International Joint Project – An Innovative Initiative in the Academic Program as Part of the Long Term Quality Improvement Plan to Bridge the Gap between Academics and Global Industry - Colleges of Applied Sciences Strategic Plan

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1. Introduction

Historically there has been a distinct divide between education and practical training needed by the industry at the tertiary level. Especially over the last decade and a half, the falling of barriers to international trade and investment has led to a more integrated and interdependent framework of international business. Employers today, as a result operate in an environment that demands new and constantly developing skills to retain global competitiveness. However, the impact of globalization and the paradigm shift toward knowledge-based economies have resulted in many first world countries adopting different strategies to face the challenge of bridging the gap between higher education institutions (HEI's) and global industry. According to the results of a special survey on "Higher Education: Free degrees to fly" (Economist, Feb 26th March – March 4th 2005, pp63-65), Higher education is already a global concept.So the long term quality assurance plans should be customized accordingly or some new initiatives should be incorporated to prepare the graduates ready for the global society. So, the initiative, International-Joint-Project will strongly bond the cyclic process shown below in Fig.1(next page), giving everybody what they need. This initiative can be a complete replacement of the project part of the academic program or strengthening that with an international perspective.

2. Problem Statement and Approach

CAS, with the vision in mind proposed many intiatives like E-learning for all, Student fair, international student exchange, cultural action bureau, innovation assistance, international joint project , research mobility, conference support e.t.c., out of the many initiatives ,our aim of the research is to investigate how to fit International joint project initiative in the academic programs of all the HEI's declaring their objectives, requirements, activities and also Key Performance Indicators to measure the success and also its limitations with all the risk factors
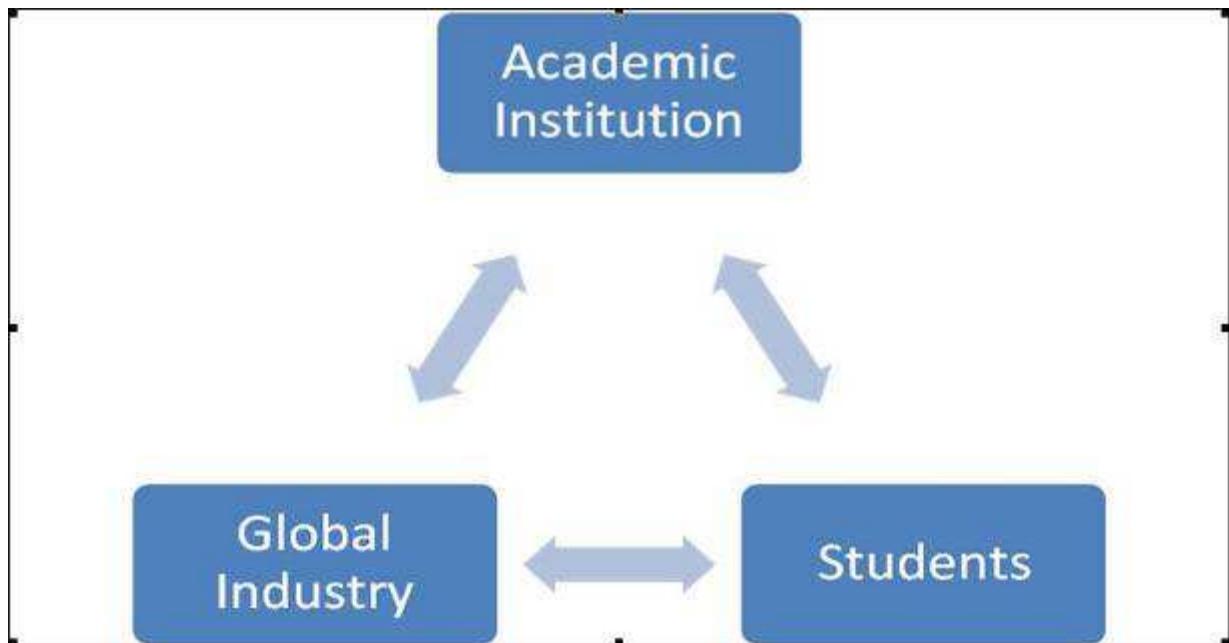

Fig.1. The cyclic process

3. Objectives of the Initiative

3.1 To Strengthen the respective higher educational institution on Global Standards

This objective will help in heightening the presence of the respective college/university at a global level because of the dynamism, we introduce in internationalizing the curriculum to implement this initiative and also increasing multilateral collaborations with respect to doing projects, research, designing twinning programs to support global

industry to make the graduates ready for the market anywhere to any standards because of the cross geographic nature of the initiative.

