



SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF CLUSTER COLLEGES IN INDIA

Dr. Anil gaman Ahire

Associate Professor

K. V. N. Naik College, Nashik, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has finalised rules for converting colleges and universities into multidisciplinary institutions and has recommended three distinct options, one of which involves “clustering” nearby institutions. In order to encourage multidisciplinary education and research in both offline and online formats, the UGC has encouraged academic collaboration between universities through “clusters” of higher education institutions (HEIs). According to the National Education Policy 2020, all HEIs should strive to become interdisciplinary by 2040, with thousands of students enrolled. Additionally, it states that in order to promote equity and inclusion, more HEIs would be constructed in underserved areas, and that by 2030, there should be one large, multidisciplinary HEI in or close to every district of India, this might be accomplished by developing new HEIs. Hence, in the present paper an attempt has been made to carry out an empirical research that examines the idea of cluster colleges with its problems and prospects. Clustering is not altogether new concept, hence, the American experiment with cluster has been discussed in brief in order to evaluate how it can be used to operate and sustain cluster colleges in India.

Key Words: Cluster, NEP 2020, College, Education etc.

Introduction

After Independence India has explored several educational policies like National Education Policy (NEP) 1968, National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, Programme of Action- Ministry of Education (POA-1992). However, keeping larger view of the demand of the 21st century society our education system must look forward and make our students compete with the students of the other progressive countries. The education system must incorporate the changes taking place and address the issues of the country in the curriculum to bring a viable economic and social order to realize the constitutional goals and the philosophy of the nation. The nation in 2020 introduced National Education Policy (NEP-2020). The government of India intends to allow all of its affiliated colleges to become “degree-awarding interdisciplinary autonomous institutions” by 2035 as part of a significant reform of higher education in the country.

The University Grants Commission published a revised draught of “Guidelines for Transforming Higher Education Institutions into Multidisciplinary Institutions” (UGC) (Sep. 2022). The National Education Policy 2020's suggested reforms, in particular, aim to stop the fragmentation of higher education by converting higher education institutions (HEIs) into interdisciplinary universities, colleges, and clusters, as well as information centres. The division of a big institution into small, comparatively independent centres on the same campus is referred to as “clustering” or “cluster college.” The present paper examines the idea of cluster colleges with its problems and prospects. Moreover, the American experiment with cluster has been discussed in brief in order to estimate how it can be sustained in India.

UGC and NEP 2020's Guidelines on Cluster of Colleges in India

One of the most important proposals in the NEP 2020 is to establish sizable interdisciplinary HEIs in or close to every district by 2030, according to UGC chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar. The suggested regulations would also permit students to simultaneously pursue dual degrees from two different institutions, earn 40% of their credits from institutions other than their parent college or university, and permit colleges to group together or even allow a larger university to offer multidisciplinary degrees. The strategy also called for institutional cooperation, which would let undergraduate students enroll in a partner institution's master programme immediately after finishing their undergraduate degree programme without taking a separate admission test.

In order to encourage multidisciplinary education and research in both offline and online formats, the UGC has encouraged academic collaboration between universities through “clusters” of higher education institutions (HEIs). According to the rules, the cluster system will assist single-stream universities with low enrollment caused by a dearth of creative, employment-oriented transdisciplinary courses and a shortage of funding, helping these centres raise their NAAC accreditation scores. In order for students to sign up for their courses without encountering scheduling conflicts, they will need to speak with partner universities when creating their schedule. During the initial phase, the member colleges in a cluster will continue to operate as affiliated colleges under the university, sharing their resources to provide programmes and direct student research initiatives. Once the initial years have passed, the affiliating institution may attach the group of colleges as a single entity, during which time they will go through varying degrees of autonomy before becoming an autonomous group of colleges that confer degrees. These can then develop into teaching or research universities. In order for current colleges and universities to become multidisciplinary, the UGC has also recommended two further strategies.

In addition to increasing the number of departments in a college or university by introducing new subjects like languages, literature, music, indology, sports, etc., these include the merger of single-stream institutions with other multidisciplinary institutions under the same management or different management. The National e-Governance Division of the Ministry of Electronic and Information Technology (MeitY) has created the ABC platform, which enables students to open an academic account, add HEIs of interest, and store credits earned from them for receiving degrees and diplomas. As a result, students choosing courses offered as a result of collaborations and mergers can also benefit from credit mobility between partnering institutions.

