

## Role of assessment in maintenance of quality of higher education

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education is one of the complex systems of the whole process of education which facilitate teaching, research, extension, and understanding. Quality in higher education means the educational process is such that it ensures students achieve their goals and thereby satisfies the needs of the society and help in national development. Higher education imparts in-depth knowledge and understanding so as to advance the students to new frontiers of knowledge in different walks of life. The 'quality' of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) is a major concern: for actual and potential students, for government, for industry and for the staff of the HEIs themselves. Therefore the question arises automatically-Assessment and accreditation Focus on Quality sustenance and quality enhancement; promote the culture of self-appraisal and self-evaluation; create a climate conducive for healthy competition among higher education institutions to pursue quality; help institutions to carry out their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis, and in making their programmes more attractive to the students and to their potential employers and so on which will be discussed in the paper.

**Key Words:** Quality, Accreditation, Quality sustenance, Quality enhancement, Self-appraisal, Threat analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

The higher education system in India has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest system of its kind in the world. While government efforts at reform in school education have been extensively reviewed, there is relatively little analysis of higher education reform in relation to changing national and global economic, social and political frameworks. In developing countries, where resources are scarce, countries should not waste them on institutions that are not fulfilling important purposes. For India today,

quality in higher education is a key priority, and this must be achieved by keeping in mind the issues of relevance, costs, equity and international standards.

In terms of the level, higher education includes college and university teaching-learning towards which students' progress to attain higher educational qualification. One of the basic objectives of Higher Education is to increase the resolving power of the human mind. Two other important aspects of Higher Education are to inculcate the basic tenets of independent thinking and to enliven the indomitable character of the human mind to the young and talented students. It is about knowing more and more about less and less. It develops the student's ability to question and seek truth and makes him/her competent to critique on contemporary issues. It broadens the intellectual powers of the individual within a narrow specialization, but also gives him/her a wider perspective of the world around.

Therefore, it can be said that higher education is the backbone of any society. It is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources in a country.

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Now, everyone is worry about quality. Quality simply as 'fitness for purpose at minimum cost to society. The 'quality' of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) is a major concern: for actual and potential students, for government, for industry and for the staff of the HEIs themselves. Two decades ago, when the system came under severe criticism that it had allowed the mushrooming of higher education institutions (HEIs), compromising the quality of educational offerings, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and University Grants Commission (UGC) took initiatives to restore the standards of higher education. Consequently, the National Policy on Education (1986) that laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India noted certain policy initiatives. On the recommendations of the Programme of Action (1992) document that provided the guidelines for the implementation of the National Policy on Education (1986), in 1994, the UGC established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an autonomous body to assess and accredit institutions of higher education and its units thereof, with its headquarters at Bangalore. It was also felt that a system of rating by an independent autonomous body recognizing teacher education institutions will bring credibility in functioning of the institutions and the quality of the programme. The Indian system of accreditation puts a focus on quality improvement. The system of assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions by an independent body such as National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is being made an effective instrument for raising of quality of higher education institutions and for enabling institutions in using their physical and instructional infrastructure optimally and professionally. The concept of accreditation of educational institutions is relatively new phenomenon in the country. Accreditation and assessment assures the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution or program (a) has clearly defined and educationally sound objectives (b) maintains conditions under which their achievement can

reasonably or expected (c) is in fact accomplishing them substantially, and (d) can be expected to continue to do so. The purpose of accreditation is to find out how far an institution is performing beyond the minimum stipulations for achieving quality and excellence. It is a process for improving the quality of education and ensuring the suitability and quality of the products of the educational process to fulfill the purposes expected of them. It is a quality certification given by the accreditation agency to an institution, a course or a programme.

Therefore the question arises automatically-

### **What is the Role of Assessment in Maintenance of Quality for higher education?**

As we all know that in India, Assessment and accreditation is done by NAAC. The activities and future plans of NAAC are guided by its vision and mission that have a focus on making quality assurance an integrated functioning of the higher education institutions.

The main role of NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL (NAAC) which is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC), is to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION in higher education is justified on several counts.

1. In the first place, presently there exist no benchmarking standards or criteria for institutions desirous of pursuing excellence, so there is a need for some standards by which institutions can get a base. And can compare themselves with their peers or standards.

