

CHAPTER SIX
FOCUS GROUP DICUSSION

6.1 Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

The Focus Group Discussion was done with participants from different central, state and private university employees. To preserve the anonymity of the employees of particular universities, respondent and university names are not disclosed. Some of the noteworthy discussion points are as follows:

6.1.1 University Group I (State Universities): The employment agreement from the university is in conformity with UGC guidelines and it is pretty much exhaustive. Other activities which are not mentioned in any contract and are expected by the university, hamper the core job responsibilities of teaching and research (eg., additional responsibility in student affairs, administrations etc.). There is no extra benefit or assistance for research work, which is a serious issue. Proper resources are expected to be provided from the University for learning and research. Unlike colleges there is no summer break for university employees. Although nothing is written explicitly, employees are expected to visit the workplace for additional work and responsibilities, such as evaluation of mark-sheets, assignments etc. Different ways of teaching are not appreciated and traditional methods of classroom teaching are expected to continue from the faculties. Engagement of faculties in non-academic work is relatively less but individuals who engage in such activities are acknowledged. There are visible problems in communication gap of administration and faculty (eg., claiming of arrears, bills, etc. is not transparent and takes a lot of time). Employees of Central Universities claim that there is a difference in central and state universities in terms of funding by the Government and pace/speed of work. Participants from the Administration of state universities feel that there is not much breach in psychological contract although admitting that it cannot be generalized for every employee. Change in executive body/policy makers of an institution, hampers an individual employee in terms of knowing them. Since leaders are very important in running an organization of such high stature, it is expected to provide longer duration for an individual leader to execute their plans and decisions. They have admitted to the communication gap between faculty and administrators at times. Employees have proposed that communication gap can be filled by applying newer technologies. The state universities have a lot of affiliated colleges under them which takes up a lot of administration work load. Several vacant posts have not yet been filled which leads to increase in work for existing employees.

6.1.2 University Group II (Central Universities): Faculty participants from central universities claim that nomenclature of university employees' change according to state politics and that creates confusion at times. Problem in nomenclature include terms such as Regular employees, Ad-hoc employees, Permanent faculty; Guest faculty etc. In recent times, there has been a surge in appointment of contractual employees. This practice can lead to lack of job security among employees of central universities. It was discussed that students are the main entity in a learning institution and therefore administrations and faculties should be complementary to each other to facilitate a proper learning environment. There is a rising concern for Government's decision of funding to private sector universities. Government University employees feel that it is not fair that they should be partaking government fund with private universities. Recognition is deemed important and should be encouraged more in employees of central universities. There is a difference in terms of benefits and expectations from the organization between contractual and regular employees. Appreciation is comparatively less in case of administration employees and they expect to be recognized for their work. They feel if an employee contributes to an institution, it is only fair that they expect appreciation for the same.

6.1.3 University Group III (Private Universities): There is notable difference between regular and contractual employees. Benefits and perks of the position are not clearly mentioned in the contract and therefore difficult to assume and expect. The difficulty in nomenclature (Regular, ad-hoc, permanent; guest faculty etc.) also exists among employees of private universities. Employees feel that Public Relation department is important to fill the gap between administration and faculties. One major issue faculties face in a private university is the random timing of classes. Class timings are not consistent on a daily basis and that is informed to them after joining. There is no clarity of the functions of line and staff relations in the institutions. Administration and faculty employees show lack of cooperation and unity.

6.1.4 Additional discussions on higher education sector of Assam:

1. There are three main reasons as to the difference in student footfalls in the three groups of universities (Central, State and Private)- Brand of the institution, Scope/ Exposure in the university, Perception in quality of education practiced in the institution.

2. Master of Philosophy (MPhil), a course which has been proposed to be discontinued from 2020 is a very good learning process but not enough for a degree. Therefore proper courses should be introduced to enhance the PhD degree for Non-Mphil students.
3. Although there exist an explicit employment contract for employees in any higher education institute of Assam, few things are written objectively, and opinions can vary from individual to individual.

6.2 Findings

- All Government University employees and a fair amount of Private University employees receive an official document stating their job descriptions, roles and responsibilities. In spite of the explicit documents, there are several responsibilities which are not stated elsewhere, such as responsibilities in student affairs, administration etc. Such responsibilities do not provide benefits or perks in addition to the remuneration. These duties have arguably hampered the core responsibilities of faculties, i.e., teaching and research.
- Research work in the concerned universities has been found to be disappointing. Participants have stated the lack of research assistance and resources. Lack of sufficient university holidays (eg., summer vacations in colleges), research work and study gets hampered with additional ad-hoc work.
- Participants have expressed the dissatisfaction in communication gap between the administration and academic employees. The issue has been constant in universities, irrespective of the sector. Proposals of active Public Relations Offices is made for mitigating the communication gap.
- Participants have differing viewpoints regarding few policies designed by the Central and State Government education sectors. Regular funding and pace of work has been a crucial issue for the institutions in both public and private sectors. Surge in appointments of contractual employees is seen as a threat to the job security of public universities.
- Non-appreciation of different ways of teaching has led to a ‘follow the herd’ mentality where decade old teaching ways are continued. New methods and modes of teaching are discouraged leading to unsatisfied academicians.

- Institution head/leader plays an important part in the psychology of employees.
Job stability and satisfaction is indirectly related to the type of leader.

Appreciation and recognition is found to be comparatively less in public universities, which has led to dissatisfied employees.