

Role of Higher Educational Institutions in the Growth of Non-Formal Sectors with Special Reference to Arul Anandar College

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Abstract

Higher Educational institutions (HEI) are playing vital role in transforming the lives of the graduates and their community as whole by creating several opportunities for the promotion of their livelihood through the channels of employability and entrepreneurship. It is also the innate responsibility of the HEI's located in the rural backgrounds to work for the social transformation and upliftment of the non-formal sectors through formal system of education. One of such institutions is Arul Anandar College (AAC), an autonomous institution located in Karumathur, a socially under privileged area of Madurai district in the state of Tamil Nadu. AAC is striving hard for enhancing the livelihood of the farmers residing in the areas of Karumathur and the institution puts strenuous efforts for boosting their predominant occupations such as farming and livestock rearing through formal means of educational system. This paper strongly suggests that the HEIs can contribute towards the growth and development of non-formal sectors with special reference to the initiatives practised by Arul Anandar College and also proposes the means of achieving it.

Keywords

Higher Educational Institution, Arul Anandar College, Non-formal sectors, farmers, lifelong learning

1. Introduction

Education, the tool of transformation is provided in three forms such as formal, non-formal and informal to cater the needs of the people. Formal education is subjected to the

education obtained through educational institutions and non –formal education takes places in the outskirts of the formal system of education. The third form of education occurs naturally in our day to day life. The first two forms of education have to be focussed, as the former is made available to diverse people without any categorization, where as the latter is highly specific and functions on target groups. Non-formal system of education exists several decades ago which highly emphasizes on skill development, capacity building and empowerment through various training programmes conducted by a mixture of non-profit organizations and institutions.

Paranormal Education, Popular Education, Personal Development Activities, Professional Training are the manifestation of non-formal system of education. In general the non- formal educations act as the gateway for instigating the endeavours related to rural activities, health and safety measures. Though this system of education is effective, it is highly individualistic and need based. The propagation of literacy through non formal mode of education is essential for fulfilling the needs of the deprived and disadvantaged.

But in recent times, the formal system of education has also commenced to introduce skill based, outcome based curriculum which gives more focus on fostering the skills of employability and entrepreneurship encompassing a wide range of soft skills, life skills and so on. A series of questions arise in the minds of the educators, can formal education blend the objectives of non-formal system of education in its curriculum framework? Can an educational institution contribute towards the growth of non-formal sectors? Is it possible for a higher educational institution to enhance and support rural activities especially farming and livestock rearing to the farmers? The answer is definitely YES, it is possible and practically viable.

This research work substantiates that a higher educational institution can certainly contribute towards the growth of the non-formal sectors with special reference to Arul Anandar College. The research article is structured as follows: section 2 presents the brief description of AAC; section 3 demonstrates the curriculum framework fulfilling the objectives of a non-formal system of education; section 4 presents the contribution of AAC towards the growth of farmers through extension centres and section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Brief Description of Arul Anandar College

Arul Anandar College (Autonomous) affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University is a minority catholic co-educational institution run by Madurai Province Society of Jesus since

1972 but it was founded by De la Salle College in 1970. The vision of this institution is to promote the integrated development of the rural students and to empower the student community for social transformation. The accomplishments for turning this vision to reality are to create a platform for academic excellence, training in soft and professional skills to the learners; translate the students to social agents of social transformation and to build AAC into a policy advocate centre. The institution implements several strategies of linking the institution with the society for creating good ambience, networks and people – friendly policies. The emblem of the college bears a sheaf of paddy which symbolizes the rural service rendered by the institutions towards the growth of the economically and socially backward people.

