Role of Sustainability in Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT
This paper indicates that corporate organizations would recruit students from institutions which have a good track record of implementing sustainable initiatives since the global market is moving towards environmental consciousness and there is a dire need for professionals in this area.

Keywords— Research, Educational institutions, Multinational companies

I. INTRODUCTION
The Talloires Declaration (1990) was introduced to promote sustainability amongst universities and colleges. More than 499 universities spread across 55 countries have signed the declaration (University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, 2016). There has been a growing importance of sustainability linked to campus operations, education and research. This is called whole – of – university approach to sustainability where the objective is to deliver experiential learning to students (Memmlin and Dyball, 2009). Researcher (Shephard, 2007) has emphasized that education on sustainability should not only impart knowledge but also inculcate values that can help businesses and society. Jain and Pant (2010) has proposed a model for implementation of environmental management systems in universities which relates to ISO 14001. The United Nations has created a platform for promoting sustainability in higher education. It has the membership of 300 universities around the world. The initiatives include teaching sustainability in all disciplines, encouraging research in the area of sustainability and working towards green campus development.

According to Cortese (1999), the disturbing trends on global environment have made it necessary to spread awareness and education about sustainability issues. According to Tilbury (1995), education on sustainability should be linked to sustainable development activities undertaken by institutions in order to bring a greater realization on the issue. A study done on Griffith University in Queensland, Australia revealed that students were concerned about environment by were not confident about making plans or decisions on environmental issues due to lack of involvement in the learning process. Hence a need was felt to restructure the education on sustainable development (Stir, 2006). Shepard (2008) has emphasized that education on sustainability should focus on effective learning outcomes of values, attitude and behaviour through learner support activities.

Research by Kolk (2003) has shown that the concern for environment has led to a significant increase in sustainable reporting by multinational companies. Research by Knoepfel has revealed that investors have shown significant interest in companies committed to sustainability. Dow Jones has designed a sustainability index for ranking companies based on sustainability. A study on Indian companies (Jose and Saraf, 2013) has shown that significant initiatives have been taken by Indian companies on sustainability, the reflection of which is in sustainable reporting by them.

A report by Economic Times (2015) has shown a 40 – 50 % rise in hiring of professionals with expertise in sustainability at all levels with attractive pay packages. The study will help in awareness on sustainability at various educational institutions so that improvements can be done for saving the environment and increasing environmental consciousness.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Any deliberation on sustainable universities focuses on university-systems which are mostly traditional, (Lozano, R., Lukman, R., Lozano, F. J., Huisingh, D., & Lambrechts, W. (2013). Velazquez, L., Munguia, N., Platt, A., & Taddei, J. (2006) proposed a four phased structural framework in a strategic management process to assess sustainability. Promoting and practising collaboration and transdisciplinarity, clearly focussing on personal and social sustainability, integration of plans, decision-making structures and evaluative measures, integration of research, service and teaching have been emphasized for their significance when a university is developing a sustainable model (Moore, J. (2005).). Importance of ‘reflection’ and ‘pedagogical upgradation’ has also been emphasized in creating sustainable higher education systems. (Moore, J. (2005.). Educational, research and outreach efforts within all academic institutions have been studied worldwide. (García, F. J. L., Kevany, K., & Huisingh, D. (2006).) Overcoming the resistance to change within and outside of academia. (García, F. J. L., Kevany, K., & Huisingh, D. (2006).) has also been studied towards creating sustainable societies. Research has also focussed on ‘integrating environmental management systems’ (Clarke, A., & Kouri, R. (2009).). There has also been observed some evidence of poor management of ecosystems (Berkes, F., & Folke, C. (1998). ‘Communication’ and ‘interaction’ with society are found to be important determinants of sustainability efforts of an organization. (Stephens, J. C., Hernandez, M. E., Román, M., Graham, A. C., & Scholz, R. W. (2008).) Importance of ‘Greening the campus’ initiatives has been highlighted in higher education (Beringer, A., & Adomßent, M. (2008).). Van Weenen, H. (2000) discussed a vision of a sustainable university by highlighting that it is one of the biggest challenges to universities (Van Weenen, H. (2000).) There is felt a need to think and rethink how universities are facing sustainability (Ferrer-Balas, D., Lozano, R., Huisingh, D., Buckland, H., Ysern, P., & Zilahy, G. (2010).) Spellerberg, I. F., Buchan, G. D., & Englefield, R. (2004) emphasized the significance of having an environmental policy and ensuring its implementation. Studies talk of bringing new elements to the process of reorienting university studies towards sustainability (Junyent, M., & Ciurana, A. M. G. (2008).) identifying and fixing barriers for sustainable systems (Lidgren, A., Rodhe, H., & Huisingh, D. (2006) and designing technology and economic activities that sustain rather than delegate the natural environment (Cortese, A. D. (2003).) Research is now also focussing on applying ‘Lean Thinking’ to the academic institutions (Hines, P., & Lethbridge, S. (2008).) Having an environmental management system for higher education. (Barnes, P., & Jerman, P. (2002) will not only help working for sustainability but also build a robust system.


Involvement of students and measurement of sustainability involvement are big challenges for an institution of higher education. The studies show that sustainability challenge lies with implementation of sustainability concepts, its measurement and presentation of results (Finkbeiner, M., Schau, E. M., Lehmann, A., & Traverso, M. (2010).)

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES

The study was carried out on a prominent deemed university in India which had 18 constituent institutes belonging to the Faculty of Law, Management, IT and Engineering. The university implemented various sustainable initiatives in all its campuses which housed the various institutes. The initiatives were implemented by campus administrator of each campus. The various initiatives taken were as follows:

1. Rain water harvesting: This relates to storage of rain water in a river bed which can further be filtered and used for various purposes. This initiative helped in the saving of water across various campuses.
2. Energy efficient lighting: Conventional lighting was replaced by energy efficient lighting thereby helping each campus in saving of electricity.
3. Solar water heating: Solar cells were deployed in the hostel block of each campus thereby replacing conventional power with a renewable source and saving on electricity supply.
4. Heat pumps: During the rainy season, it is difficult to get sunlight and the hence the solar cells become less effective. An alternate method is to create heat through heat pumps which can be used for heating water thereby saving energy.
5. Sewage treatment plant: Sewage treatment plants were installed on each campus to recycle the used water and this water could be used for watering the plants thereby saving on water.
6. Borewell: Some of the campuses received water through bore wells which were dug up on the campuses thereby saving on water supplied by the municipal corporation.
7. Sign boards: Sign boards were installed in classrooms and other areas of various campuses to instruct the users to switch off electrical equipment when not in use.
8. Purchase of energy efficient IT equipment: The university purchased energy efficient IT equipment for its various campuses to further save energy.
9. Banning of plastic: The university banned usage of plastic on all its campuses and carried out an anti–plastic drive to spread awareness and discourage the use of plastic material.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sustainability can play an important role in inculcating a spirit of environment consciousness among the student community (Shephard, 2007). Sustainability also plays an important role in the ranking of the institute (AMBA, NAAC). The corporate organizations would recruit students from institutions which have a good track record of implementing sustainable initiatives since the global market is moving towards environmental consciousness and there is a dire need for professionals in this area. This is in agreement with the research (Jose and Saraf, 2013) who have found that Indian companies would prefer employees from those institutions that inculcate values of sustainability. There has also been an increase in sustainable reporting by global companies and hence realization of the issue through education is of utmost importance.

REFERENCES

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