3.2 To provide a ROAD MAP for accommodating international students in the system

As a matter of fact, twinning programs should be an integral part of the strategic plan to make this initiative perfect. So, it provides a platform for opening twinning programs which will lead to build learning environments that enhances the skills and intercultural capabilities of students getting them ready for the global market.

3.3 To Execute Projects having Global Acceptance

The nature and scope of executing academic project can be taken to a new dimension as it can lay a platform to address some cross geographic problems sharpening the skills of students to compete and be ready for the global demand. According to many surveys, there is a large gap between industry demand and skilled graduates who are industry ready. This gap can be filled to a maximum extent with the successful design and implementation of this initiative in a long term.

3.4 To make Education in respective country to be in line with the cutting edge developments in the rest of the World

The ultimate aim of a higher education institution is to produce individuals who are competitive and innovative with high moral values to meet the aspirations of the industry nationally and internationally. So, it's very important to be in line with the cutting edge developments in every area of education and this initiative will help right from doing the ground work to implementation by giving international perspective to every angle of academics.

4. The ROAD MAP –Strategic Plan

In order to succeed, embedding International Joint Project, as a part of the academic program requires a preparation of an International Joint Project strategic plan (IJPP), which spans a number of years. IJPP will provide an obvious starting point for the activities, priorities and policies necessary to ensure the application of the initiative effectively and appropriately. Consequently, it explains the steps needed to achieve the objectives. Moreover, it identifies requirements and needs necessary for the implementation of the initiative successfully. In general, the plan provides a "road map" of what must be done in order to build and integrate IJP as a part of the requirement for the course completion. The implementations starts with a medium-range time that is between 4 and 6 years, and then revise it after the planned term, in view of the risks and uncertainties to be faced in the elements of implementation to make future of this initiative a concrete one.

5. International Joint Project Strategic Plan (IJPP)

Here are the main tasks:

5.1 Formatting the IJPP Committee

The respective university/college needs to form a joint committee consisting of various university experts in sectors such as academic programs (e.g. Head of every academic program in the university), Curriculum development, Quality, planning and development, Human resource team, education and instruction, multimedia, media and public relations. This committee will play a key role in doing the ground work for the initiative with the help from all university levels, to view the infrastructure and all university resources.

5.2 Bridging the GAP (Where are we? What do we want?)

This part deals with sectors like: curriculum, global industry demand, methodology of project execution, Infrastructure, skills, in term of their existence and needs. It could be realized by:

1. Surveying the current situation (Where are we?): with respect to Curriculum, Global Industry demand, Methodology of project execution, Infrastructure and Skills

2. Determining the initiative requirements (What do we want?): This study is strongly influenced by the vision and objectives of the IJP. The main sectors again remain the same as discussed above and the points to be considered are:

- possibility of using the current resources/methods or updating them.
- identification of new requirements or avenues for the successful implementation of the initiative to reach the goal.

5.3 Vision and Mission:

So, to implement this in any higher educational institution, they need to:
- Determine the desired vision, or overall objectives of IJP.
- Clearly defining IJP vision which needs to be understood by the constituents of the institution and incorporating into the institutions strategic plan.
- Setting the goals to be achieved by the initiative.

5.4 Steps to be followed for Initiation:

1. Design the Platform /e-platform required for implementation – The IJPP committee formed will focus to prepare a report on all the modifications/additions for all the sectors mentioned above to be done to start the initiative and lay a platform clearly defining the responsibilities of each and every stakeholder setting the deadlines, limitations, risks and benchmarks

2. Design the curriculum as per international standards, 3. Build partnerships with local and foreign universities for collaboration (For Projects and twinning programs,4.Formalize a process for the execution of IJP, 5. Establish policies and guidelines for implementing this iniziative.

