

The paradox surrounding a higher education institute: dilemma of the business administration program

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Abstract: The positioning of a particular program of a university was depicted by the number of students willing to take admission in that program, hence the number of admissions depict the level of preference or non-preference by the students, and it speaks volumes about the reputation of a university for that particular program or domain and all the factors associated with it. The purpose of this case study was to identify, analyse and provide an in depth alignment amongst the challenges faced by the Faculty of Management Science (FMS) department of a local University of Karachi which are hampering the positioning of its business programs and making it appear as a wide and visible red flag for the potential students. The case revolves around many questions which encompasses several challenges such as declining admission rates, early dropouts, Lack of NBEAC accreditation and high faculty turnover. The case highlights insights regarding these challenges and raises questions regarding the discussed challenges

Keywords: Positioning Of a University, Faculty of Management Science, Declining Admissions

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Q** 1. What promotional strategies did the university adopt to increase the positioning of its business programs and increase the admissions along with retention of newly enrolled students?
- Q2. What measures did the university management take to fulfil the NBEAC accreditation criteria?
- Q3. How did the university increase the student job placement in the corporate sector?
- Q4. How did the university decrease its FMS faculty turnover ratio?

PROLOGUE

The university had a great reputation in the higher education sector due its unique degree programs which took even below average students and transformed them into thorough professionals on the basis of a very nominal and affordable fee as the chancellor believed that every individual deserves a chance to get higher education no matter what the past academic background or the social status of the individual is. The chancellor wokeup this morning with his usual positive spirit and energy, thinking about the Board of Studies (BoS) meeting for the recently past fall semester. As he got ready, had his usual low calorie breakfast and was on the way to the university. He was eager to hear about the progress and the student churn of all the faculties but his particular department of interest was the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS) as FMS had undergone many administrative and curriculum based changes with a promising growth and increment in the student churn, placement and brand image of the business administration programs. The chancellor was eager to hear about the outcome of all the changes. As the meeting begun, all the faculties were being discussed one by one, FMS came at number third and the coordinator of FMS passed a file to the chancellor which had certain numbers and their interpretations which changed the facial expressions of the chancellor, he was seeming worried, disappointed and stressed. The numerical data consisted of the number of admissions the department had during the recent semester as well the number of students who had dropped out of the university during their first semester, only 90 students had taken admission during the recent Fall semester, out of which 30 students had dropped out, which makes approximately 33% of the newly admitted students in the business program. There were two main issues with these numbers, the first one was the lowest number of admissions in the history of FMS , second and the more pressing one was the number of students who dropped out of the program, the chancellor was thinking about all the possible issues which would have led the students to drop out of the program and even compromising their non-refundable admission fees.

The chancellor was thinking about this particular problem in three dimensions, firstly all the factors which led the newly admitted students to drop out, including faculty, curriculum, co-curricular, infra-structure and administration. Secondly for the low number of admissions, he was thinking about the lack of a proper placement department, which was never a concern before as the QEC department had it covered. Third and the most important was the credibility of the university business program as it lacked the newly required NBAEC accreditation. These were all the issues which required further analysis in order to identify the root challenges and their possible solutions.

HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN PAKISTAN

The higher education division in Pakistan has seen tremendous growth and change in recent years. Public and private institutions in the nation come in a wide variety and place an increasing emphasis on research and innovation. The primary regulatory organization in charge of regulating higher education in Pakistan was the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The HEC has put in place a variety of changes to raise educational standards and widen access to higher education. Over 200 institutions will exist by 2021, up from 59 in 2002. A system of accreditation has also been put in place by the HEC to guarantee that universities adhere to specified standards of excellence. All universities and their programs must be accredited, and those that do not comply run the risk of losing their standing as recognized institutions. Pakistan now has 206 universities, 108 of which are in the public sector and 98 in the private sector. In Pakistan, the higher education sector's gross enrolment ratio (GER) in 2019 was 10.8%. The GER was 13.4% for men and 8.4% for women. A total of 192 colleges and universities, including 109 public and 83 private schools, have received accreditation from the HEC. In Pakistan, there are more than 4.3 million students enrolled in higher education institutions, including more than 2.3 million undergraduates and more than 1.1 million graduate plans. During the fiscal year 2020–21, the HEC has allotted PKR 29.73 billion (or roughly USD 183 million) for research and development. Only two Pakistani universities—COMSATS University Islamabad (ranked 801–1000) and Quaid-i-Azam University (ranked 501–600)—made the top 1,000 list. Pakistan has a 60% literacy rate, with 71% of men and 48% of women being literate. Pakistan has a 72% youth literacy rate (ages 15 to 24), with male youth literacy standing at 79% and female youth literacy at 65%. Pakistan has advanced significantly recently in terms of enrolment. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education increased from 6.4% in 2010 to 10.8% in 2019. The enrolment discrepancy between men and women was still very wide, with men making up 13.4% of the student body and women just 8.4%. The higher education system in Pakistan still confronts a number of difficulties notwithstanding these advancements. These include a lack of research and innovation, inadequate finance, and obsolete curricula. Political meddling was another issue that frequently affects colleges, limiting academic freedom and lowering educational standards. The HEC has initiated a variety of initiatives to solve these issues, including the creation of new colleges and research institutes, an increase in research funding, and curriculum updates to better suit the demands of the

contemporary economy.

THE GROWTH WITH THE EMERGENCE OF THE LATEST PRACTICES

During the fiscal year 2020–21, the HEC had allotted PKR 29.73 billion (or roughly USD 183 million) for research and development. Only two Pakistani universities—COMSATS University Islamabad (ranked 801–1000) and Quaid-i-Azam University (ranked 501–600)—made the top 1,000 list. Pakistan has a 60% literacy rate, with 71% of men and 48% of women being literate. Pakistan has a 72% youth literacy rate (ages 15 to 24), with male youth literacy standing at 79% and female youth literacy at 65%. Pakistan has advanced significantly in the area of enrolment in recent years. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education increased from 6.4% in 2010 to 10.8% in 2019. The enrolment discrepancy between men and women was still very wide, with men making up 13.4% of the student body and women just 8.4%. The higher education system in Pakistan still confronts a number of difficulties notwithstanding these advancements. These include a lack of research and innovation, inadequate finance, and obsolete curricula. Political meddling was another issue that frequently affects colleges, limiting academic freedom and lowering educational standards. The HEC has initiated a variety of initiatives to solve these issues, including the creation of new colleges and research institutes, an increase in research funding, and curriculum updates to better suit the demands of the contemporary economy.

TOP PLAYERS IN THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

The Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) was frequently considered as Pakistan's best business school. A variety of undergraduate and graduate business and management programs are available at LUMS, including a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), and Executive MBA. The Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi, which was renowned for its superb professors and research facilities, was another well-known name in the world of business education. The National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), and the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) are other renowned universities to this extent.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The Chancellor of the University was a businessman, known for his contributions in the textile industry mainly. He founded the university because of his intention to educate the youth with a minimal affordable fee structure. His intention was evident even before he founded the university because he initially opened a madrassa where the children were educated on the basis of a hybrid curriculum of contemporary and religious education, this blossomed and evolved with an impressive pace and thus leading the founder to open a full fledge university. The university was located in Karachi, Pakistan, situated in an advantageous and approachable location in the middle of the city, making it easy for the students to reach. It was widely known for its commitment towards providing quality education and academic excellence. It offers a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs under the umbrella of five faculties; Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS), Faculty of Engineering Science & Technology (FEST), Faculty of Communication and Design (FCD) & Faculty of Health & Medical Science (FHMS). A University degree contributes positively for acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise required to succeed in an individual's preferred area of work. Moreover, many students in Pakistan choose this institution because of its reputation for providing a rigorous academic curriculum combined with holistic development opportunities. For many years this institution had been renowned for stimulating intellectualism and cultivating future visionaries