2. Focus on Quality sustenance and quality enhancement. During the first assessment, the NAAC's process has triggered quality initiatives in many aspects of functioning of higher education institutions. The preparation of the self study report has served as a catalyst for institutional self-improvement. The participation of the faculty members, administrative staff, students, parents and alumni has lead to new initiatives. Interaction

with the peers has assisted this process and also provided a means for the wider dissemination of information about educational development. It has triggered many innovative practices and paved way for institutionalizing those practices. It is proper and educationally sound to expect that re-assessment has to bring to limelight how institutions have progressed over a period of five years with accredited status. It is reasonable that the re-assessment will give a due place to the quality initiatives promoted by the first assessment and the consequent quality enhancement that has taken place.

3. The accreditation will promote the culture of self-appraisal and self-evaluation of performance by institutions, determined pursuit of standards of excellence set by themselves and mutual sharing of institutional experiences.

4. It will also play a leadership role in the creation of a climate conducive for healthy competition among higher education institutions to pursue quality and excellence and influence one another with their good practices. It will also create an environment for learning and staff development.

5. It will recognize the efforts of staff without creating a competitive environment.

6. The scheme of assessment and accreditation will help institutions to carry out their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis, and in making their programmes more attractive to the students and to their potential employers.

7. Accreditation also assists the students, parents and employers in identifying, acknowledging and encouraging institutions and programmes, which fulfill norms and standards and make proper use of their services.

8. The overall quality assurance framework followed by NAAC incorporates elements of all the three basic approaches to quality assurance - accreditation, assessment and academic audit. NAAC accredits institutions and certifies for the educational quality of the institution. It also goes beyond the certification and provides an assessment that classifies an

institution on a rating scale indicating where the institution stands in the quality continuum. A small team of external peers is sent to the institution mostly as generalists and the report is made public as in the case of academic audit. In practice this has been found to be the best choice for the huge and diverse system of higher education we have.

9. Assessment and Accreditation's process made a significant change in all aspects of institutional functioning - pedagogical, managerial and administrative. One could see that the institutions had become more open and sensitive to the needs of the stakeholders. The need to keep abreast of changing trends was felt by one and all, and institutions now found it easier to introduce innovations as everyone realized the importance of coping with the needs of the present world. The autonomous institutions that had the freedom to innovate in curriculum and the affiliated colleges that were offering additional programmes of their own restructured the curriculum. In the scheme of assessment of NAAC, the criterion Teaching-learning and Evaluation carries the maximum weightage. It gave a positive stimulus to institutional attention and oriented the institutions to improving their quality of teaching-learning by going beyond the routine examination-oriented outcome. Improved teaching methods using educational technology, projects and student seminars, providing of computer skills, encouragement of co-curricular activities, and incorporation of community orientation were observed.

10. In this era of values losing their significance, the accreditation framework of the NAAC has made higher education institutions in India think about the values they practice. The focus on values practiced in the functioning of higher education institutions has been rekindled due to the salient features (critical elements) of the NAAC's model that are based on certain assumptions of values, i.e. desirable practices. The appreciation of the desirable values is expected to result in a better understanding of the practices, particularly in the context of varying realities.

The value framework of NAAC starts with its right choice of 'unit' of evaluation, namely institution as a whole, which promotes a holistic value. The institutional accreditation that focuses on the policies, facilitating aspects and evidence of healthy practices of the whole system strengthens a healthy interdependence among the campus community. Gradually it promotes the holistic mindset that is essential for developing institutional excellence and institutional 'dharma', subsuming individual excellence and individual 'dharma'.

## CONCLUSION

Accreditation is an assurance of quality of both the institutional processes and outputs. Accreditation ensures accountability and efficiency with reference to the intrinsic and extrinsic functions of the institutions. It enables the society to find out the extent to which society's expectations from the educational system are met and imparts credibility to the system. It safeguards by ensuring quality and standards of the trained individuals from the educational institutions. This is done after carrying out appropriate criteria-based evaluation.. For example- The NAAC has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis for its assessment procedures: Curricular Aspects; Teaching-Learning and Evaluation; Research, Consultancy and Extension; Infrastructure and Learning Resources; Student Support and Progression; Governance and leadership; Innovative practices. So, it can be said that the whole process of self-evaluation, peer review, assessment and accreditation have to be seen as ingredients of a development-oriented process for the higher education institutions. It has to be viewed as a participatory process. The philosophy underlying the whole process is ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judge mental, so that all constituencies of the teacher education institutions are empowered to maximize their resources, opportunities and capabilities. The accreditation process helps the institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through an informed review; it

identifies internal areas of planning and resource allocation; it enhances collegiality on the campus. From the initial phase of apprehension about the philosophy of external review, the country has gradually moved to the current phase of appreciation for the intrinsic benefits of accreditation.

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