

Role of Employer in Public Universities: A Business Approach

Pulapa Subba Rao, ¹Albert Mellam

¹The University of Papua New Guinea, PO Box: 320, University PO, NCD., Papua New Guinea

Abstract

Education plays a vital role in human resource development which in turn contributes to the socio-economic development of any country. Governments until recently considered education as a public utility service and invested in education as a priority for country's human resource development. But, the recent globalisation and privatisation have given a greater fillip to private sector to invest in education as a business proposition. Consequently Governments in most parts of the World relinquished their responsibilities of investing in education partly. This in turn caused the problem resource crunch to public educational institution especially public universities. This paper aims at suggesting new roles to employers to help the public universities who have been the major beneficiaries of public universities in sourcing g their human resource needs.

Key words

Employer, Public Sector Educator

Acronyms Used

PNG= Papua New Guinea, PEs= Private Enterprises, SD= Standard Deviation.

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in human resource development which in turn contributes to the socio-economic development of any country. Arthur Lewis observed in 1965 itself that "there are great differences in development between countries which seem to have roughly equal resources, so it is necessary to enquire into the difference in human behaviour." It is often felt that, though the exploitation of natural resources, availability of physical and financial resources and international aid play prominent roles in the growth of modern economies none of these factors is more significant than efficient and committed manpower. It is in fact, said that all development comes from the human resource which is the result of relevant education.

Countries during the initial stage of development should concentrate on education as education leads to human resource development and which in turn attracts business and enhance economic activity. As such it is said that the countries during their initial stage of economic development believe in 'ignore anything except education' and allocate money meant for crime control and incentives to attract to businesses on education.

Shift in the Purpose of Education to Employment and Entrepreneurial Urge: The purpose of education has been shifted from providing knowledge as was in the past to providing practical, analytical, decision-making, leadership and entrepreneurial skills since most of the educated people seek economic utility of their value addition along with social, psychological and spiritual upliftment. Employment and/or entrepreneurial urge of the graduates would enable them to uplift their lives economically, socially, psychologically and spiritually.

Who is the Ultimate Customer of Education Sector? This new trend in the purpose of education brought paradigm shift in the concept of customer to the education sector. This shift emphasises that the customer of the education sector today is the employer and entrepreneur rather than students or parents or funding agencies. In fact, all these stakeholders also emphasise that education mostly serves its purpose once the graduates produced meet the employer requirements and/or entrepreneurial challenges of the country. Thus employer and entrepreneur to a larger extent have been viewed as the ultimate customer of the education sector today.

Employer and Entrepreneurs' Needs-thrust areas of Education:

Developing countries should prioritise the education both in terms of quantity and quality based on the requirements and expectations of the business and entrepreneurs including social entrepreneurs as a considerable portion of the educated people are employed by the later in order to accelerate the comprehensive and sustainable growth of their nations via motivating domestic investment and attracting foreign investment.

Quality does mean conformance to the needs and delightment of the customer. As such education sector should produce graduates as per the current and future needs of the employer and entrepreneurial challenges of a country. Employers and entrepreneurs today expect the graduates to possess technical/ job skills as well as soft skills like personality, leadership and management skills, team skills, positive attitudes and mindset, self motivation and commitment.

Education Sector-Free Human Resource Supplier to Employers: Education sector particularly after globalisation is the major supplier of human resources to employers/ business sector throughout the world without charging any price. In fact most of the private sector universities including church run universities in advanced countries have re-tailored their programs to the changing needs of business particularly after globalisation and information technology revolutions by investing heavily in infrastructure, state-of-art teaching and learning facilities, information and communication technology and human resource acquisition and development. Most of the private sector universities run more or less on business principles and charge higher fee from students compared to that of public universities and supply qualitative human resources to business. But the public sector universities are caught in between the devil and the deep sea as Governments reduced funding and they can't charge higher fee like private universities as most of the low and middle income students look at the public universities as a ray of hope.

In fact, Governments forget that they are the owners of the public sector universities when the issue of financing comes in. They exhibit their magnanimity by helping profit-oriented private universities even by providing financial assistance to them.

Capacity of Public Universities to meet HR Needs of Employers: Public universities in developing countries particularly after deregulations have been crippled with critical problems of resource

crunch particularly finance and human resources. Reduction in the Government funding adversely affected infrastructural facilities including basic teaching and learning facilities, levels of staff salaries and benefits and basic consumables like procuring of books, subscription of journals and procurement of even stationery. The students who couldn't source education from private universities by paying higher fee resorted to public universities causing excessive capacity utilisation problem to the public universities. In fact public universities are the social responsibility discharge arm of the Governments though the latter reduced its support to the former. Consequently the public universities could not produce the type and quality of graduates required by the employers. This phenomenon would have prompted the employers of some countries like Papua New Guinea to source human resources from foreign countries rather than assisting domestic public universities. This is a sad scenario. However, employers in some developing countries support the education sector to produce the human resource they need as they support other input suppliers like raw material suppliers.