6 Getting Ready for Implementation

Planning at the Institution level

6.1 Comprehensive Awareness Plan: Actually, getting Students and faculty to get acquainted and get adjusted to adopt is a challenge. Resistance to change is often determined by the degree of confidence that others have in the new vision. This confidence is significantly impacted by how much information and understanding there is around what this 'new initiative' will look like. People need to be able to' see' where they are going (Pasian, 2006). Overcoming resistance to change is to inform students, faculty, teachers, learners and university staff, about the benefits in a better manner.

6.2 Comprehensive Training Plan: The stakeholders who are going to be involved to fulfill the vision of IJP are to be trained to do their jobs the right way; otherwise, they become the barriers to progress of the successful implementation. So, they should be trained right from the objectives and the process of design to implementation with a clear focus.

6.3 Setting a Time Scale for Deployment of the initiative: The timetable will show every step with its schedule during all the period (3 to 4 years) listing every sectors responsibility in doing the ground work measuring its success proceeding to the implémentation.

6.4 Setting the Estimate Budget: The estimated budget has to take into consideration all direct costs as well as indirect costs of adopting and executing the initiative during the period.

6.5 Developing an Evaluation Plan: The overall aim of the evaluation is to ensure that the IJPP result in outcomes with clear expected benefits, In addition to ensure that every part of IJPP is running as planned, The plan needs to explain the procedures of continuous feedback with many ways like Key performance Indicators (KPI), Survey, questionnaire, ranking etc. as well as methods of maintenance and modification. Some of the reference key performance indicators are given in the next part of the paper for reference and are not limited.

7 When Launched the Process Will be

After the ground work is done for three to four years accordingly 1. The IJPP Committee will publish all the possible projects to be undertaken by university in the current year and share with all the partnering universities inviting proposals. 2. The committee reviews the invitations received and finalize the respective proposal suiting the requirement of respective university so that both of the regions will get benefit by the project 3. Upon acceptance, customize the plan for the project and execute the project and evaluate it 4. Design marketing guidelines for real time implementation in the community if needed. 5. Design twinning programs every year with different universities to give the initiative a broad view.

8 Structure of the Plan

Fig.2 in the next page, shows a structure of the main phases of the International Joint Project strategic plan (IJPP).

9 Key Performance Indicators:

KPI is a set of quantifiable measures that uses to gauge or compare performance in terms of meeting their strategic and operational goals. So, IJP should also be assessed during and after implementation with respect to success in reaching its objectives to make sure that implementation is proceeding in a right direction. KPI's can be very specific with respect to the vision and mission inclining towards the initiative goals. Table 1 below shows some of the KPI's defined with their measuring factor and are not limited.

Table1. Some KPI's with the measuring factor

- A large number of partnerships initiated with international HEIs
    - KPI: a minimum of two MOUs signed per year
- Scope of academic projects expanded to giving solutions for some cross-geographic implementations.
   - KPI: Number of projects undertaken addressing Global needs

- Acceptance of graduates for international assignments
    - KPI: Number of students recruited by Multinational companies and accepted for post graduate studies
- Twinning programs designed to help students exchange their ideas at a global level
    - KPI: Number of twinning programs implemented

10 Conclusion

The concept of bridging the gap between academics and global industry is a trivial task which requires a variety of competencies to be included in every angle of academics. Our paper focused on an initiative which can go to a maximum extent to fulfill every vertical of academics minimizing the gap between industry demand and academics. The literature on the subject so far is not direct but we tried to take some experiences from international joint research and guidelines in executing a academic project from different parts of the academic world. This paper aims at a long term strategy assuming a minimum twenty years (20) down the line where globalization is a common term. So, to face the challenge, we proposed an initiative that clarifies the adoption procedures with flexibility of each university getting ready for future. The proposed structure of IJP explained in this paper provides a clear understanding right from objectives to roles and responsibilities with measuring factors. Research can be taken forward customizing the road map by taking new initiatives in the system working towards long term quality improvement.

