

Opportunities and Challenges of Higher Education: Status of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Tribhuvan University

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Abstract

This paper primarily discusses the major challenges the faculty of humanities and social sciences facing today at Tribhuvan University with more emphasis on exploring the future prospects as opportunities in its areas in the context of growing educational unemployment in Nepal. University degree has largely become a basic requirement to enter into the job market in most of the areas particularly in Nepal today. This is because higher education has been accessible to all whoever passes higher secondary education including all undergraduate studies. Although access to higher education has been easier to all the common people there are challenges in getting job in the market even after an individual gets the certificate of university degree. The government and universities of Nepal have not realized yet that we need a body of knowledge to solve the problems at our own local realities, experiences and actual need in the areas of humanities and social sciences. Most of the political leaders representing government and secretaries and officers in bureaucracy are from the field of humanities and social sciences. However, government is hesitant to invest in the areas of humanities and social sciences on higher education. Government's investment in the universities is decreasing, in proportion, every year. Within this reference the allocation in the areas of humanities and social sciences is very low. Attraction is now increasing in technical area which is good from job perspective. But ignoring the importance of social science discipline which is continuously leading country is certainly not good. The advocates of such ideas have quoted success stories of countries like India and China. But they have not heeded to the fact that mere focus on science will ultimately result in the failure to produce fully developed human resources. These are the challenges facing by social sciences of Nepal. However, there are some new opportunities emerging in this area when it is examined in the context of Tribhuvan University. Some examples can be referenced with growing scope of social science disciplines such as Sociology, Social Work, International Relations, Economics and discipline in humanities such as English as attraction of larger number of students competing to get admission.

Key Words: higher education, challenges, opportunities, technology

Introduction

Today's world is known as the age of science and technology. The science is based on scientific education and educational institutions. The number of educational institutions including universities is heavily increasing all over the world including Nepal. "Despite the changes and challenges involved, few argue philosophically against an increased

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openness and diversity within higher education. Most laud the dramatic expansion of university access as commensurate with principles of distributive justice, equal opportunity, and improved social mobility (Black, Cortes, and Lincove 2015; Liu 2011; Louie 2007; Smith and Gottheil 2011; compare Haveman and Smeeding 2006). Much of the research and commentary have been devoted to expanding access for previously disadvantaged groups (Abrego 2006; Arciniega 2012; Frempong, Ma, and Mensah 2012; Gallego and Busch 2015)” (as cited in Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry, 2017, pp. 66-67). It tells us that education is at the core of development of human society.

The delivery of educational institutions depends on the socio-cultural context and educational system. Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry (2017, p. 67) further highlight that “At the level of individual institutions, each university’s philosophy serves as an integral guiding factor for establishing fair and equitable admissions. An interrogation of their mission statements offers a lens through which one can view how organizational cultures affect the delivery of student supports on campus, which then influence student success (Meacham 2008)”. The practice of expanding the horizon of education is widely increasing throughout the world including Nepal.

The Office of the Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FOHSS) at Tribhuvan University (TU) is one of the oldest faculties formed within TU since it’s established in 1959. It provides academic supports as well as leadership and direction to the Campuses and Central Departments. It conducts Ph. D. program in the subjects of Humanities and Social Sciences in academic coordination and involvement of the concerned Central Departments and faculties. In order to enhance the efficiency, the office of the Dean regularly conducts seminar and workshop for its faculties. It also publishes periodic journals, teaching and research manuals. In addition to this Faculty Board headed by the Dean is highest body of the Faculty. Dean's Office has six sections; Ph.D., Examination, Equivalence, Research/Publication, and Training/Seminar Section, and Administration Section. The number of campus/colleges affiliated with this faculty is increasing every year. But in reverse the number of students in some disciplines taught under this faculty is decreasing every year. Some others which have larger number of students are getting students with poor performance. However, this faculty is offering some new disciplines with new objectives catering the needs of changing social, economic, political and other contexts of Nepal. In this larger turn taking context of our country and the world this paper is prepared to highlight on both sides; challenges and opportunities, in the areas of humanities and social sciences at TU in Nepal.

Objective

The primary objective of this paper is to trace the historical development with some critical discussion on the major challenges the FOHSS facing today at TU and highlighting more on the importance and future prospects as opportunities in the field of humanities and social sciences. Therefore, this paper gives the overall picture of the status and importance of the humanities and social science disciplines in Nepal in general and at TU in particular.

Methods

In order to trace the history of FOHSS at TU as much as literature available at various sections of the same FOHSS were collected. Most of the information/data on administration, academic programs and examination were noted before writing this paper. Also informal interviews with some senior professors were carried out during the period of short time of writing this paper. Some of the bulletins published from TU were also reviewed in order to get other necessary information on the past and present status of FOHSS.