Support to Input Suppliers in Business Sector: There are many instances that the business supports input suppliers in enhancing their capacity even after the payment of price for the inputs it buys. For example, Volkswagen in Brazil and Toyota in Thailand helped its input suppliers to produce the type and quality of input they needed. The recent phenomenon is that the business provide place and facilities to locate input suppliers' factories within their factories and created a new concept of 'factory-in-a factory' i.e., location of input supplier's factory in the company's factory. This concept allows the business to be more competitive by enhancing the competencies of the suppliers at the level with those of the former. Thus businesses help their input suppliers in order to have required specification and quality inputs as per their quantity and quality requirements, production schedules in order to enjoy complete collaboration with the suppliers. These supports include enhancing suppliers' capacity, assisting suppliers in training and developing their human resources, financial assistance and the like. It is viewed that the employers may propose to assist the public universities who are their human resource suppliers on the similar lines that businesses helped other input suppliers elsewhere.

Support to Public Universities by Employers: It is not uncommon that business helps universities by instituting chairs for appointing faculty members, assistance in construction of new buildings, providing laboratory facilities and the like. The latest developments in this arena include participating in university councils, curriculum design, revision and development to ensure that the curriculum suits to the human resource requirements of the business, training teachers of the public universities in teaching methods based on practical approach and practical issues/ aspects and latest practices/ concepts. Businesses currently allocate dismal time and resources for assisting public universities and help on scattered approach in some countries like Papua New Guinea. Thus business houses help public universities on a piece-meal approach rather than a comprehensive approach similar to that it does in case of other input suppliers.

Need for Intensive Collaboration between Public Universities and Employer: As public universities are the vendors of the business in supplying human resources, business priorities are changing widely consequent upon competition, and the economy of Papua New Guinea is expected grow at a fast rate, an intensive/ comprehensive collaboration between employers and public universities is the need of the hour in the country.

The comprehensive collaboration would enable the employers to recruit the human resource they need easily and reduce training efforts and budget. In fact, it would reduce the unemployment/ underemployment period of graduates, thus making effective human resource utilisation. It also allows the public universities to formulate utility-based strategies and achieve them effectively and efficiently.

Areas of collaboration between Public Universities and Employer

As mentioned earlier business in developing countries can collaborate with the public universities. The following are some of the suggestive modes of collaboration between employers and public universities.

Infrastructure Development: Businesses may help the public universities and other public universities in construction of new academic and administrative buildings, student hostels, library buildings, laboratory buildings, staff houses and the like. Universities should name the building after the company which donates the finance for the construction of the building concerned. In addition, the businesses can also donate for reconstruction of the existing run-down buildings. These are not uncommon practices as many business houses help the universities in this area across the world.

Libraries, Science Laboratories and Computer Laboratories: Businesses may help the public universities and other public universities in developing and renovating libraries by donating money for acquiring latest books, journals, on-line books and journals. This is also a common practice in many countries around the world. Some software companies build and maintain the computer laboratories of the universities in India as a part of their assistance.

Participation in curriculum design and revision: Businesses may propose new programs and courses based on their current and future human resource requirements. In addition, they participate in curriculum revision and development in order to guide and direct the faculty members towards their current and future human resource requirements. Further they can identify new courses and new topics within each course for addition and less relevant topics for either deletion or to reduce the emphasis. Universities and other public universities should appoint employer representatives as members in the curriculum revision and development committees/ bodies.

Provision for Scholarships: Businesses may institute large number of scholarships for economically poor, but academically brilliant candidates to pursue tertiary education in the universities in the country. The scholarship amount should meet university fee, university hostel expenses, airfares and incidental expenses.

Practicum/ Internship/ Job Shadowing: Business houses should train the students in practical aspects at the workplace seriously. Businesses can select the appropriate students based on their human resource requirements and train them seriously under the guidance of an experienced manager/supervisor. This process helps business to employ the interns that are suitable to their human resource needs. Further this process will reduce the gap between concepts/ theory and practice.

Guest Lectures: Business houses/ employers may train the students in practical aspects of various topics or courses as well as industry systems through guest lecturers in order to provide industry relevant information and to complement the theory/ concept taught by lecturers.

Extensive Industrial/ Site Visits: Businesses should allow and encourage students and lecturers to visit industries and businesses to have first hand information about business and industrial operations and practices.

Train the Lecturers: Business houses recently started providing training to university and college lecturers in practical aspects as well as recent developments in the business operations. This measure started bearing fruits in the form of enhanced confidence of the lecturers in interlinking theory and practice while presenting their lectures and students to have a comprehensive understanding of the concept and their practical applications.

