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Higher Education: It's Pillars and Praxes

Dr. Divyeshkumar D. Bhatt
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Faculty of Languages and Literature,
Gujarat Vidyapith,
Ahmedabad.

Abstract:

In 21st century, institutions of higher education hold a crucial place in the development of individuals, societies, and nations by providing advanced knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities. This research paper explores the pillars and praxes of higher education, highlighting the key components that contribute to its effectiveness and impact. The paper discusses the pillars of higher education, including access, quality, relevance, and equity, and examines their interconnections. Additionally, it investigates the praxes of higher education, encompassing teaching and learning methodologies, curriculum design, assessment techniques, and the integration of technology as the rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed the landscape of higher education, leading to new opportunities and challenges. By examining these aspects, this research paper aims to provide insights into the fundamental elements that underpin successful higher education systems and their implications for students, institutions, and society as a whole.

Key Words: Higher education, Pillars of Higher education, Praxes of Higher education, **Digitalization** of Higher education.

Introduction:

Higher Education in the 21st century has undergone significant transformation and continues to evolve to meet the needs of students, society, and the changing job market. It plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for professional careers, fostering personal growth, and advancing knowledge and innovation. This research paper aims to explore the pillars and praxis of higher education, delving into its fundamental components and examining the practical implementation of educational principles in the context of institutions of higher learning. By examining the pillars of higher education and their application in praxis, this paper seeks to shed light on the key factors that contribute to an effective and impactful higher education system.

1. Pillars of Higher education:

The pillars of higher education typically refer to the fundamental principles or key components that form the foundation of quality educational experiences. While the specific pillars may vary depending on the context and perspective, the following are commonly recognized pillars of higher education:

1.1 Equity and Inclusion: This pillar emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to access higher education. It focuses on breaking down the barriers related to socioeconomic status, race, gender, disability, and other factors, ensuring that education is accessible to all who seek.

1.2 Quality and Excellence: Higher education institutions strive to maintain that high standard of quality and excellence in teaching, research, and overall educational experience. This includes maintaining rigorous academic programs, promoting critical thinking, fostering intellectual curiosity, and ensuring the currency and relevance of knowledge and skills being taught.

1.3 Teaching and Learning: This pillar focuses on the core mission of education- Facilitating effective teaching and promoting active learning. It encompasses innovative teaching methods, student-centered approaches, engaging instructional techniques, assessment strategies, and the creation of a supportive learning environment.

1.4 Research Innovation and Financial Aid: Higher education institutions contribute to the advancement of knowledge through research, scholarly activities, and the dissemination of findings. This pillar encompasses the exploration of new ideas, scientific inquiry, artistic creation, and intellectual contributions to various disciplines.

1.5 Student Engagement and Support: This pillar emphasizes the holistic development of students and their active engagement in the educational process. It includes providing support services, mentoring, concealing, co-curricular activities, and opportunities for leadership development, promoting student access, well-being, and personal growth.

1.6 Global and Intercultural Perspective: Higher education increasingly recognizes the importance of preparing students for a globalized world. This pillar emphasizes fostering intercultural understanding, promoting diversity and inclusion, offering study abroad programs, international collaborations, and preparing graduates who can thrive in multicultural environments.

1.7 Community Engagement and Social Responsibility: Higher education institutions play a vital role in society, and this pillar emphasizes their responsibility to actively engage with the community. It includes fostering civic responsibility, addressing societal challenges through research and outreach promoting ethical practices, and contributing to the social, cultural, and economic development of the communities they serve.

2. Praxis in higher education:

Praxis in Higher education refers to the practical application or implementation of knowledge, skills, and theories in real-world settings. It involves bridging the gap between theory and practice allowing students to gain hands-on experience, develop critical thinking skills, and apply what they have learned in academic settings to practical situations. Here are some common praxis approaches in higher education:

2.1 Student Engagement and Support: These programs provide students with opportunities to work in professional settings related to their field of study. By integrating classroom learning with practical work experience, students can apply theoretical knowledge, and gain industry insights.

2.2 Service-Learning: This approach combines community service with academic coursework. Students engage in volunteer activities or projects that address real community needs, while reflecting on their experiences and connecting them to academic concepts.

2.3 Fieldwork and practicums: In fields such as education, social work, psychology, and healthcare, students are often required to complete supervised fieldwork or practicums. The work in real-world settings, applying theoretical knowledge, and honing their professional skills under the guidance of experienced practitioners.

2.4 Research Projects and Scholarship: Many higher education Institutions emphasize research as a form of praxis. Students engage in independent or collaborative research projects, investigating real-world problems or contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

2.5 Experimental learning: This encompasses a wider range of activity, such as simulations, case studies, role-playing, group projects, and hands-on experiments. Experimental learning allows students to actively participate in the learning process, apply concepts in practical situations, and reflect on their experiences.

