Innovations in Private Universities : A Case of Srinivas University

P.S. Aithal*, & P.M. Suresh Kumar**

School of Business Administration, Srinivas University,

Mangalore - 575 001, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Private universities have acknowledged importance in improving the quality of higher education due to their autonomy, motive and capacity to introduce innovations. Since they are self-financing entities, introducing innovations is vital to their sustainability. Srinivas University, as a private self-financing university, established in the year 2015 aims to become the most innovative higher education institution in India to bridge the gap between conventional education and next generation education through initiating radical reforms and thereby fulfill the goal of its founder to become most innovative higher education University. Srinivas University believes that scholastic backwardness is an inevitable product of marginalization and hence comprehensive development and inclusion agenda for minority, marginalized and scholastically backward students could create the necessary change. All major streams like medicine, engineering - technology and humanities finds place among the plethora of courses offered by the University. Being not-for-profit university, it aims to bring in innovations through curriculum design and implementation, teaching-learning process, examination and evaluation so that the students standout differently to become star performers. The vision of Srinivas University is to create star performers who would be intellectually robust, technically competent economically productive, socially inclined, ethically and emotionally sound to be best suited to face emerging challenges in all walks of life. In this paper, we have studied STAR framework as an overall beacon for development of Srinivas University.

Keywords : Private university, Quality in Higher Education, Innovations in Higher education's, STAR Framework.

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I. Introduction

After independence, the general pattern of Universities with affiliating colleges continued. Historically, the affiliating system of colleges was originally designed when number of Universities were reportedly less. The University could then effectively oversee the working of its affiliated colleges, act as examining body and award degrees. However, with rapidly growing increase in number of colleges and educational institutions, the system became unmanageable and started losing its governance. It is becoming increasingly difficult for any University to effectively attend to the various needs of the affiliated/constituent colleges in a regular way and that too within the reasonable time. The Acts, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations of the University and its common system governing all colleges irrespective of their characteristic strengths, weakness and locations, have adversely affected the quality and academic development of individual colleges.

All affiliated and constituent colleges of a University are supposed to strictly adhere to be governed by the given system and any initiative and innovation, outside the given ambit, taken by a particular college at its own cost and initiative is often treated by the University as infringement of their dictum (Mukhopadhyay and Pabitra, 2015). They do not have freedom to modernize their curricula to make it relevant to the local-specific needs, resources, and aspirations. The colleges have capacity and capability for offering programmes of higher standards do not have the freedom to do so within the prevailing routine and rigid bureaucratic style of functioning of the University system of educations. Monitoring of quality of teaching, research, physical facilities like library and laboratory equipment too is often minimal. This apart, the system is made so complicated that nothing gets done on time. As a result, higher education delivery system becomes inefficient and ineffective and finally the objective of education itself gets defeated.

To provide a remedy for quality higher education and to avoid the constraints faced by conventional Universities, Private University system is encouraged. Private Universities which have been relatively recently established, solved the need of autonomous system to facilitate much needed innovations in teaching and learning environment, such as dual degree programmes, inter-disciplinary programmes, inter-institutional sharing of academic loads, and transfer of credits between different modes of learning and so on to maintain quality. Private Universities are enjoying academic autonomy, administrative autonomy, and financial autonomy. Academic autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, instructional material, pedagogy, techniques and models of students' evaluation.

Administrative autonomy is the freedom to institution to manage its own affairs with regard to administration. It is the freedom to manage the affairs in such a way that it stimulates and encourages initiative and development of individuals working in the institutions and thereby the institutions itself. Financial autonomy is the freedom to the institution to expend the financial resources at its disposal in a prudent way keeping in view its priorities. Private Universities also have accountability as autonomy and accountability are the two sides of the same coin (Mukhopadhyay and Pabitra, 2015).

A State private university is established through a State/Central Act by a sponsoring body viz. a society registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, or any other corresponding law for the time being in force in a State or a Public Trust or a Company registered under Section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956. Private universities are different in size, enrolment, course offered, funding authority, financial and managerial capacity. By and large private universities are providing quality education compared to public universities, and private universities are best option to the students due to their real concern for quality (Rajesh, 2014).

Most of the private universities are working hard to attract students away from central and state universities by offering differentiated courses incorporating features like triple mains, super-specializations, dual degrees, integrated programs, CBCS, and industry affiliated courses. It is tougher for self-financing colleges to rapidly implement such measures as they can move only at the speed of the affiliating state universities that often take ages to implement an innovation. The best example is the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), which the UGC has been coaxing all public universities to implement. Till now, there has been only very few takers for this global standard, whereas many leading private universities have already implemented it without any prompting, as a progressive measure.