Differentiation of the university

The university differentiates itself from other university because of its unique philosophy of student development. Where other universities shortlist and pick the cream student and equip them with the higher education and associated skills, the University takes a different approach and gives a chance to weak student and transform them into skilled and confident professionals, this transformation philosophy comes from the thought process of the founder that every human being intentionally or unintentionally makes a wrong decision due to which they face the consequences but there should always be a second chance to right the wrong and students are young minds on a journey of self-discovery and if they take wrong turn, it might be due to the lack of understanding or due to unavoidable circumstances, either way they should be given a chance to obtain higher education irrelevant of their past academic performance. The university management hires teachers who are professional academicians and have the ability to

THE PARADOX SURROUNDING A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE: DILEMMA OF THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

educate the students with latest effective teaching methodologies.

Faculty of Management Sciences

Business administration undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs are offered by the Faculty of Management Sciences. Over the past few decades, business education has expanded dramatically in Pakistan. More universities and colleges are now offering business programs in response to the nation's expanding economy and rising need for qualified workers. The government's emphasis on supporting higher education in the nation was one of the key factors contributing to the expansion of business education in Pakistan. The Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), and Karachi School of Business and Leadership (KSBL) are just a few of the institutions and institutes the government has developed that offer business and management programs. The expansion of business education in Pakistan has been aided by both government programs and private sector investments in education. Along with a wide range of business programs, including undergraduate and graduate degrees in business administration, accounting, finance, and marketing, numerous new private institutions and colleges have popped up all throughout the nation. Additionally, the expansion of business education in Pakistan has been facilitated by the introduction of online learning platforms. Online courses and programs today make great business education available to many people who, for financial or logistical reasons, cannot attend conventional colleges. Overall, Pakistan's expanding business education has given people the chance to advance their business management abilities and support the expansion of the economy of the nation.

The FMS initiation

The Faculty of Management Science (FMS) was initiated in 2004 when the University was an Institute of Higher Education. It had its business programs but it was not a proper accredited Faculty. In 2013 it achieved university status and this a proper Faculty for Management Science programs was launched. FMS initially offered BBA & B.com programs to A level and intermediate passed students and later on it started offering MBA & M.Phil program as well. A broad range of programs are offered by the Faculty of Management Science at the University which was an esteemed academic institution providing education for successful career prospects in management. The faculty was fully committed to providing high-quality education complemented by modern teaching methods and relevant job-oriented skills in a contemporary campus environment. Various disciplines such as business administration and marketing are covered by the faculty's undergraduate or postgraduate programs with immense concentration on practical learning, and these programs have been developed with the purpose of endowing students with critical knowledge and skillsets essential for excelling in a constantly evolving and highly competitive business landscape. Management career prospects are bright at the University's Faculty of Management Science - a renowned academic institution offering numerous program options. The faculty prioritizes delivering excellent education with modern teaching methods and essential practical job-related skills required for success in a contemporary campus environment. Covering multiple disciplines including business administration and marketing; the faculty's undergraduate or postgraduate courses are centered on hands-on learning experiences which are instrumental in shaping successful graduates ready for the demanding realities of an ever-changing corporate arena. The faculty also encourages students to participate in extracurricular activities and student clubs to develop their leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. The Industry was deeply involved with the university's ecosystem, working together on joint ventures while sponsoring many internship & placement programs. To connect its students with top organizations for internships and jobs placements was the primary objective of the institute's placement cell. We ensure our students receive valuable on-the-job training and make a comfortable leap into the professional world. At The University's Faculty of Management Science - a leading institution for management education - excellence was pursued relentlessly. Aspiring managers and entrepreneurs who want to lay a strong foundation for their future success mostly prefer this institution because of its commitment to academic excellence practical experience through relevant industries and overall personality development.