Fig.2 Structure of the Plan
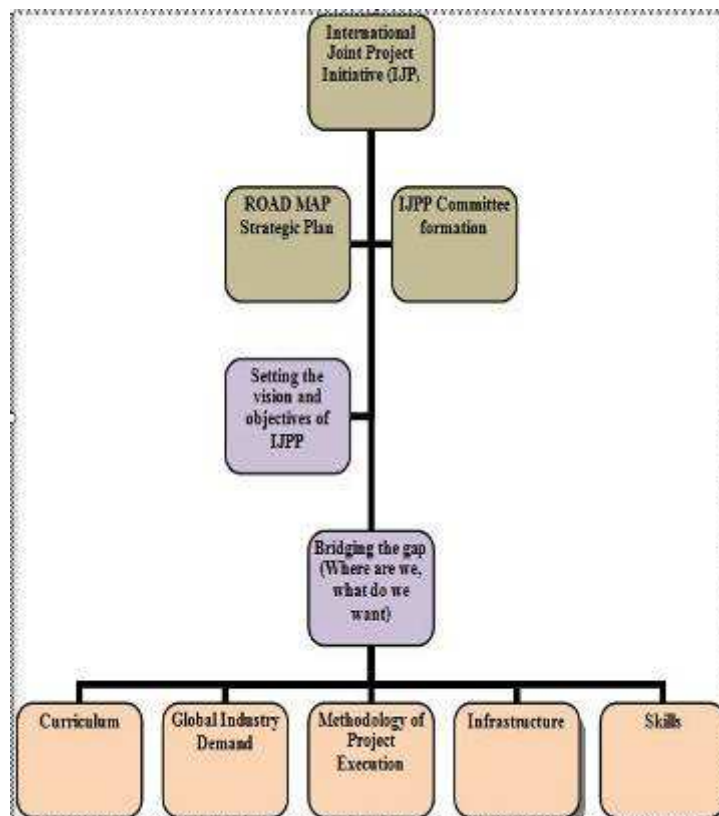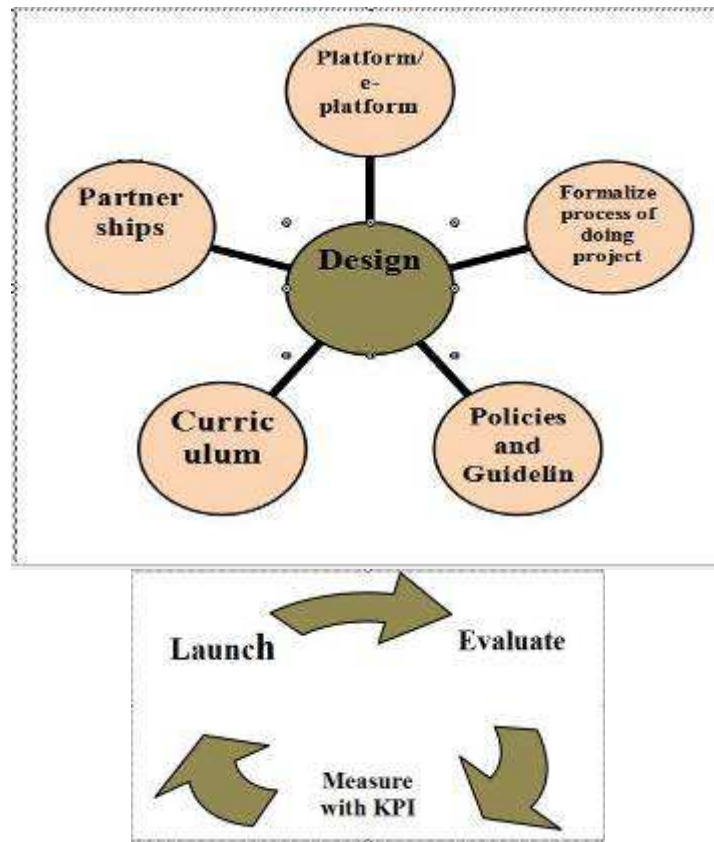
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