The recommendations mention student orientation programmes as a crucial component for introducing students to the various possibilities open to them. The UGC also advises investing in learning assessment technologies as well as initiatives like the Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT) to help enhance faculty capacity so they can teach, train, and conduct research in multidisciplinary academic programmes. It has also repeatedly pushed for

the establishment of education departments in universities and colleges that will instruct aspiring teachers in curriculum design, pedagogy, communication, and writing.

The Concept of Cluster College

Cluster college was largely an adaption of the Oxford-Cambridge organisational structure, which dates to 1249 in England. It was also adopted in the 1920s by the Atlanta University Center and the Claremont Colleges in California, none of which were new to America. However, during the turbulent 1960s, American educators appeared to re-discover the collegiate model of university organisation as a means of promoting liberal education and reversing the detrimental impact of the expansion of the “multiversity,” (Davis, 1985) which was described by Clark Kerr in 1963 in *The Uses of the University*.

There are two different configurations for cluster colleges. The first kind is an intimate group of independent universities that have deliberately joined together for mutually beneficial goals. The second is that of the subcollege, a smaller, campus-based college that enjoys some autonomy. Both types continue to exist in US and UK as examples of a wide range of institutional settings, governance structures, and curriculum methods. Cluster colleges were not constrained by established norms of academic practise when they were in their infancy. They were able to carefully evaluate their educational goals and create novel structures and practises to carry them out. Almost without exception, they made the commitment to teach undergraduate students at a period when, like now, applied technology and research graduate and professional training were given top priority at the majority of colleges and universities. Most shared the conventional ideals of liberal education, which emphasise a broad, non-vocational, and non-utilitarian approach to learning as the greatest preparation for a variety of occupations and a happy life. They didn't think there was a single perfect liberal arts programme, or a particular body of knowledge or curricular approach that was suitable for everyone, as seen by the diversity of their programmes. Instead, they thought that the specialised academic fields were unable to offer the kind of comprehensive, integrated viewpoint that liberal education demands.

The cluster university paradigm originated in the United States. When the Indian government intended to put it into operation here, they were unable to offer a model, a structure, or rules for how to do it. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) now discusses the creation of cluster universities/colleges by combining several institutions in the same region and having multidisciplinary teaching in all universities/colleges.

American Experience with Clustering

A cluster college is basically a partially independent college located on the campus of a larger institution; the concept is not particularly novel. The concept of a cluster college has existed since at least the inception of Oxford University in England in the thirteenth century. Even in the United States, the Claremont Colleges and the Atlanta University Center have utilised such organisations since the 1920s, demonstrating the viability of the concept of a university made up of a federation of cooperating colleges. The college style of academic organisation has been revived by American educators, which is something fresh. Despite the early initiatives at Claremont and Atlanta, cluster colleges are mostly a 1960s invention. At least 45 such schools were opened and 26 different colleges and universities were established during that decade.

It should not be forgotten that small classrooms and low overall enrollments have been the norm in higher education for generations. The multiversities, commuter junior colleges, and large city colleges are all relatively recent developments. The cluster concept could be interpreted as a way to recreate “higher education” rather than

an educational innovation brought on by any novel insights or technological advancements (Yeo, 1970). The college of yesterday engaged the student in the teaching-learning process and allowed the peer group's power to function as an educational force without particularly arranging for it. The modern college is striving to make it simpler for "peer power" to once again be channelled toward the goal of learning by participating in or planning clustering.

In the past twenty years, colleges and universities have all seen the same phenomenon: a massive increase in the number of students, who in turn have increased the need for teachers and administrators. Although this expansion has been held directly accountable for a number of issues in higher education, it has also been seen as a sign of the vitality of our society. Economics, management, and student-specific issues such as identity exploration, connections with teachers and peers, and participation in the teaching-learning process are all concerns.

Decentralizing or clustering is a strategy that can be used to provide students more opportunities to form meaningful relationships, explore their identities, and participate in the learning process. A smaller unit most likely enhances the likelihood of these opportunities. In a cluster college, students and staff can take part on a campus-wide basis while maintaining their sense of self. When it comes to streamlining operations, most notably education, a cluster college offers a practical unit. It offers on-the-spot management and administration, allowing the principal administrative officer of a cluster college, like his predecessor in the nineteenth century, to be in constant contact with the entire student body and faculty and, as a result, be in a position to identify particular issues, requirements, or objectives. Nonetheless, clustering is not something that all universities should adopt right away as the panacea. (Yeo 1970) (Educators are eager to elope with a trending notion and spend a lifetime going through divorce proceedings.) However, it can be a useful tool for structuring and improving the process of teaching and learning.