The homogenous student segment

The homogenous student segment that is catered by FMS consists of 3 categories of students; The first category is of those students who have a very low academic performance in their prior academics, intermediate or A levels, due to which they are unable to get admission in any second or first tier university, The second category consists of students who have financial constraints due to which they cannot afford a very high fee structure. The third category are students who prefer the university due to its location in the middle of the city.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the Business programs

The Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the Business programs offered at the Faculty of Management sciences was what separates the university from the rest of the HEIs and makes it the best choice for business education. The USP encompasses the unique Experiential Learning Project (ELP) that was compulsory for the final year students of BBA in order to complete their degree. ELP integrates theoretical knowledge with practical skills as the students have to work in a team under the supervision of a faculty member and work on an innovation and make a full fledged report on it along with a working prototype. The ELP project was a roller coaster ride for the students as there are various phases that the students pass through during the project tenure, which start from Idea selection and ends at the final report and prototype submission. This project gives practical exposure to the students and makes them more confident about their knowledge as a potential business professional.

Key competitors

The HEIs are recognized on the basis of tiers allocated on the basis of their HEC ranking and overall employability ratio in the corporate sector. The university comes under the third tier and so does its key competitors. The key competitors of the university are Ilma University, Karachi Institute of Technology and Entrepreneurship (KITE) and Jinnah University for women. Amongst its competition, the university was a preferable choice for students because of its easy to commute location and its well established system.

THE MARKETING MIX

Product

The products of a university are its graduates and they are produced through a rigorous academic process offered through a degree program which was a service offered by the university to the students. The FMS provided business programs, BBA being its flagship program along with MBA and MPhil.

Place

The university has 2 campuses in Karachi, The main campus was purpose built and has latest research lab, air conditioned classrooms, library, multiple canteens, clean toilets and many other facilities for students. Apart from the physical campus, the university also provides online classes when there was a need and has a highly sophisticated computer software system called 'Campus Management System (CMS)'.

Promotion

The university promotes itself through social media marketing, promotional drives in various colleges, schools and coaching centres. Social media marketing was mainly executed on the platform of Facebook where the university keeps highlighting its various events, updates, offerings and testimonials of its alumni and industry experts. The university performs its brand activation campaigns in coaching centres, schools and colleges so that the students are aware about the existence of the university and it can be positioned in the minds of the students. These campaigns are executed by the students' societies of the university, backed by the support of the management.

Price

The pricing strategy of the university involves careful considerations to attract the potential students while also ensuring competitiveness and sustainability. The university's FMS has adopted a value-based pricing approach, aligning tuition fees with the perceived value of its services and programs. This includes many factors such as campus facilities, student support services, quality of education and industry connections. The pricing was also set keeping in mind the sufficient budget for operational expenses. Implementing need-based financial aid, merit-based scholarship and flexible payment options which make the programs more accessible and appealing to the prospective students