Soft-Skills Development: Businesses expect that their prospective employees should possess soft skills like personality, leadership, self-motivation, self-commitment, managerial and organising, team-building and the like in addition to job skills/ technical skills. Certain university schools/faculties/ departments like Physical Sciences, Natural Sciences, Medicine, Health Sciences, Law, Humanities and Social Sciences may not teach/ provide soft skills. Even though Business School teach soft skills, they may not be in the degree as expected by the employers. Hence, business houses may conduct programs to impart soft skills to students.

Lecturer-Manager Exchange: Under this measure the selected lecturers may be allowed to work in the relevant area of the business/industry for a specified period and the lecturer will go back to the university after that specified period. During this period the lecturer will be paid salary by the university and the business may provide certain allowances and he/she will acquire most relevant practical aspects. Similarly a manager of an industrial/business unit may be allowed by a university to work as a lecturer in the appropriate discipline for a specified period and he/she will receive the salary from the industry/ business and the university may pay certain allowances. The manager can share his/ her practical knowledge with the students and get latest conceptual knowledge from the colleagues at the university before goes back to his/ her organisation.

Quality Assurance: Employers often feel that public universities don't impart the knowledge and skills that are needed by them. Public universities traditionally have been more academic and less practical-orientation as they lack the knowledge of employer needs. The gap between employers' needs and graduates quality can be narrowed down, if the employers participate and guide faculty extensively in quality assurance process starting from curriculum design, revision and development to the stage of student evaluation.

Campus Recruitment: Employers can continue their practice of campus recruitment to select their prospective employees in order to maintain long-run relationship with the input suppliers as is the practice in modern business.

Establishing collaboration between public universities and employers will be a critical task as education is a fragmented industry and business in general is of heterogeneous. However, there are certain associations in case of employers like Business Councils and Chambers. Similarly, there are monitoring and accrediting agencies in case of education like Office of Education and Office of Higher Education in Papua New Guinea.

Modes of collaboration between Public Universities and Employers

Collaboration between public universities and employers can be established and monitored by the employers' associations from employers' side and Department of Higher Education, from

educational institutes' side.

Department of Education: Department of Education, under the Ministry of Education is responsible for curriculum design, revision and development from Grade-1 to Grade-12 and Business and Vocational Colleges, and control and monitoring of Schools in the country. Schools are the first tier suppliers of human resources to employers and input suppliers to business colleges, vocational college and universities. Hence, Office of Education may design and revise curriculum, formulate policies and implementing them in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education as well as employers' associations as some of the employers employ Grade-12 graduates as well as the quality of Grade-12 graduates affects the graduates of business colleges, vocational colleges and universities. Office of Education may involve the representatives of employers' associations and Office of Higher Education in its various committees (if not yet done) that decide curriculum, teaching methodologies and any other issues that influence the quality of Grade-12 graduates as per the needs of employers and higher education institutions.

Employers' Association's Office within the Department of Education: Office of Education can provide facilities to employers' associations/ federations to establish their office within their premises under the business concept of 'factory within a factory' in order to have close liaison and effective coordination between employers and the Schools.

Department of Higher Education: Department of Higher Education, under the Ministry of Higher Education, is responsible for policy formulation, coordination and monitoring of higher education institutions like universities in the country. Higher education institutions are the human resources suppliers to employers as well as second-tier suppliers either to them or to other higher education institutions. Hence, Department of Higher Education may formulate policies and implement them in collaboration with higher education institutions in the country as well as employers' associations. Department of Higher Education can act as a nodal agency and a linking pin between employers and all higher education institutions in the country as direct contact between employers with each of the higher education providers may be a difficult task in certain cases. However, employers can contact certain universities directly, if they are only the institute producing a particular program, in order to eliminate intermediation. For example, an employer can directly play its role in the Papua New Guinea University of Technology, if it needs graduates in Mechanical Engineering, until another university offers the same program.

Professional Organisations and Training Organisations: Professional organisations in the country may work in coordination with the Department of Higher Education in human resource development, which in turn work in liaison with the proposed employers' federation.

Employers' Association's Office within the Department of Higher Education: Department of Higher Education similar to office of education can provide facilities to employers' associations/ federations to establish their office within their premises under the business concept of 'factory within a factory' in order to have close liaison and effective coordination between employers and the human resource suppliers.

Employer Federations: Employers' associations in order to play their pivotal role in designing, supporting and monitoring the type and number of employees needed by all kinds of employers in the country based on their strategies should work closely with the

Department of Higher Education by locating their offices within the office of Department of Higher Education.

Conclusion

This collaborative effort will enable the public universities in the country to produce the human resources that the employers need/ expect from time to time and who can also meet the entrepreneurial challenges of the economy. Thus employers can benefit from the collaboration by getting right human resources they need as procuring the right input by helping the vendors. Public universities can tide over from the problem of resource crunch.