Review: Higher Education in Contemporary World

Higher education has become an important foundation for the development of any country. All the countries in the world today are emphasizing on the education system to develop society and state. The modern practice of education is heavily focused on university education. Universities are the centres where youths grow academically and develop themselves as scientists and experts of various areas so that they can contribute in specific areas. Youths from various countries are moving from one part of the world to another to gain education. In this context, Mantovani, Gasperoni, and Albertini (2018) have mentioned:

In many Western societies, youths belonging to first- and second-generation (G1 and G2) immigrant groups display a comparatively low propensity to engage in higher education. This puts them at a disadvantage throughout their life courses but also entails extensive social costs for the wider population. Some barriers to immigrant-origin students' transition to university are 'hard' and general in nature, mainly linked to social origins. Youths belonging to lower social classes have inadequate access to financial resources, and those from families with low cultural capital (e.g. poorly educated parents) tend to perform less well in school and have modest educational aspirations (Ballarino and Checchi, 2006; Bottani, 1986; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997; Gambetta, 1987; Gasperoni, 1996); in many contexts (children of) immigrants are plagued disproportionately by both factors. (P. 604)

However, the purpose of visiting other countries for education differs from individual to individual. Based on their own specific purpose youths gain knowledge and skills useful to their life. Mantovani, Gasperoni, and Albertini (2018) further write:

Regardless of their education levels and financial resources, immigrant parents and their offspring often show higher educational aspirations than their native peers (Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado, 2007; Kao and Tienda 1995, 1998). Immigrant parents are generally aware of university degrees' economic and social benefits, which allow their children to compete on the labour market, earn higher incomes, increase their chances of upward social mobility and enjoy greater prestige and status (Bowen, 1997). (P. 604)

Many parents from different parts of the world including Nepal are sending their children to foreign countries particularly developed countries for higher education. They do so because the learning in developed countries helps youths to get job easily and work efficiently wherever they engage themselves. In a volume of work by Brint and Clotfelter (2016) there is analysis about effectiveness of education. They write about effectiveness as:

A topic that has not been as prominent in scholarship as we believe it should be. Scholars of higher education have been principally interested in how colleges and universities work and what forces in their environments lead them to change. But most policymakers (and most of the public) do not want simply to understand institutions, but rather to know how to make them work better than they currently do. Because colleges and universities are central institutions in American society, their effectiveness should be considered a topic of national priority. (P. 2)

Each country in the world therefore keeps education system in the top priority. With particular focus on national priority the educational institutions of any country contribute for the betterment of the country. Regarding the meaning of effectiveness in U.S. context, Brint and Clotfelter (2016) further write:

The meaning of effectiveness depends on what society expects to achieve through higher education. We begin by asking the basic questions: What are the functions of higher education in society? What does effectiveness mean in this context? And how can effectiveness be measured once it is defined? After this discussion, we briefly describe the historical development of American higher education and its current structure and challenges. We do so to set a context for the issues explored here, an analysis of the effectiveness of U.S. higher education in relation to system- level, campus level, and classroom- level effects. This threefold division based on the primary actors involved in effectiveness policies and practices provides a useful heuristic for dividing the topics we consider in this issue.¹ Because we believe systems- level actions will be of the greatest interest to readers, we devote more space to issues at that level than to those at the other two levels. (P. 2-3)

Thus, the meaning of effectiveness of any education system depends on what a nation focuses on and aims to achieve. As per the aspiration of country education is planned and implemented. Whatever kind of education system is planned and implemented it faces certain kind of challenges. The challenges may differ by socio-cultural context and the level of development in the country.

Results and Discussion: Historical Development and Current Status

The key argument of Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry (2017, p. 81) suggests that “while institutions of higher learning can facilitate improved access to PSE, they must commit to developing support services and a more welcoming and inclusive environment in order to ensure student retention and success among an increasingly diverse student population. Such a commitment aligns well with Swail’s (2014: 23) contention that “when an institution accepts the registration of a student, they are, in effect, entering a moral,

ethical, and legal contract with the student to do whatever they can to help that student succeed.” The key role of educational institution is to enroll students and train them academically to produce competent qualified human resource.

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FOHSS) is one of the four Faculties of Tribhuvan University. Formerly it was existed as an Institute in the beginning. Later it was restructured as a Faculty in 1985 (2042 BS). This Faculty aims at producing specialized human resources in humanities, social sciences, computer applications and interdisciplinary studies. There are 30 constituent Campuses along with more than 300 affiliated colleges under this Faculty (Dean’s Office, FOHSS, 2016).