Private Universities have also turned aggressive on the faculty hiring front, with the latest trend being such institutions hiring from the corporate sector. Many senior managers working in the corporate sector are now switching to teaching roles in these private universities, as they offer more flexible working hours and less of deadlines and targets. The political aversion towards private universities too is ending in some states, with the most notable being Maharashtra. Despite pockets of resistance like Tamilnadu, Puducherry, & Kerala, private universities are here to stay. While the ruckus in Puducherry over allegedly providing private university status to certain colleges raised a storm in the national media, the huge positives coming from Maharashtra is likely to be the longer-term trend. In Karnataka

as on June 2015, eleven private universities were started to function as per UGC status declaration in its website.

II. Srinivas University – Origin & Vision

Srinivas University, Mangalore, is a Private Academic & Research University established in Karnataka State (Act No. 42 of 2013 and with the final notification of establishment by Higher education department of Karnataka state on 20th February 2015) recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi. The University is established by A. Shama Rao Foundation, Mangalore and Srinivas Group of Colleges with a view to bridge the gap between conventional education and the next generation education requirements. The University is committed to transform society through its innovative model of higher education in all areas of Sciences, Engineering, Technology, Management, Social Sciences and Humanities.

The University, is founded by a noted educationist CA. A. Raghavendra Rao, who has pioneered the cause of higher education for inclusive growth and social development. Being a not for profit university, aims to bring in innovations through curriculum design and implementation, teaching-learning process, examination and evaluation so that the students standout differently to become star performers.

The vision of the university is to be a trendsetter among universities and build students who emerge as leaders with competence, conscience and compassion by empowering them with sound education and high standards of ethical and professional behaviour enabling them to build and promote a more humane, just and sustainable world for future generations. The mission is to provide an exceptional learning environment where students can develop and enhance their leadership and teamwork skills, creative and intellectual powers and passion for learning by providing an uncompromising standard of excellence in teaching; embodying the spirit of excellence to educate the citizen-leaders of society with distinction (Aithal et. al. 2015).

III. Excellence in Identity

The objectives of the University spells out its identity :

(i) To support, promote and undertake advancement of and innovation in University education leading up to and including post graduate, doctoral and post doctoral courses in the Technical, Health, Medical, Dental, Para-Medical, Pre-Medical, Cultural, Spiritual, Vedanta, Astrology, Management, Life sciences and all sciences, social sciences, Sports & Athletics,

Arts including performing Arts, all types of Media including electronic media, journalism, humanities and any other allied sectors or branch of knowledge or learning and make provisions for research, advancement and dissemination of knowledge and consultancy in these fields; including online education through information communication technology and distance education.

(ii) to collaborate with any other universities, research institutions, non-profit organizations, industry associations, professional associations or other organizations, to conceptualize, design, develop and offer specific educational and research progranlmes, training programmes and exchange programmes for students, faculty members and others;

(iii) to undertake collaborative research and advocacy with any organizations with prior approval of the Board of Governors;

(iv) to disseminate and advance knowledge by providing instructional and research facilities in such branches of learning as it may deem fit and in particular, to make special provisions for integrated courses in Technical, Health, Management, Life sciences and other such higher educational programmes of the University in the all area of Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and to make appropriate measures for promoting interdisciplinary studies and research, both in continuing and online education mode;

(v) To develop human resources to meet the demands of high end technical and professional industries with research on future sustainable technologies catering to engineering solutions and support technology business and technology incubation;

(vi) To provide innovative system of University level education, flexible and open with regard to methods and places of learning, combination of courses eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, conduct of examinations and operation of programmes with a view to promoting access and equity in higher learning besides encouraging excellence in new fields of knowledge and placing special emphasis on both academic as well as application oriented learning;

(vii) To develop resource Centres to contribute to quality education with prior approval of the Board of Governors;

(viii) To establish Campuses, Regional centres, study centres and constituent Schools, colleges, Institutions, Academies at various locations in Karnataka and to contribute and to conduct research and develop an understanding of educational change in technical, professional, general education and social and human development with prior approval of Board of Governors;

(ix) To institute degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions like award of credits on the basis of successful completion of academic work evaluated through multiple modern methods of assessment;

