

Vignan University - A Case Study

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I INTRODUCTION

The Indian higher education system, although the second largest in the world, has been facing three fundamental challenges - access, equity, and quality - as evidenced by the relatively low Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), wide geographical, community and gender disparity, and unemployability of graduates. There has been wide disparity in higher education GER across states, urban and rural areas, gender, and social groups. Further, it has been plagued with faculty shortage, poor academic standards, outdated curricula and ill-equipped libraries. Against this backdrop, the Vignan group of educational institutions evolved to address these challenges effectively and provide credible option to those students who were not satisfied/able to access quality education.

II TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH OF VIGNAN UNIVERSITY

Vignan University is an institute, which has been set up to provide quality education in a diverse and intellectually stimulating environment and impart value addition training to students to make them competent and inspired engineers. The Institute cultivates vision and encourages new ideas, besides aiming to inculcate human values and build awareness about the self and society around. The Institute has dedicated faculty, state-of-the-art infrastructure and good Placement Record.

As a University, it is in the process of improving its standards to the level of a global technical institution. The latest curriculum has been prepared after consulting the institute's illustrious alumni working across the world, veterans from industry and distinguished academics possessing a rich teaching and research background.

VIGNAN GROUP is a group of institutions in the country, which has established a good foothold at all levels of education by catering to the needs of various sections of student community. Starting from schools to junior colleges (+2), Science, Engineering, Pharmacy and Postgraduate institutions with a student base of about 40,000, VIGNAN has today branched across all important geographical areas of A.P, like Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Rajahmundry, Charla, Vishakapatnam and Hyderabad. Thus VIGNAN is playing a significant role in promoting higher education sector and thereby bringing about a dramatic

change in the socio-economic dynamics of the region. Empowered by education, many families from the lowest rungs of the society have been uplifted to the higher income levels. As a result A.P has become a rich pool of talent and the favorite hunting grounds for global companies.

III ENTRY PARAMETERS

The Vignan group has identified educational needs and designed academic courses ranging from kinder garden to post doctoral studies to fulfill the unmet the needs of various segments of student population spreading across rural, semi-urban, and urban areas, income, occupational, and social groups. It focused on identifying and stimulating latent talent among students with rural background.

The founder Chairman, Vignan Group envisioned in the early 1980's the exponential growth in the demand for exceptionally good quality education in the fields of engineering and medicine on the one side and the inelastic supply of the public educational system. He further observed that in the fierce competition for very limited seats available with public educational system, the 10 + 2 students from rural areas, particularly girl students, were not able to move to urban areas due to concerns such as affordability and security for girls to explore their chances in the competitive exams. Thus, they were always on a lookout to affordable, quality education within their reach. The Vignan Group has come up with the residential pattern of education at the +2 level to suit this unmet demand.

With the brand Vignan becoming credible and most sought after, the group started focusing on expansion. Gradually the junior colleges were spread across the state. Soon the management discovered that in order to unfold the full potential among students, they should be provided quality education right at the elementary level and accordingly built a network of very good primary education. By 1990s Vignan has become the state's leading player in the field of education at primary and secondary levels of education. These initiatives turned out to be timely as it was co-terminus with the nationwide educational reforms aimed at building a huge pool of human talent to take advantage of the job opportunities thrown open by the advent of ICT and internet. At this juncture, the Vignan group forayed into the field of engineering education with the establishing of Vignan's Engineering College with focus on students with rural background.

The tremendous student response vindicated the Vignan's vision was right. Soon, Vignan has become synonymous with the quality engineering education.

On its vertical growth, it has built credible institutional space to meet the demand for pharmaceutical education. With the great deal of experience and proven track record, the Vignan group started horizontal expansion at the graduation level in engineering and pharmacy. Eventually, about 37 high quality educational institutions were put in place throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh.

IV TARGET AUDIENCE AND POSITIONING

Unlike several institutions that mushroomed in no time to meet the demand for quality higher education, the Vignan group has evolved itself to set benchmark standards leaving its competitors far behind. The successes in academic results, and placements made it a premier brand in the education field. The students who join these institutes are sound in their academic background and strong in their commitment towards becoming professionals. With the offer of quality education at benchmark standards, constant motivation, career guidance, placement and excellent hostel infrastructure that provided good nutritious food and comfortable ambiance it emerged as the most preferred choice of parents in their search for holistic education towards building all round personality and character of their children.

The growing student response unfolded the space for a full-fledged university with focus on engineering. The Vignan Engineering College at Vadlamudi transformed itself into Vignan's University in 2009.

The country is looking forward for innovation, employment, entrepreneurship and growth which all require autonomy to mould the institute to meet the challenges. This could be possible through a university which encourages innovation and promotes research. Vignan made its right entry by becoming a University. It expanded array of programs offered and entered into new segments. A reputation for quality, a consistently strong track record, and a well-known brand are the key drivers of its growth.

V CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Pro-active management, Student-centric pedagogy, high degree of academic rigour and excellence and mentoring by quality faculty, industry driven course curriculum, well equipped library, focus on soft skills and placement oriented education have been the factors responsible for Vignan's success.

VI THREATS AND CHALLENGES

- (a) Maintaining current strength is a major problem due to large number of branded universities in neighboring states.
- (b) Large number of neighboring engineering colleges offering the same course at low price.
- (c) Compared to the students of branded universities, vignan student projects, participation in outside competitions, seminars, conferences and workshops is low.
- (d) Machinery required need to be procured in each discipline. There is lack of Labs in many departments.
- (e) Lack of core faculty in all branches is a major issue.
- (f) Maintain appropriate Teacher /student ratio is the biggest challenge. At present ratio is 40:1, far below the statutory norms.

VII CONCLUSION

The unprecedented growth in higher Educational during the past two decades has to a large extent been due to the participation of private sector. Their presence in the higher education sector is manifesting in many different forms of colleges and universities. As rightly expressed by Prof. M. Anandkrishnan, former chairman, FICCI Higher Education Committee, private sector investment in higher education has considerably supplemented the public investments and helped to enhance the enrollment capacity in selected disciplines as well as employment potential. Vignan group of institutions as one of the private sector players is making significant strides in the field of education and community development.