRM and these would help the institutions to deal effectively the employee turnover [15].

Universities are always considered as catalyst for change in the society through offering its services to the public at large [16]. The findings of an Iranian based study conducted in 2020 in State Universities indicates that HR practices, social, economic, psychological factors and branding significantly influences on the HRM sustainability at universities and ultimately leads to competitiveness in the higher education ecosystem [17]. Like any business organization, universities too have internal goals some may include creation of body of knowledge, motivation, skill development and trust building with its learners and the recruiters besides fulfilling the economic and cultural objectives.

The present study is aimed at exploring the factors, influencing the sustainability of human resources in the public funded university institutions and to reduce the hindrances and bottlenecks in the governance of these institutions.

DISCUSSION

The identification of factors has been done through the literature review. Figure 1 shows the six factors influencing the sustainability of a public university institution.

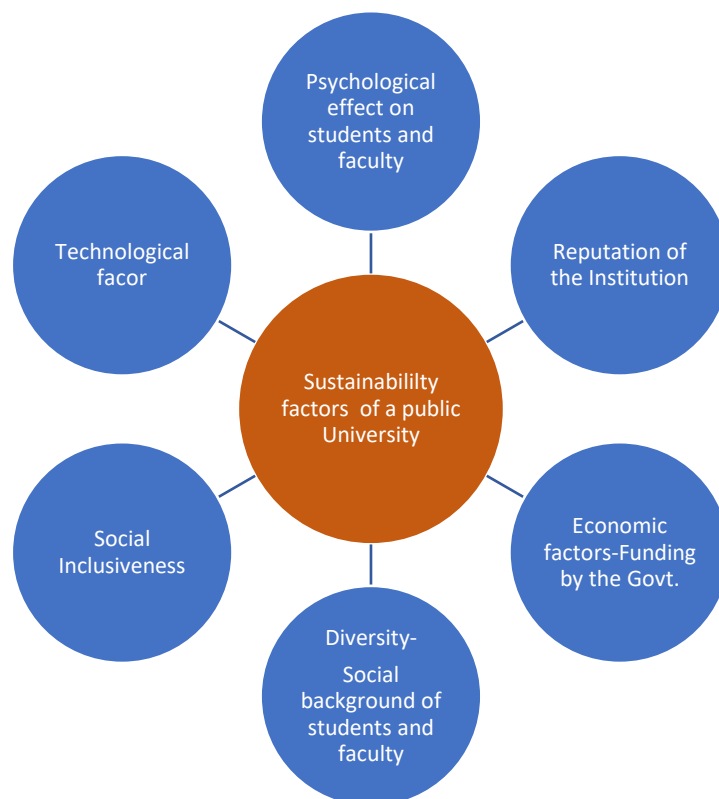


Figure 1: Factors influencing the sustainability of human resources in the public funded universities.

[Source: Conceptualized and developed by the authors]

Economic Factors

The Economics factors which influence the sustainability of Human Resources in Public Universities are attractive perks, stability of service, growth opportunities and better social security measures, research consultancy etc. In order to retain highly qualified and experienced faculty members to improve the quality of education, higher pay scales may be offered to them to get their talent utilized. Public and private spending on higher education is almost double in the case of United States as compared to European countries. US spends 3.3 % of its GDP as against 1.3 % in Europe.

The Central Government through the Ministry of Education has allotted Rs.33,531 crore, Rs.40,828 crore and Rs.44,095 crore for the last three financial years starting from 2020-21 onwards for higher education in the union budget allocation. The expenditure is steadily increasing for the higher education sector but the non-academic expenditure on account of salary and pension occupies a major portion of the budget allocation for centrally funded university institutions in India. Out of which, the grants allotted to Central Universities are Rs.8750 crore for 2020-21; Rs.11,034 crore for 2021-22 and Rs.11,529 crore for the year 2022-23 [18].

The locational advantage of an HEI in India also plays an important role for its overall development. Experienced, talented and qualified faculty and non-faculty members do want to work in rural areas where the Universities are located. Younger employees though opted to work in the Public Universities located in rural areas due to career growth, but they make it a launching place. Most of the qualified and talented employees want to work in cities where all the facilities are available. In order to attract talent, the Govt. of India may extend some incentives to those faculty and non-faculty members working in the rural areas. Because of non-availability of a large chunk of land in urban areas, these universities is moved to semi urban locations with lesser connectivity and social infrastructure in many a case.

Technological Factors

The technological factors in the HEI include the digitally adoptable campus infrastructure suitable for hybrid learning for students, online learning facilities with digital libraries and e-contents, state of art laboratories for driving innovation, start-up culture. The increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by Tech companies for services and products has disrupted the traditional way of learning in the schools, colleges and universities and skilling and up-skilling of employees become imminent. The recent arrival of ChatGPT like AI Tools has also disrupted the Edtech industry and students are increasingly using it for their day to day learning [19]. The Machine Learning and Internet of Things (IoT) in combination with Artificial intelligence impacted every sphere of human life today. The new technologies have made our lives more comfortable. On the other hand the digital based technologies are adversely affecting the job opportunities of young people who are passing out from the university institutions. The technology has a profound impact on the deliverance of services by the universities today and Hybrid classes become the norm even post covid-19 conditions. The use of technologies can contribute for a collective learning by teachers and students. The disruptions caused by tools like ChatGPT can make teaching in universities a bit easier provided the digital technologies are absorbed by the teachers and students with adequate digital environment.