(x) To disseminate knowledge and develop a public debate on issues of education and allied development fields through seminars, conferences, executive education programmes, community development programmes, publications and training programmes and events;

(xi) To undertake programmes for development and training of faculty and researchers of the University in partnership with any other university of quality with prior approval of the Board of Governors;

IV. Relevance & Context

The existing educational institutions largely, has not sufficiently taken care of the unmet aspirations, career needs, job profile, skill requirements of the students and employer-community expectations while structuring their course, enrollment, imparting learning, assessments and awarding degree. Srinivas University aims to bring in innovations through curriculum design and implementation, teaching-learning process, examination and evaluation so that they standout differently to become star performers. The vision of Srinivas University is to create star performers who would be intellectually robust, technically competent economically productive, socially inclined, ethically and emotionally sound to be best suited to face emerging challenges in all walks of life. All Srinivas University programmes strives to create professional manpower with global perspective and the University has been established to serve the educational needs of the country through comprehensive programmes of education which is open to innovations based on the changing environment and employment market. The group of colleges which has celebrated its silver jubilee two years ago, came into existence to realize the vision of its founder, promoted by his admirable son who is a chartered accountant. The group of colleges offers educational opportunity to 12,000 students and livelihood to families of 3000 employees including faculty members. This massive buildup is the strong base for a strong institution to take off to greater heights.

V. Perspective Plan

Srinivas University believes that academic excellence can be created through a convergence of student interest, faculty expertise, quality services, well maintained infrastructure, positive

learning environment and effective leadership. The philosophy of the university is well spelt out in its perspective plan. Regarding students the perspective plan defines the following.

- To develop an admission process which would attract the best students in large numbers with variety of background such as gender, linguistic, religious, cultural, socio-economic and nationality characteristics.

- To impart quality education to the students enrolled through effective teaching/training methods suited to the needs of the students and maintain a team of highly motivated and competent teachers.

- To transform the students into better performers so as to achieve the best out of each student, that will make them quality professionals to handle multi-faceted jobs.

The perspective plan for faculty defines the following:

- To identify and attract talented professionals who would take challenges and provide leadership to equip an emerging generation with clear sense of direction.

- To provide appropriate orientation to the existing and newly absorbed faculty, so as to enable them handle difficult situation in the easiest way and be devoted in the task of imparting education to the students.

- To transform the faculty into highly productive, efficient and effective in executing the responsibilities of their job with fullest satisfaction to them as well as to the students, parents and stake holders.

The perspective plan for the courses is explained as follows:

- Vertical and horizontal expansion of courses in all realms of knowledge pertaining to the areas of interest of the institution, the students and the community at large.

- To maintain high standards in the subjects offered through various courses which would be in the best interest of the institution, students and stake holders.

- By way of enriching the courses adding new and relevant courses, it is expected that more students will be attracted, quality professionals will be created, greater recognition and reputation for the institution is obtained and the community will be satisfied.

The various aspects considered under perspective for infrastructure development as follows:

- Create better and appropriate infrastructure suited to the anticipated situation, emerging out of the increased intake and expansion of courses

- To make the best use of the infrastructure created through optimum utilization, continuous maintenance, and sustainable efficiency

- To accommodate the multiplying units resulting from expansion, diversification and anticipated improvements

The perspective plan for employers defines the following:

- Creating enhanced opportunity, improving employer interest, catering to the diverse needs of the industry so as to achieve harmony between institution and job market.

- Ensuring a regular supply of talented and trained professionals would provide leadership and handle challenging assignments emerging out of developing needs and changing technology.

- Collect regular feedback from the employers and utilize to dovetail curriculum, supplement knowledge gaps through skill building and value addition.

Srinivas University believes that scholastic backwardness is an inevitable product of marginalization and hence comprehensive development and inclusion agenda for minority, marginalized and scholastically backward students could create the necessary change. All major streams like medicine, engineering technology and humanities finds place among the plethora of courses offered by the University.

VI. STAR Framework

Srinivas University has developed **'STAR'** framework (acronym for Student, Teacher, Academic governance, and Research with extension) encompassing of all facets of functioning of an educational institution for continual improvement.

<u>Students</u> :

Ensuring desired enrollment, focusing on well balanced mix of gender, culture, nationality, religion, socio-economic strata and scholastic credentials is met through planned and purposeful enrollment. The institution display commitment and accountability by involving all means in the enrolment process.

- Maintain transparency in admission, maintain quality teaching, providing growth opportunity and creating learning atmosphere.