CHALLENGES FACED BY FMS

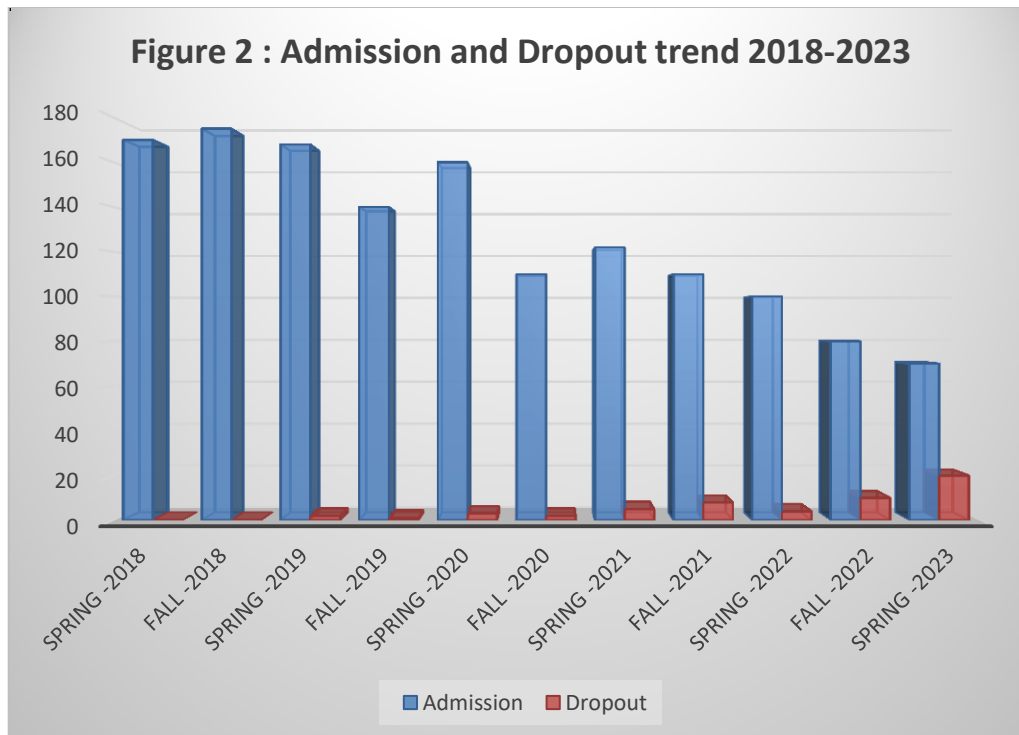
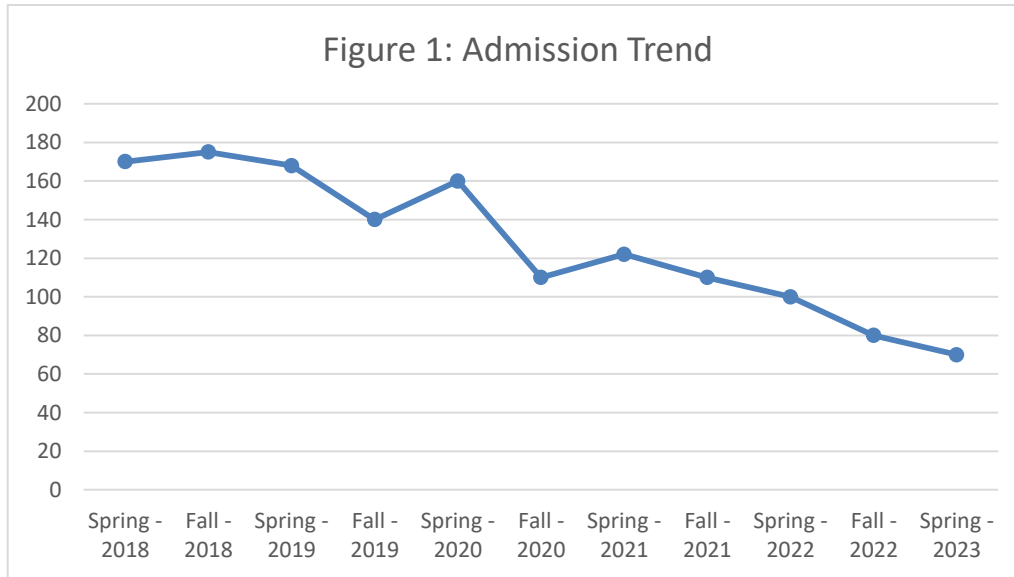
The university faced four major challenges, the in depth discussion about the challenges was written below:

Challenge I - Decline in admission and early drop outs

A university becomes eligible to be called a university because of its academic practices and academic practices have students and teachers as the key stakeholders. So a drastic decline in the number