This Faculty has 22 Central Departments, 4 new Master Degree programs like Conflict Peace and Development Studies (CPDS), Gender Studies (GS), International Relation and Diplomacy (IRD), Social Work (MSW). Some other new disciplines such as Master Degree Program in Sports Science (MSS) are also coming up. Master Degree Programs at the university campus as well as all new programs are running under semester system. Six Central Departments; English, Nepali, Economics, Population Studies, Sociology and Anthropology are conducting M. Phil. Program in their own Central Departments. Three special Masters Degree programs are affiliated to this Faculty: 1) Strategic Study (SS), 2) Security, Peace and Development Studies and (SPDS) and 3) Crisis Management Studies (CMS). Some more new courses of Master Degree are in pipe line to be launched soon. They are Folklore Studies, Development Studies, Tourism and Hospitality Studies and Leadership and Governance. The number of students' enrollment in this Faculty is 26 percent out of the entire university enrollment (TU, 2016). However, this number has increased up to 43 including Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) programs (FOHSS, 2022). Thus, still it is larger faculty at TU which is growing creating new opportunities in its own field humanities and social sciences.

Major Challenges of Higher Education and FOHSS, TU Facing Today

The research in various parts of the world report different challenges of higher education. On of the paper by Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry (2017, p. 81) have discussed “the previous research and offered evidence to suggest that the main narrative of higher education in Canada largely parallels the one currently being written in the United States (and elsewhere): that the students populating institutions of higher learning are more diverse than ever, even though some groups continue to be disadvantaged, struggle with equal access, and must confront a host of challenges to have success”. This indicates that higher education even in the context of higher level of development is facing various challenges.

Tribhuvan University as the oldest University of Nepal is contributing a lot in producing human resources required in various fields of country. Currently TU is leading such kind of burden with almost 436 thousand in the academic year 2014/15 which is the largest among all universities in the world (Pokharel, 2015). This number is almost similar to the last academic year as well. FOHSS shares one of the larger parts of this huge bulk of students. Despite the production of large number of students in humanities and social

sciences is now blamed in terms of deteriorating quality of education with production of large number of unemployed youths. This kind of blame is not only for FOHSS but for TU at larger. In my view it is because of two reasons. One is that it has very large number of students among which only little get degree with enough hardwork on getting both knowledge and skill that enhances their capability. Another is that large bulk of students who do not get their degree with a standard of capability. Actually they do not get market opportunities easily. These two reasons are tied together and support those who blame TU as a factory for producing educational youths. Therefore maintaining the quality of education in the disciplines under humanities and social sciences is one of the major challenges for FOHSS. There are also some more challenges which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

FOHSS at TU was leading and competing faculty since very beginning. There was large number of students even in political sciences in the campuses all over the country. There were many faculties leading the disciplines with international exposure. But today the quality of education in most of the discipline is blamed as deteriorating that made TU very low in global ranking of the universities. However, it is not because of only FOHSS. The ranking is not only because of deteriorating quality in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences. This deterioration in quality of education is the consequence of a number of other reasons which are now facing as challenges. The most leading challenge is to maintain academic calendar. Political pressure through students' organizations and other indirect forces are creating difficulty in maintaining academic calendar. Neither we can intake students in time nor we can complete courses in time and finally nor examination happens in time nor result in time. These all reasons have played crucial role in creating the image of FOHSS together with TU.

Currently there are two parallel academic programs running together under FOHSS. One kind of programs is semester based and another is annual system based. It has been almost three years that FOHSS is taking intake students in both types of academic programs. Still it is challenging to maintain consistency in academic program in the coming days as well. Another challenge is to make students' participation regular in the class room. Only in the case of semester programs students' presence is more regular. Thus it has also been challenging to maintain students' participation in the study. Those students who regularly present in the classroom also do not prefer to consult the text books. In this sense orientating students in consulting original texts rather than guide, guess papers and notes is remained as another challenge of this faculty. The programs that are running under FOHSS are more theoretical. Even they are text based. Very few faculty are being engaged in research. Connecting research and teaching is also another challenge of this faculty. These all challenges are somehow connected with the political intervention over the programs of FOHSS. It has been a great challenge for FOHSS to protect departments from political interference. Due to these departments are unable to enroll students on merit basis recruiting competitive students. Thus FOHSS is facing different types of challenges today. The last but the most important challenges following the previous one for this faculty are to draw students' attention towards social science disciplines.

From secondary and higher secondary level students and their parents plan to go for technical subjects in the areas of science and technology and some areas of management. Most of the competing intelligent students first they try to go for these technical type subjects even at bachelor level to ensure their jobs. The students left are for humanities and social sciences. One of the reasons for this is that there is very less priority is given from the government and university side. The government education mechanism and our faculty including university is not orientating people about what happens when the disciplines leading nations and service nations become poor in quality. Therefore the importance and the role of social sciences in the world in general and in Nepal in particular is not highlighted through medias, government mechanisms and educational institutions. Reviving the status of humanities and social sciences is thus the great challenge for FOHSS today.

