

Quality Enhancement in Indian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Indian higher education system has grown in a remarkable way, particularly after independence period, to become one of the largest systems of its kind in the world. However, the system has many issues of concern at present, like financing and management including access, equity and relevance, reorientation of programmes by laying emphasis on health consciousness, values and ethics and quality of higher education together with the assessment of institutions and their accreditation. Institutions of higher education fulfill vital roles in the global education community; they have the potential to bring changes within educational systems that will shape the knowledge and skills of future generations. Often, education is described as the great hope for creating a more sustainable future; higher education institutions serve as key change agents in transforming education and society. Not only do higher education institutions educate individuals, they update the knowledge and skill of students, provide professional knowledge, and often provide expert opinion to regional and national ministries of education. Recognizing the above and the basic fact, that the Universities and colleges have to perform multiple roles to give quality education as Establish one independent national agency for quality assurance; Re-organization and integration of various faculties; Ensure professionalism and consistency in the work of the quality assurance agency; Learning resources and student support; Establishment of IQAC within institution; Quality assurance of teaching staff; curriculum renewal and others are discussed in the paper.

Key Words: Quality; Higher Education; IQAC; Professionalism; Learning Resource; Curriculum Renewal.

INTRODUCTION

At one time, standards of education in India were maintained through a prescribed syllabus and a final examination to evaluate student performance. Even though this approach to quality control did not quite serve the purpose, most of the efforts to improve it came to naught. Then, after independence in 1947, a conceptual shift from quality control to quality assurance was seen. Unless the

quality and standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced continuously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene. This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms to be available in the country to ensure the quality and standard of the academic/training programmes at higher educational institutions. The assessment has to be continuous and the process has to be transparent to gain the acceptance of the society at large. The Indian higher education system is one of the largest such systems in the World. It is estimated that during the X Five Year Plan period (2002-07), there will be a tremendous pressure of numbers on this system and a large number of additional

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students will be knocking at the doors of higher education institutions in the country. There are also new challenges of management and regulation being faced by these institutions, which require serious attention, both at the institutions in the public sector and also those in the private sector now growing at a fast pace. As a result, the old structures of management established in pre-independent India and working during most of the twentieth century are now required to undergo drastic changes.

Therefore, one question arises that how can we maintain the quality of higher education system at one hand and fulfilling the need of the society on another hand?

Thus, as we all know, there are so many constraints present higher education institutions, and give rise to fresh challenges when developing or implementing programmes for both students and teachers. The present provision for higher education is inadequate in respect of both quality and content.

Major Guidelines

Quality assurance in higher education can be promoted by using following guidelines-

Establish one independent national agency for quality assurance

Setting up of NAAC has sent the right and positive signals for generating and promoting awareness of the urgent need of quality upgradation of Colleges and Universities. The need is to identify effective ways and strategies to expedite the completion of assessment and accreditation by NAAC within a stipulated time frame.

Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically

reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

The quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include:

1. Development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes;
2. Careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content;
3. Availability of appropriate learning resources;
4. Monitoring of the progress and achievements of students;
5. Regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members);
6. Regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organizations;
7. Participation of students in quality assurance activities.

1. Re-organization and integration of various faculties, particularly in social sciences, around inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary courses can also help in quality improvement in teaching, research and consultancy. UGC, ICSSR and other research funding bodies should encourage interdisciplinary/ multi-disciplinary Seminars/ Conferences/ Research projects. These bodies could allocate at least 50 percent of their research funds for inter-disciplinary activities. UGC could also take initiatives to open Centers/ Schools for promoting multi-disciplinary teaching and research.

Ensure professionalism and consistency in the work of the quality assurance agency

The credibility of quality assurance processes depends on a high level of professionalism in the agency responsible. The level of credibility is closely related to the consistency between processes. Therefore, the standards emphasize that quality assurance agency should have adequate human and financial resources to match the tasks they are required to perform. The agency should have a strong, highly qualified staff with experience in quality assurance and with knowledge of the higher education system.

1. Insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
2. The exercise of care in the selection of experts;
3. The provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
4. The use of international experts.

3. Ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution stated procedures;

4. Be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

5. During curriculum transaction learners should be assessed formatively on a continuous basis to create the basis for acquiring new experiences.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their program, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

Examination reforms, gradually shifting from the terminal, annual and semester examinations to regular and continuous assessment of student's performance in learning should be implemented. The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:

1. Be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other program objectives;
2. Be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
3. Have clear and published criteria for marking;
4. Be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;

1. Where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiner;

2. Have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other circumstances;

Create a quality assurance system with clear consequences and well defined procedures for follow-up

Consequences of accreditation and follow-up procedures in connection with academic audit should be clearly defined in the legal framework, and the agency should be responsible for providing the higher education institutions with proper information concerning the practical implications. The agency should be responsible for overseeing the follow-up on academic audits by carrying-out follow-up visit to discuss and explore what actions institutions have taken in response to a review. Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Quality assurance of teaching staff

Teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own performance.

1. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence.

2. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Institutions should provide opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and should have the means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective. Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so.