Three issues with cluster colleges in America were put forward by Jerry Gaff in his 'Cluster Colleges And Their Problems' (Gaff, 1971). He asserts that every institution faces challenges, but few institutional speakers openly identify the weak points of their own institution. Some of the issues are so serious that they put cluster colleges' very survival in danger. While some of their challenges are undoubtedly comparable to those experienced at other institutions, others seem unique to cluster colleges. He proposed three sets of these issues, placing particular emphasis on those that are typically unanticipated;

1. Implementation issues: There are a number of issues that people attempting to launch an experimental cluster college may encounter. Some subcolleges don't have enough freedom to deviate from accepted practises. Others have autonomy but are unable to implement innovations, either because their planners are content with using the status quo or because they lack the creativity or the guts to try anything new. Of course, there is the perennial issue of inadequate funding, as well as the challenge of finding faculty members who are open to trying new things.

2. Development issues: The fact that the character and standard of life on cluster colleges' campuses evolve over time is among the most significant things to be said about them. Most cluster colleges have an ambiance that is quite enthusiastic and upbeat in their early years. A sense of utopianism permeates the atmosphere as everyone is enthusiastic about the new endeavour. However, as participants gain experience and maturity, their initial joy naturally wanes as they learn about the positive and negative, expected and unexpected effects of their work.

3. Issues brought on by their own institutions: An organization's flaws typically reflect its strengths. Thus, some of the most significant issues with cluster colleges stem from the very characteristics that designers purposely added to give them a distinctive identity. These colleges' internal innovations and collegiate structure not only serve to solve some of the biggest problems faced by contemporary colleges, but they also create their own unique problems. Modern colleges create their own unique challenges. The collegiate structure has typically resulted in noticeable differences between the various colleges. As it is, the collegiate model seems to better serve the needs of a diverse student body than the university model. But this diversity itself causes a number of significant issues. The realisation that conflict between various schools is frequently a result of pluralism is perhaps the most troubling of all the issues. In federated colleges, particularly in cases where there are obvious differences in size, money, or programme quality, there may be excessive worry about the relative position and authority of each institution within the group.

Indian Response to Culster of Colleges

According to the National Education Policy 2020, all HEIs should strive to become interdisciplinary by 2040, with thousands of students enrolled. In order to achieve equity and inclusion, it also states that new HEIs will be developed and founded in underserved areas. In order to reach the 2030 goal of having one sizable multidisciplinary HEI in or close to every district, additional to consolidating, enhancing, and growing current HEIs, could be created.

However, the "idea" of cluster universities in India "is not very successful." (Anand 2021)

The Odisha government unveiled a new higher education model in 2015 for the state's southern region. In it, a "cluster university" was established in Berhampur by combining five colleges that were connected to several universities. The 100-year-old Khallikote College was chosen as the nodal institution, and the cluster university was given the name Khallikote Cluster University On May 30, 2015, in line with the RUSA plan. It was affiliated with five colleges: Binayak Acharya College, Gopalpur College, Gopalpur College, Sashi Bhusan Rath Government Women's College, and Khallikote (Autonomous) College, all of which were located in Berhampur. The Khallikote College campus served as the cluster headquarters. Despite the cluster university's establishment in 2015, the first academic session and admissions under the new structure didn't begin until 2018 and only included 30 postgraduate students. The cluster, which operates out of the Khallikote Autonomous College campus, appointed 32 faculty members across six departments in place of the 42 authorised positions.

Practically everything was lacking when it first started operating, including employees, students, and infrastructure. The cluster university's academic sessions lasted for two years, and each year, a modest number of students were admitted. In both 2018 and 2019, it let in about 30. By 2020, all parties involved acknowledged the initiative was failing. Khallikote University was made a stand-alone institution by the state government, which removed it from the list of cluster universities. It was later clarified that students of these five colleges already enrolled under the banner of Khallikote Cluster University will continue their studentship under that until they complete their courses, despite the initial confusion over the degrees of the students enrolled in its courses caused by the scrapping.