Future Prospects and Opportunities of FOHSS

It is important to understand that the new educational institutions serving for higher education should have large potentials so that students can choose them for their life. Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry (2017) write in detail about it as:

With respect to ensuring student retention and success with an ever more diverse student population, these aims can be achieved through the development of well-resourced counselling and student support services, creating a campus culture that encourages diversity and difference, and through positive student-faculty relationships (O’Keefe 2013). King’s University College (KUC) has been used as an exemplar to demonstrate the types of initiatives that should be developed to facilitate sustained success for underrepresented groups accessing university in increasing numbers. The primary driver behind the aforementioned and countless other KUC initiatives stems from the recognition that students from every background—and especially those from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented—deserve appreciation, respect, and whatever supports we can offer to facilitate both access and success. (P. 81)

The higher education institutions should have attraction and success among students so that they can serve the country. Each country’s education is therefore evaluated on the basis of its role in attracting students and their success after being educated through the HEIs they enrolled. Despite all the challenges FOHSS facing today there are a number of hopeful opportunities that the faculty can grasp and move ahead with success in maintaining its academic image. It has long history with diverse national and international exposures and experiences. Such exposures and experiences would obviously be useful to improve the current frustrating status of FOHSS at TU. The opportunities can be started with the recent initiatives taken by the University. As one of the wings of TU, FOHSS has now an important opportunity to implement semester system at both bachelor and master level in order to maintain consistency in academic programs. University Campus, Kirtipur is implementing semester system it can be expanded in other campuses with a little effort. Since it has been successful at Kirtipur other campuses/colleges can easily be convinced

with the quality of semester system. In all the campuses/colleges where programs through FOHSS are running there is enough infrastructures required to run all types of academic programs related to humanities and social sciences. Campuses scattered in different parts of Nepal have their own enough land, buildings and also enough human resources; both faculty and staff. These human resources can be mobilized for new academic programs with new activities. There are also possibilities of generating financial resources mobilizing material and human resources. Large number of students is also one of the important sources of income. The fund generating in this way can be used for research activities which can be connected with teaching activities. FOHSS can move ahead to collaborate with other universities to launch new programs since it has already some activities run in collaboration. Work with Sichuan University in China and other universities of Europe, America and Australia are few examples of such collaboration. Such kind of collaboration can be extended increasingly at global level. The question of lack of relationship between research and teaching can be fulfilled utilizing the expertise of senior professors from various disciplines of humanities and social sciences. Mobilizing renowned experienced professors in creating research fund FOHSS can create environment to groom new trained human resources. Thus FOHSS has also some important opportunities to grow itself and expand its scope in different ways in future.

The changing context of Nepal is demanding change in all social sciences; such as sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, history, geography, psychology, etc. New discipline such as International Relations and Diplomacy, Social Work, Conflict, Peace and Development Studies emerged very recently in the changing context of Nepal. There was a national seminar on Contemporary Social Science Practices in Nepal organized by Central Department of Sociology which is an initiative taken for exploring contemporary practices in all social sciences mentioned earlier. FOHSS has to now frame new strategies to revive the status of many disciplines developed in the past through entire revision of courses in the changing context and develop new disciplines as per the need of changing national and international context.

Conclusion

It is important to pay attention on university education and its contribution in enrollment and production of human resource. This paper concludes its argument from what Mantovani, Gasperoni, and Albertini (2018) write regarding the benefits of education. An exploration of school leavers' beliefs about the benefits of higher education and its link to the labour market reveals that immigrant-origin students have slightly less favourable views of higher education with respect to their Italian schoolmates (Mantovani, Gasperoni, and Albertini, 2018). As in other parts of the world higher education in Nepal is facing similar challenges and opportunities.

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at TU has a long and glorious history which is almost parallel to the history of TU. It has been continuously serving the nation producing the human resources required in the field of humanities and social sciences. Almost all the leaders, civil servants, professors, teachers, journalists and other many educated workers

in Nepal are produced through this faculty. However, today question is being raised in the quality of education provided by the FOHSS through various humanities and social science disciplines. Decreasing number of students in some disciplines and some unemployed human resource produced through this faculty have been the bases of blaming social science disciplines as irrelevant disciplines. It has created a number of challenges to FOHSS. Maintaining quality, consistency in academic programs, academic calendar, regular upgrading and revising curriculum, connecting research and teaching are some of the major challenges facing FOHSS today. However, there are some disciplines like sociology, economics, English among others are maintaining their charm and some other new disciplines such as social work, international relations, conflict, peace and development studies, gender studies among others emerged very recently have been attractive at most. This indicates that there are some opportunities to improve and upgrade quality education through FOHSS at TU. Sufficient physical infrastructure including building, large number of senior experienced faculty and staff, large number of students are some of the opportunities to enhance the overall quality of education in humanities and social sciences at TU.

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