AAC tries hard for the social upliftment of the rural neighbourhood through various academic, research and extension programmes. The college offers several programmes for the students to get empowered and to empower the weaker sectors of the society. The contribution of the college towards social development has earned them ‘A’ grade with CGPA of 3.66. It is the tradition and one of the best practices of the college to integrate the phase of rural development in all its ventures of developing the institution. The college has assimilated with the rural backgrounds and have adapted and adopted many aspects for the global growth of the institution and the society as whole. It is the fact that the institution has joined hands with the rural neighbourhood in promoting, propagating all the nuance of social empowerment. The association with the rural neighbourhood is very strong and the portals of strengthening are nourished through regular extension activities. One of the indomitable strategies practised by AAC is the establishment of organic link between lab and land, which makes the college stand unique and it, keeps up the spirit of social integrity.

3. Curriculum Framework of AAC

Arul Anandar College has devised an excellent curriculum framework for integrating the facet of rural development with academic programmes. One of the significant departments of the college is Rural Development Science, which is exclusively meant for the growth and development of rural neighbourhood. The department offers Under Graduate programmes to Doctoral programmes with rural development as the baseline. The students are subjected to field work, case study, data collection which provides them the opportunity of building rapport with the farmers and livestock rearers. The learners are subjected to work in the agricultural field to enable them study practically the problems associated with farming

and also they are exposed to livestock rearing to get familiarized with the difficulties in agriculture and livestock management.

The students pertaining to this department acquire the knowledge and the skills of tackling the problems of agriculture and livestock management as they have exposed in several dimensions. The other students of the college are also offered many opportunities to be acquainted with this department of Rural Development Science through career oriented courses, non-major electives, foundation courses. The department also offers a course entitled, “Lifelong Learning for Farmers”, which comprises of the ways and means of promoting the livelihood of the farmers, the non-formal sector. This is a unique course and it stands as forefront for other institutions. The major outcomes of this unique curriculum framework are as follows:

- (i) The students acquire social responsibility, which motivates them to incorporate the same in all their initiatives.
- (ii) Reaching the unreached through the establishments of associations between the villages and the college.
- (iii) The faculties provide consultancies to the farmers and the livestock rearers.
- (iv) The illiterate farmers are enlightened with current trends in farming.
- (v) The rapport built by the students with the rural people pave way for community – building process and orientation of social and community.
- (vi) Participatory research gains momentum. The students and the faculty jointly undertake research projects focusing on the rural issues and challenges.
- (vii) Bridging of lab and land takes place smoothly. The problems encountered by the farmers and the livestock rearers are brought to limelight and the solutions are framed and implemented instantly with the support of the experts and the institution.
- (viii) Sharing of expertise takes place. The resource persons and the experts are brought from other regions and practical sessions cum demonstrations are made wide open to the needy people.
- (ix) The college takes strenuous efforts in taking the challenges faced by the farmers and the livestock rearers to the notice of Governmental organizations and the concerned persons after profound analysis of the actual status of the crisis.

- (x) The students spend their time productively and acquire primary experience with the rural problems.
- (xi) The students take projects at minor level to explore various hidden problems of farming and livestock management and begin to formulate models as solutions to it with the supervision of the faculty.

4. Contribution of AAC towards the growth of farmers through extension centres

The strength of Arul Anandar College is the effective functioning of the extension centres. There are prime thresholds of extension centres namely RADAR, VETEX, CCRG, ACPR. These extension centres are highly integrated with academics, especially VETEX and ACPR. The ultimate aim of these extension centres is to promote the livelihood of the farmers and the livestock rearers. Let us see in brief the linkage of these extension centres with the growth of the farmers.

RADAR (Rural Action Development and Research)

RADAR is intended to associate people as group to work together for the upliftment of the society and it acts as catalyst for organizing training and capacity building programmes for the people of rural neighbourhood.

CCRG (Computer Course for Rural Girls)

The college conducts computer courses for the rural girls, especially drop outs and unskilled persons. This extension centre works towards skill development for promoting economic empowerment and economic independence in female gender.

RADAR and CCRG are exclusively administered by the college for the betterment of the society, where the former focus on the farmers and the livestock rearers and the later focus on their respective families. These two extension centres goes hand in hand for promoting the livelihood of the people of non-formal sector.