Diversity and Demographic Factors

Diversity of students and faculty members plays a key role in centrally funded universities. Diversity includes regional diversity, religious diversity, and adequate representation of urban-rural representation as well as gender diversity. The NIRF ranking framework, therefore, gives

due weightage for regional diversity, outreach, gender equity and inclusion of disadvantaged sections – viz. minorities, socially-economically backward sections besides persons with disabilities. Despite the steps taken by the Government agencies ensuring diversity in the admissions and appointments in public funded universities, it is still a lot of scope of improvement in this direction.

Social Inclusiveness

As per the orders of the Govt. of India, every Public University has to follow the reservation roster while notifying teaching and non-teaching vacancies by earmarking reservation of 15% for Schedule Caste (SC), 7.5% for Schedule Tribes (ST), 27% for Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 10% for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). The term reservation means to keep certain number of seats for certain category of people in Jobs. These are mainly made to raise those people who have faced a setback due to the inequality inflicted upon them previously. It is for the betterment of the downtrodden people of the society. The candidates belong to reserved posts not only their vacancies earmarked, but also they are also giving relaxation in age, percentage of marks in essential qualification degree and recruitment tests, etc. The efficiency of the employees appointed through reserved and unreserved posts is not uniform because of the social factors. Each employee is distinct from others in terms of attitude, belief systems, workplace motivation and productivity.

Psychological effect on the Students and Faculty

“Physical health, mental health and social health contribute together to the subjective health of the individual” [20]. Numerous studies conducted during Covid-19 pandemic and post Covid-19 conditions suggest that a large number of university students and faculty members faced negative mental health on their well-being [21]. A number of factors affected the mental health of the students and teachers and some of them were – continuous isolation, difficulty in coping with online or hybrid classes, lack of digital skills by teachers, anxiety about class progress [22].

Past research suggests that there is a direct connection between the work and wellbeing of an individual [23]. Employee wellbeing is considered as dynamic conditions which allow a person to achieve his fullest potential either at workplace or studies. The concept of wellbeing is equally important in the case of university and college teachers to accomplish their intellectual pursuit in teaching and research efficiently and effectively. Similarly in some cases, the faculty members were also suffering because of differential treatments by their colleagues. Such types of behaviour at work place and institutions cause severe stress and directly or indirectly affect their academic performance.

Institutional Reputation and Brand Image

The perception of an institution plays an important role in the minds of the admission seekers, parents, the prospective employers and the society at large. The perception and the brand image of an institution is dependent upon a number of factors such as quality of teachers, infrastructure, research publication, innovative projects, active involvement of students in the delivery of the services, placement records, availability of scholarships to meritorious students and subsidy provided by the Government. The brand image and reputation of the institution is attained after several decades of hard work and dedication by the stakeholders of the institution concerned.

One of the last ‘I’s viz. innovation is somewhat missing in public funded universities which has been reflected in accreditation and ranking processes undertaken by the government like NAAC, National Institutional Ranking Framework, Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation

Achievements (ARIIA) etc. [24]. The Ministry of Education and regulatory bodies do encourage the faculty members and students to undertake quality research, innovation in the Universities to create intellectual property rights (IPRs) through patents in the emerging fields of science and technology to fuel innovation and start-ups.

Many public universities started promoting the institutions and its programmes with the rankings accorded to the national and international rating agencies in the social media. One of the best examples is the Jamia Millia Islamia which created a niche itself among the central universities by exploiting its rankings.

CONCLUSION

The six institutional sustainability factors identified through the present study broadly analyse various aspects of strategic human resource management in public funded universities with a view to improving the existing HR practices. Entry of private and foreign universities in India also posing challenges to the public universities to retain its quality manpower and attract students whose parents are willing to pay higher fees to avail quality and digital based learning. The domain knowledge and skill sets possessed by the teaching staff play a pivotal role in not only creating the best learning experience for the students but also attracts the talents. The financial support to the public universities by the Government plays a crucial role in improving the performance of a university. There is an increase of 4% in the funding in the current financial year as compared to previous financial year (2021-22) to central universities by the Central Government which shows the commitment by the Government towards public universities. The location of any Institution in India also plays an important role for its overall development.

The recent technological advancements are slowly replacing in the dissemination of traditional knowledge with digital based learning or hybrid mode of learning in the universities and the public universities are not immune to the changes taking place in the higher education sector. Several public funded universities provide adequate reservations for women to encourage diversity in admissions to fulfill its social objectives. However, due share of women in public universities is still lacking behind in appointments with some exception in older universities.

The employees hailing from different backgrounds and the element of diversity consist of gender, race, ethnicity, physical ability, marital status, geographic location, parental status, etc. Here, human resource management can play an important role by conducting period training for the employees, so as to improve their working performance. The mental health of students was some time happens in universities and technical institutions because of the non-acceptability or isolation of reserved category students by meritorious students. Though there are strict laws to curb such discrimination in the university system, seldom the affected students approached the higher authorities with such grievances. In India, reputation of a university or college is vital for its survival and success. The NAAC and NIRF rankings in India give an edge to an institution to position itself in the higher education sector to attract meritorious students. If the citizens of any country are literate, it would definitely contribute for the growth and development of the nation. It has been observed that Human Resources Management (HRM) practice is well-implemented in Public Universities as compared to Private Universities. However, the performance appraisal of the employees in the Private Universities is better compared to the Govt. Universities.

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