- Courses offered to ensure the taste and talent of the student, adhering to the allotted strength and permitted specializations within the approved syllabus.

- Ensure that the restrictions and relaxations of followed.

- Open to wide range of aspirants based on a free competition of first come first serve basis.

- Compliance to regulations in examination and assessment to maintain high academic achievement.

- Ensuring the preparedness of the students for employability providing variety of services like placement, skill development, further studies, career planning.

- Emphasis on extra and co-curricular activities, industry exposure, social service programmes.

- Efforts to materialize the slogan of creating star performers by converting raw students into talented innovators.

- Value addition beyond bare essentials required.

- Planned curriculum, hours of instruction, qualifying examination and award of certificate

- All aspiring students are provided support to redefine their goal and plan for higher studies.

The student profile in enrollment is not just limited to diversities but also on talent in arts, games, sports events. Once admitted the focus is on enhancing performance and producing desired learning outcome in expanding opportunity for growth and self discovery. This is important because when a student discover his own potential he is set to develop his dream and begin journey for realization of the abilities. Examinations and evaluations become routine and no more frightening. Capacity development through student support programmes such as exposure visits, field visits, guest lectures, certification programmes, value addition classes, industry interface, employability trainings, skill development package are given emphasis. Campus placement services are extended to all students. The institution is student friendly. Counseling and grievance are part of regular services to students. Alumni interaction is fostered. Discipline and hard work are the key mantras for ensuring success.

Teachers :

The institution is committed to quality teaching and learning process. The quality policy declare maintaining high standards in imparting education, motivating and monitoring a team of competent professionals as faculty, building them continuously through development programmes so that they eventually absorb the spirit of institutional values and maintain high degree of efficiency. The faculty members are oriented with necessary responsibility and accountability to carry out their task. A variety of empowerment strategies employed to develop the faculty.

- Improved ability in communication and language proficiency is promoted through a variety of ways.

- Enhanced competency in imparting knowledge to compensate deficiency in comprehension to enhance learning.

- Effective presentation skills are developed through strategies providing know-how.

- Effective judgement and fair assessment in evaluation are created.

- Synergy and collaboration are built through team work and group activities.

- Better student teacher relationship is promoted through increased interaction and counseling strategies to overcome deficiency in sensitivity to student difficulties.

- Technology adoption is encouraged through support facility to incorporate use of electronic media such as teaching aids to make teaching effective.

- Attitude is redefined to positive thinking through reorientation strategies.

- Stagnation is overcome through advancement in research by provoking analytical thinking leading to original contribution.

- Quest for excellence is created to counter challenges in effective teaching, adoption of creative thinking and improvement in teaching methods.

Mechanisms are instituted for faculty improvement. It includes for example the following:

- Importance of adhering to schedules

- Recognizing the importance of classroom teaching in effective student learning

- Identifying the need for improvement through 360° appraisal

- Student feedback is positively and constructively welcome

- Comprehensive performance management system to identify weaknesses

- Realizing the need for improvement through overall result analysis

- Developing increased accountability

- Academic leadership is encouraged in the faculty in areas relating to setting standards, measuring performance, enforcing discipline, imbibing values, character formation and personality development

Academics and Governance :

Education has become institutionalized in the present day world so that any aspiring student is offered a menu of courses to choose in any institution of desire. The curriculum is predetermined and rules regarding examination are set much before the student chooses the course. Evaluation is done in a manner approved by the institution as desirable. Teachers use prevailing pedagogy and seek to stuff in knowledge. Therefore curriculum planning is significant since it affords a lot of room to maneuver according to the requirement and interest of the prospective students. Once set it is continuously improved through faculty,

student and stake holder feedback. Curriculum enrichment measures included industry exposure, supplementary learning through value added courses, academic discourses and field exposure involving social service.

Institutional distinctive characteristics in academic governance address the vision and mission:

- Diversity and inclusion - right mix of conventional/traditional with modern teaching techniques

- Innovative programmes – courses suited to emerging requirements and challenges

- Planned curriculum – taking into account student interest and aspirations

- Teacher quality and pedagogy – meet the demand for curriculum implementation

- Adherence to quality – create star performance

- Quality professionals – equipped to serve, ethically and emotionally sound

- Changing scenario – updated curriculum

The institution believes in value-based, culture oriented quality education and faculty empowerment strategies are therefore deployed.

- Programmes such as conferences, workshops, faculty development programmes are organised periodically.