VETEX (Veterinary Extension)

This extension centre is an outreach programme by the department of Rural Development Science and extends the technical assistance of the veterinary professionals. It renders excellent service in treating common diseases, artificial insemination, castration, immunization and pregnancy care. This extension centre organizes several camps and awareness programmes about livestock management. This extension centre offers practical sessions to the learners and makes them involve in all their endeavours. This centre provides

service to the people and at the same time it educates the people, which is the role of non-formal system of education. Non-formal system of education demands realization of self, goal setting and implementation. The learners subjected to this extension centre experience the same.

ACPR (Arrupe Centre for Policy Research)

ACPR is a vibrant extension centre which works exclusively for enhancing the livelihood of the farmers by training and imparting life skills in them. It also works to facilitate research with sound data base. The excellent features of ACPR are listed below:

- (i) ACPR has collaboration with commonwealth of learning (COL) for Learning for Development as the motive.
- (ii) Facilitates Micro Planning through PRA.
- (iii) Housed the complete data base of the Chellampatti Panchayat union comprising of the rural resource data archive.
- (iv) Maintains Britto Agro-Informatic centre with Touch Screen Kiosk.
- (v) Provides helping hand to Vaigai Farmers Association with 1000 progressive farmers.
- (vi) Conducts One - year Diploma Programme on Multimedia.
- (vii) Establishes dynamic partnership with NGO's like RSGA and VIDIYAL organisational structure.
- (viii) Sends voicemails to the farmers and administers a website with E-contents to the literate farmers.

This extension centre also gets assimilated with academic programme as it offers a career oriented course and a diploma course to the students. The students are exposed to the terms such as lifelong learning, multimedia. The lifelong learning (L3) course on 'Multimedia for Lifelong learning and Open and Distance Learning' offered by Arul Anandar College since 2007 aims at inculcating the idea of Lifelong Learning in the minds of the students of academic institutions to make them capable of producing technology integrated learning material through the use of multimedia.

The Objectives of L3 course are

1. To provide learners the comprehensive idea of life-long learning and opens and distance learning (ODL)
2. To enhance the perspectives of learner and learning.

3. To develop the skills on content creation and learning materials using multimedia tools.

This course predominantly aims in exposing students to the basics of multimedia tools. Hands on training sessions were handled by well experienced and professionally skilled faculty of the college. This created the channels of creating E-content to the students. The curriculum of this course is basically skill based. On completion of this course, the students are evaluated based on summative and formative assessments to gain credits and certificate.

The outcomes of this course in the context of employability are presented below with the combined feedback from the faculty and the students subjected to this course.

- The novices will gain awareness on work placements; acquire work experience after visitation to work places.
- The stakeholders will receive employer liaison and consultation
- The learners will get wider opportunities to interact with practitioners and professionals.
- Facilitation for resume preparation, mock interviews, Personal Learning Plans will be disclosed to pupil.
- Motivation and preparatory phases on competitive exams will be rendered to the students.
- Orientation on simulations (e.g. Reel to Real, the Write Stuff, travel bureau, exhibitions, clinics)

As employability is the need of the hour, the skills of employability must be acquired by the students through various portals and L3 course takes an upper hand as it kindles and sustains the skills of employability to greater extent. Thus the extension centres are contributing towards the growth of non-formal sectors in their own pattern.

Conclusion

This research work has presented the contributions being made by Arul Anandar College towards the growth of farming through formal system of education. This article also proposes to imbibe AAC as a model for other higher educational institutions to work for the growth of non-formal sectors through formal system of education rather than adopting non-formal modes of education. As the higher educational institutions are in the circumstances of contributing towards holistic growth of the nation, it is a thought provoking effort made by the authors to practice the channelization of the non-formal educational objectives with the

formal system of education to reach the pinnacle of growth of non-formal sectors. The special reference of AAC is a model for other higher educational institutions to set new benchmarks for social transformation and upliftment of the economically and socially deprived community.

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