THE PARADOX SURROUNDING A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE: DILEMMA OF THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

of students was an alarming situation for any university. The university had faced a drastic decline in admissions since the previous 2 semesters. The number of admissions slightly varies every semester and this slight variation was understood and negligible but the constant decline with the variation negatively enlarging every semester was a point of concern. It was evident in figure 2 that the number of admissions have highlighted a slight variation from 2018 till 2021, and 2021 onwards it was following a declining trend with the variation becoming larger every semester. This was a point of concern because this was either a symptom of a declining demand in the university’s FMS degree programs or might the outcome of ineffective marketing campaign. The second pressing issue here was the students who take admission, a number of them, dropout mid semester, the reasons which make the students drop out mid semester have to be identified and dealt with.



Challenge II - National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC)

An accrediting body that evaluates business education programs provided by universities and institutions in Pakistan was known as the National Bureau of Educational Accreditation (NBEAC), and the core regulating authority for advanced studies in Pakistan was known as the Higher Education

Commission (HEC), which operates together with NBEAC.

By setting strict accreditation standards and criteria for business education programs, NBEAC strives to achieve quality assurance as well as excellence. Assessment procedures for business programs include the evaluation of curriculum design and faculty qualifications in addition to teaching methods and learning resources.

NBEAC accreditation was voluntary, and institutions that seek accreditation undergo a rigorous evaluation process to determine if they meet the prescribed standards. Accreditation by NBEAC was considered a mark of quality and was often used by institutions to demonstrate the credibility and standard of their business programs to students, employers, and other stakeholders. Institutions wishing to obtain NBEAC accreditation voluntarily subject themselves through stringent assessments aimed at determining their ability to meet set requirements. In order to attest to the standard of their business programs with students or other stakeholders, many institutions rely on NBEAC accreditation as a mark of quality. Though there are many elements of NBEAC related to academic and administrative operations of the university, some main elements of NBEAC accreditation which university should focus on are mentioned below.

Industry Linkages: Industry linkages are the most integral element of NBEAC. A university has to have linkages with the corporate sector, which forms a mutually beneficial relationship between both entities, as it benefits the corporate sector in terms of new talent and research and development initiatives. For the university it provides corporate insights to update its curriculum to the latest requirement of the corporate sectors, so that the students are equipped with the latest required business knowledge. The university currently lacks in this aspect because it does not have any particular corporate liaison unit, and this responsibility was assigned to the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) along with its many other responsibilities. QEC can only cater partially to industry linkages as it has many other assigned responsibilities too, due to which it was unable to focus solely on industry linkages.

Faculty related requirements: NBEAC requires faculty to be up to the higher education level standards set by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and have the following aspects:

- Lecturer level faculty should have at least 18 years of education
- Assistant professor level faculty should have completed doctoral degree and should have sufficient research publications
- Professor and associate professor level faculty should have completed doctoral degree and have at least 10 years of experience in higher level education teaching along with research publications in W category research journals
- Faculty should be involved in research work and publish research papers in HEC recognized research journals.
- Department should have Doctoral qualified faculty in each of the sub domains.

These requirements are not currently met by the university because

there are not sufficient assistant professor and associate professor level faculty members to meet the NBEAC set criteria, the biggest flaw was that there was not even a single doctoral faculty member for finance and supply chain domains.

Infrastructure and facilities: NBEAC requires infrastructure to be up to the mark so that the students have all the required facilities, such as air conditioned classes, comfortable seats, projectors and computers in classes, library computer laboratory, research laboratory etc. The challenge that university was facing in this regard was that the classes are not being maintained properly and the maintenance department has shown a high level of lethargy in this regard, for example the projects of classes have various issues such as malfunctioning project lamps, tilted display etc. the air condition of some classes are not working properly. The problem was not that these issues exist, but the problem was that they are not being dealt with timely due to which students and faculty members are facing problems in terms of lecture delivery.