3. There should be objectivity in merit promotions of teaching faculty. Specification of weightages for teaching, research publications/ supervision would help in making this transparent and credible.

4. With a view to ensure maximum participation of College teachers in Workshops/ Seminars/Conferences and Orientation/Refresher Courses, it is suggested that these events be organized during lean periods in institutional academic work (i.e. March- July). This would help the teachers to participate in these activities without upsetting the teaching schedule.

1. Effectiveness of Quality upgradation initiatives in higher education largely depend on the quality of primary and secondary education. Institutional mechanisms on the pattern of NAAC, may be set up for upgrading the quality of education at these levels to further enhance the outcome of NAAC efforts.

Learning resources and student support

In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors, counselors, and other advisers. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from

those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students.

Establishment of IQAC within institution

Quality upgradation is not a onetime phenomenon. Quest for excellence is a continuous and perennial pursuit. In view of this, post- accreditation complacency must be arrested by evolving quality assurance mechanism for self-regulation. The setting up of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) is one such mechanism. The IQAC comprising the Chief Executive, senior academics and officers of the institution should work as a steering group. The Cell may constitute two quality groups, one for academic excellence and another for administrative efficiency. Periodic assessment exercises in the future should be undertaken by IQAC as part of post assessment and accreditation exercises. These could be conducted in collaboration with NAAC.

Curriculum Renewal

Multidisciplinary curriculum must be developed with a view to cater to the needs and fulfillment of expectations of learners, teachers, parents, employers and society. While restructuring the syllabi and courses, efforts should be made to develop an optimal combination of acquisition of theoretical and practical skills. The courses should be so designed that critical reading and interpretation of classics, practical field work wherever relevant, and application of readings and other skills are given importance. There are some suggestions which should be kept in mind while constructing curriculum-

1. Every University must have its own curriculum. There should not be any mechanism for central curriculum framework at higher education level. Context, specificity and inquiry oriented experience must be reflected in the curriculum. Learners' participation in the generation of knowledge must be the focus of constructivist curriculum.

Problem solving abilities must be developed through experimentation in life like situations.

2. Curriculum transaction should involve social negotiation and mediation. Encourage group activities and make optimum use of peer as resources of higher learning.

3. The principles of self regulation, self mediation and self awareness on the part of learners must be reflected in curriculum transaction.

4. Quality of higher education can improve considerably through an extensive and optimal use of audio-visual technologies and Internet. The courses should be so designed to make good use of these modern developments.

Public information

Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering. Published information might also include the views and employment destinations of past students and the profile of the current student population. This information should be accurate, impartial, objective and readily accessible and should not be used simply as a marketing opportunity. It includes:

1. Student progression and success rates;
2. Employability of graduates;
3. Students' satisfaction with their programmes;
4. Effectiveness of teachers;
5. Profile of the student population;
6. Learning resources available and their costs;
7. The institution own key performance indicators.
8. Integrated approach by involving experts from different fields with major focus on sharing of experiences in a holistic framework and having dialogues at different levels such as: at core committee level and at subcommittee level. In the 21st century, it is crucial to identify the relative norms for different components of a higher education system. The alternative dynamics for teacher

preparation and the sustaining quality in teacher input, like: Curriculum design and development; Curricular practices vis-à-vis emerging principles of pedagogy; Evaluation of learners' performance and progress vis-à-vis curriculum evaluation; and, Quality management practices become crucial. The quality of these components may also differ from institution to institution. Therefore, sharing of the experiences among institutions on quality issues may generate ideas for evolving norms and strategies for their quality assurance of management processes, curricular inputs and practices and the evaluation system as well.

CONCLUSION

India being a country of the sub-continental size with a population above 1 billion, along with the necessary and inevitable quantitative expansion of higher education, it is equally important to improve the quality of higher education. Institutions of higher education would find it difficult to meet the challenges of globalization of higher education. Emphasis on quality parameters becomes all the more necessary in the light of mushrooming of private institutions with the opening up of the Indian economy. But, we can't say that all private institutions work ineffectively. Many institutions of higher education in the country are excellent in the sense that their infrastructure, resources, faculty, programmes of teaching and research are almost as good as the best in the advanced countries. But, the same cannot be said of the average institutions of higher education in the country. They do not come anywhere near the level of average institutions of higher education in the advanced countries. This vast gap in standards and facilities has been a cause of constant anxiety and concern to the policy planners of higher education in India.

Therefore, there is a need of following some guidelines like- Renewal of Curriculum design; Curricular practices vis-à-vis emerging principles of pedagogy; Continuous evaluation of learners' performance and progress vis-à-vis curriculum evaluation; Evolving Quality

management practices; intervention of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, networking of the open learning system with traditional Universities, interdisciplinary interactions at intra-institutional and inter-institutional levels, networking of institutions globally, data based management of higher education, changing the orientation of institutions by incorporating self financing in their financial management, assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and creation of different statutory and regulatory bodies at the national level. Finally it can be said that continuous improvement should be the 'mantra' of promoting quality in higher education.

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