- Encouragement to attend programmes and seminars organized by other institutions.

- Encouragement to take up research projects, engaging consultancies and publications in chosen area of expertise.

- Encouragement to become members of professional bodies and participating programmes conducted

- Training programmes for enhancing competence such as use of computer and technology etc.

- Motivated and encouraged to take up higher education in the chosen field

- Encouragement for preparation of study material to simplify effective teaching

Leadership is considered as important among human higher order needs and promoted in a variety of ways. Academic leadership and programme organizing leadership are groomed.

Quality is considered as uncompromisable and quality plans and policies are implemented. Quality in maintaining high standards in imparting education is achieved through quality faculty, quality infrastructure, quality institutional values, and integration of individual interest and institutional interest. Flexi-time courses are encouraged. Collaboration with other universities are sought. All academic programmes are geared to incorporate new

generation technology in course development, curriculum delivery and evaluation. Academic audit serves to point out flaws for rectification, may it be in admission, teaching, research, co-curricular activities, placement etc. the institutional leadership involves in organizational change and reinforcing the culture of excellence through knowledge sharing, transfer of technology, infrastructure development and leadership.

Research and Extension :

The University promotes research through encouraging faculty to take up research projects and consultancies as well as qualify with a research degree. Many co-curricular programmes such as scientific exhibitions, team projects and competitions are held to develop scientific temper among students. The library is fully computerised and equipped with large collection of books and subscribed periodicals.

Extension activities is a major social out reach of the university. Free health camps are conducted in the community on a regular basis. National service scheme organise rural camps in villages were students are exposed to the real life in the villages by staying and working in the community. Job fairs are conducted in which local youth participate. Children from local government schools are open to learn computer in the institutions computer lab. Prizes are awarded annually for distinguished community service.

VII. Innovations at Srinivas University

7.1 Course Design & Curriculum Planning :

- Relevant and updated curriculum
- Enhancement of employability skills
- Industry – institution collaboration
- Flexi time courses
- Classroom learning with practical exposure
- Industry internship opportunity
- Entrepreneurial development courses
- Value addition & differentiation

7.2 Teaching - Learning Process :

- Catering to student diversity
- Student centric pedagogy
- Academic ambience
- Concurrent assessment

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- Continuous evaluation

- Promotion of ICT supported learning

- Introducing bridge courses

- Sensitization to cross cutting issues

7.3 Research, Consultancy and Extension :

- Promoting scientific temper

- Applied research projects

- Encouraging consultancy with corporate/Government bodies

- Improved research facilities

- Action programmes

- Supporting Publications & Patents

- Community service

- Collaborative research

- Industrial engagement

- Co-funded mini & micro projects

7.4 Infrastructure and Learning Resources :

- Student friendly campus

- Computer driven office automation

- Learner friendly teaching aids

- Online courses

- E-learning

- Synergy through inter-institutional collaboration

7.5 Student Support and Progression :

- Student progression to higher courses

- Well framed mentoring system

- Employment orientation in all courses

- Entrepreneurial skill building

- Extra-curricular & co-curricular activities

- Support from alumni

7.6 Governance, Leadership and Management :

- Articulation of vision & mission

- Grooming faculty leadership
- Academic de-centralization
- Faculty Empowerment Strategies
- Importance on Student/parent feedback
- Internal quality assurance system
- Academic audit
- Autonomy in functioning

7.7 Social Service & Support :

- Outreach & social service activities
- Institutional social responsibility
- Productive enterprises for income & employment
- Student earning opportunities while learning

VII. Conclusion

Scholastic backwardness is an inevitable product of marginalization and hence comprehensive development and inclusion agenda for minority, marginalized and scholastically backward students could create the necessary change only by enhancing enrollment in higher education. With this view, private universities are established to supplement the State efforts. Quality change is still not visible because of reduced emphasis on innovation in private universities also. Srinivas university aims to bring in innovations through the triad of curriculum (design and implementation), teaching-learning (process), examination and evaluation so that the students standout differently to become star performers. The innovations planned at Srinivas University cover Course Design & Curriculum Planning, Teaching - Learning Process, Research, Consultancy and Extension, Infrastructure and Learning Resources, Student Support and Progression, governance-leadership & management, and social service & support. The vision of Srinivas University is to create star performers who would be intellectually robust, technically competent economically productive, socially inclined, ethically and emotionally sound to be best suited to face emerging challenges in all walks of life. STAR framework is the overall beacon for development of Srinivas University.

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