Research: Research was one of the core element of any higher education academic institute, hence, It was a particular requirement for NBEAC also. FMS lacks sufficient credible research publications, most research publications are being done in Y category local journals by the lecturer level faculty, but there was a lack of W category publications, which was mainly done by the Senior lecturer and higher level faculty. The root cause of this can be the insufficient research grants which demotivates the faculty to put time and efforts into the research publications. The grant for Y category paper was PKR 10,000, for X category its PKR 15000, and for W category its PKR 30,000, these are regardless of the Quartile level of the paper. As per the industry practices these rewards are not up to the standards which was a demotivating factor for the faculty when it comes to research work.

Challenge III - Student Job Placement

Students are the product of any educational institute. In a higher education institute students are groomed semester by semester and turned into responsible and capable professionals. The second most important phase was employment of the students so that they can exercise their knowledge along with putting some spark on the name of their university. Placement department plays the role of a transitional bridge for students and provides them guidance, exposure and opportunities for employment, increases their chances of employability. Students also highlight their university name while they are working and the corporate sector gets to know the quality of the students as the product of the university. The challenge for the university was that there was no existence of the placement department, and this role was performed to some extent by the QEC department but it's very inefficient as it also has its core responsibilities. The passed out students are the product of the university and without a proper department they are not getting proper employment opportunities. Making it a challenge for the university to place its finished products in the corporate sector and making a reputation for itself.

Challenge IV – High Faculty Turnover

As discussed in challenge II, quality faculty was essential for any educational institution. In order to have a quality faculty roster, an educational institute has to train its faculty members so that they are aware about the latest teaching pedagogy and methodologies and after training the most important element was to retain the trained faculty. The university was facing faculty retention issue and had a high faculty turnover due to which it faced the following problems:

Disruption in continuity: Frequent turnover can disrupt the continuity of education for students. When teachers leave, it may take time for new teachers to get acquainted with the curriculum, teaching methods, and student needs, leading to a potential decline in academic performance.

Loss of experienced teachers: High turnover often results in the loss of experienced and skilled teachers. These teachers may have developed deep subject knowledge, effective teaching strategies, and strong relationships with students. Losing such experienced faculty members can impact the overall quality of education.

Negative impact on student learning: Continuously changing teachers can hinder student learning and progress. Students may struggle to adapt to different teaching styles and expectations, leading to confusion and reduced academic performance. Building rapport and trust with new teachers may also take time, affecting the learning environment.

Increased workload for remaining faculty: When teachers leave, the workload for the remaining faculty members increases. They may have to take on additional classes or responsibilities, which can lead to burnout and reduced effectiveness in the classroom. This, in turn, may negatively affect student-teacher interactions and overall learning outcomes.

Higher recruitment and training costs: Frequent turnover necessitates continuous recruitment and training efforts, which can be expensive and time-consuming for educational institutions. The costs associated with advertising vacancies, conducting interviews, and providing training for new teachers can strain institutional resources.

Disruption in university culture and morale: High faculty turnover can create an unsettled and unstable environment within the institution. Constant farewells and new arrivals can disrupt the sense of community, affecting the overall university culture and morale. Students may feel disconnected and teachers may become demotivated.

Increased administrative burden: Dealing with faculty turnover requires additional administrative work for university administrators and staff. This includes processing resignations, conducting recruitment procedures, and managing the transition of new teachers. These tasks can divert time and resources away from other important aspects of university administration.

EPILOGUE

The low calorie breakfast was easy on the heart, but the pressing issue that heavily occupied the mind of the chancellor was the declining number of admissions in the FMS department programs. All the factors associated to this decline needed to be dealt with. In order to increase the number of admissions there are a lot of other aspects that need to be dealt with, will the university management devise an strategy to retain faculty to make sure that the quality content is being delivered to the students? How will the university fulfil the criteria of NBEAC accreditation and obtain it? How will the management establish a placement department to deal with student placement issue?, these were the questions which the chancellors mind was striving to find answers for