2.6 Entrepreneurship and innovation: Some Institutions promote entrepreneurship and innovation as part of their praxis approach. They provide resources, mentorship, and support for students to develop their own ventures, apply entrepreneurial skills, and create real-world impact.

2.7 Continuous Improvement and Assessment: higher education Institutions strive for continuous improvement in their programs and services. Praxis in this area involves the use of data-driven decision-making, assessment of student learning outcomes, program evaluation, and accreditation processes.

2.8 Technology Integration: In the institutions of higher education, it's very important to recognize the role of technology in enhancing teaching, learning, and research. It encourages the integration of digital tools, online platforms, and educational technologies to support innovative instructional methods, foster collaboration, and expand access to educational resources.

Overall, the challenges in higher education can be addressed through praxis which encompasses a combination of strategic planning, stakeholders' involvement, investment in infrastructure and resources, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Collaboration among the institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders is essential to implement effective solutions and bring about positive changes in higher education.

3. Paradigms of Higher education:

In the context of higher education, the term "paradigms" refers to the prevailing models or frameworks that shape the way knowledge is organized, taught, and understood within a particular discipline or field of study. Paradigms encompass the fundamental assumptions, theories, methodologies, and practices that guide research, teaching, and learning in a specific academic growth.

Paradigm in higher education provide a lens through which scholars, educators, and students interpret and engage with the subject matter. They establish the boundaries of what is considered valid knowledge, the methodologies used to investigate it, and the dominant or mainstream perspectives within a field, influencing

the curriculum, research priorities, and scholarly discoveries. The evolution of paradigms in higher education is a natural process as new discoveries, technologies, social changes, and intellectual movements emerge. Paradigm shifts can occur when existing frameworks are changed. These shifts may be driven by factors such as advances in research methodologies, changes in societal values, or the recognition of previously marginalized voices and perspectives. Here are the sum of recognized paradigms as follows:

3.1 Traditional/Classical Paradigms: This paradigm emphasizes the acquisition and transmission of knowledge through lectures, readings, and examinations. It often focuses on discipline-specific content and follows a structured curriculum. The instructor plays a central role in impacting knowledge to students.

3.2 Progressive Paradigms: The progressive paradigm emphasizes student-centered learning and active engagement. It promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative learning. It may incorporate project-based learning, experiential learning, and student-led learning discussions. This paradigm encourages students to take ownership of their education.

3.3 Vocational/Professional Paradigm: This paradigm is prevalent in professional fields such as engineering, medicine, and law. It emphasizes practical skill, hands-on training, and the application of knowledge in real-world context. Programs are often designed to prepare students for specific careers and include internships or clinical experiences.

3.4 Blended Learning Paradigms: This paradigm combines face-to-face instruction with online learning. It leverages digital tools and platforms to enhance and supplement traditional classroom experience. Blended learning provides flexibility in scheduling, promotes active learning, and enables personalized instruction.

3.5 Online/Distance Learning Paradigm: With advancements in technology, online and distance learning have become significant paradigms in higher education remotely where all instruction and learning take place in a virtual environment. Online courses often utilise multimedia resources, discussion forums, and interactive platforms. It provides flexibility for learners to study at their own pace and from any location.

3.5 Massive open Online courses (MOOCs) Paradigms: MOOCs are online courses designed to accommodate a large number of participants globally. They offer open access to educational content and often incorporate interactive elements such as videos, quizzes, and discussion forums. MOOCs allow for self-paced learning and provide opportunities for lifelong learners.

3.6 Flipped Classroom Paradigm: In this paradigm, traditional learning methods are inverted. Students engage with lecture materials, such as video lectures or readings, outside the classroom, and use class time for active learning activities, discussions, and problem-solving. Digital platforms facilitate the delivery and access of pre-recorded lectures and other course material.

3.7 Virtual and Augmented Reality Paradigm: This paradigm emphasizes the use of openly licensed educational resources, including textbooks, multimedia materials, and interactive modules, freely available for students and instructors. OER promotes accessibility, affordability, and collaborative content creation.

These paradigms demonstrate the ways in which digital learning is transforming higher education by expanding access, fostering engagement, personalizing instruction, and creating innovative learning experiences.

Conclusion:

The pillars and praxis in higher education provide a framework for institutions to uphold their mission, deliver quality education, conduct research, engage with communities, and foster an inclusive environment. By aligning their practices with these pillars, higher education institutions can fulfil their responsibilities to students, society, and the advancement of knowledge.

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