In 2020, just five years later, the state administration abandoned the trial. The five colleges that were affiliated with it have all returned to their original affiliating universities when the university became the unitary institution Khallikote University. However, the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan, a central programme for promoting higher education that was launched in 2013, is responsible for the creation of the Odisha experiment as well as

about half a dozen other cluster universities that have sprouted up in various parts of the nation over the past few years. There are many reasons for Odisha governments's scarping of this project like shortage of infrastructure, human resource, funds and proper policy to run the clusters. The institutions must, first and foremost, be placed adjacent to one another and within the same geographic region, and second, the cluster university must have complete autonomy over all of the institutes. Because pooling of resources, students, laboratories, and research is the idea behind cluster universities. The issue that has arisen in several cluster university models in India is that the members of the cluster are spread out and are controlled by various agencies. There are other clusters besides the Khallikote Cluster University as well. This idea, in the opinion of AK Das, vice-chairman of the Odisha Higher Education Council, is not very successful. The other colleges in the cluster might have used the well-developed Khallikote College's excellent laboratories. Ultimately, the issue was that the ministry of human resource development, which is now the ministry of education, lacked policies for how the cluster university should operate and how its member colleges should share resources.

On the other hand, Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, the first cluster university in the state of Maharashtra established in February 2019 under Rashtriya Uchchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) scheme of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. This cluster consists of four eminent colleges of South Mumbai viz; Institute of Science, Sydenham College, Elphinstone College and Government B.Ed College as integral colleges. This university disseminates not only knowledge and expertise but also to provide deeper insights which will broaden the intellectual perspective of the student. The university is offering various undergraduate and post graduate courses in various disciplines under Choice Based Credit System which will accommodate student according to the requirement of the job market. The CBCS adopts a Cafeteria Approach towards education, by allowing student freedom to choose from array of subjects as per their intellectual level. Here, it hopes to bring together the finest experiential, constructivist and action based learning in the field of education. Furthermore, after completing first initial years the university is running smartly and offering various educational opportunities to the students. As a result Maharashtra has started its second cluster university with HSNC University, Mumbai.

Conclusion

In India, the public's fascination with new technology and the limitless opportunities has steadily displaced educators' concerns over broad liberal learning. There has never been a time like this one for change. As the demand for computer science, engineering, and business courses rises while interest in the humanities declines along with the pool of traditionally aged students accessible and the level of legislative appropriations, colleges and universities are desperately trying to adapt to this trend. While this is happening, national and state engagement is becoming more prevalent in academic decision making, reminding us that broad liberal interdisciplinary curricular models, excellent teaching practises, and a focus on undergraduate education are still worthwhile objectives to pursue. And they serve as a reminder that educators' primary duty is to students, that the type of learning that occurs and the specific learning environment have a dynamic relationship, and that faculty concerns must go beyond merely intellectual development to encompass the promotion of creativity, freedom of inquiry, compassion, mutual respect, and the humanistic spirit. These things make up life and provide the basis of universally applicable aspirations. The Khallikote Cluster University experiment provided, the Odisha government, and the higher education body and the University Grants Commission (UGC), with an opportunity to learn. State governments are powerless in the absence of any rules. A financial strategy and appropriate

legislation must be in place for this model to succeed. In Maharashtra the cluster university model has become successful, so the situation for the cluster colleges is hopeful. However, the cluster system needs a wide-eyed and highly developed mind to understand and implement. It also needs tolerance in the sharing of the colleges' physical and intellectual resources, including that of independent universities. The approach and techniques that will be used to overcome the fate of clustering will be determined by the challenges and limitations.

References:

1. Abhay Anand. NEP 2020: Why Odisha's Khallikote Cluster University fell apart, News by Career 360, Apr 22, 2021 - 11:48 a.m. IST <https://news.careers360.com/nep-2020-why-odishas-khallikote-cluster-university-fell-apart>
2. Ashok Kumare Das. NEP 2020: 'Cluster university model is an American concept'. News by Career 360, Apr 24, 2021 - 9:18 a.m. IST <https://news.careers360.com/nep-2020-cluster-university-model-american-concept>
3. Davis, David J. The Cluster College Revisited: A Dream Falls on Hard Times, College Teaching , Winter, 1985, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter, 1985), pp. 15-20, Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27558089>
4. Guidelines for Transforming Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) into Multidisciplinary Institutions, UGC Uuidelines, Sep. 2022.
5. Jerry G. Gaff Cluster Colleges And Their Problems The Journal of General Education Vol. 23, No. 1 (APRIL 1971), pp. 21-28 (8 pages) Published By: Penn State University Press
6. National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
7. Richard D. Yeo. A Look At College Clustering .The Journal of General Education Vol. 21, No. 4 (January 1970), pp. 291-298 (8 pages) Published By: Penn State University Press