Role of NAAC in Enhancing Quality on Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract: *NAAC is an autonomous institution established by the UGC with the prime agenda of assessing and accrediting institutions of higher learning with all objective of helping them to work continuously to enhance the quality on higher education. Assessment and Accreditation is broadly used for understanding the "Quality Status" of an institution. In the context of Higher Education, the accreditation status indicates that the particular Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) – a College, a University, or any other recognised Unit therein, meets the standards of quality as set by the Accreditation Agency, in terms of its performance, related to the educational processes and outcomes, covering the curriculum, teaching-learning, evaluation, faculty, research, infrastructure, learning resources, organisation, governance, financial well being and student services. The purpose of this paper is to focus upon the role of NAAC in enhancing the quality in defining the element of Higher Education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, issues, challenges, promotion and sustenance initiatives. This paper makes a systematic study of the measures taken by NAAC to stimulate the Academic environment for enhancement of quality of teaching-learning and research in H.E. Institutions. And also to understand the level of awareness and improvements in many aspects of such H.E. Institutions post NAAC accreditation. It is very important to encourage self evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in the Higher Education and undertake quality research work, consultancy and training programs and also collaborate with other stake holders of Higher Education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance. In this context NAAC challenges for the quality and excellence in its vision of every Higher Education institution and advocates the best practices, benchmarking approach for quality enhancement in Higher Education.*

Keywords: NAAC Accreditation, Higher Education, challenges, enhancement etc

1. Introduction

India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. Unlike China, however, India has the advantage of English being the primary language of higher education and research. India educates approximately 11 per cent of its youth in higher education as compared to 20 per cent in China.

As India strives to compete in a globalised economy in areas that require highly trained professionals, the quality of higher education becomes increasingly important. So far, India's large, educated population base and its reservoir of at least moderately well trained university graduates have aided the country in moving ahead, but the competition is fierce; from China in particular. Other countries are also upgrading higher education with the aim of building world class universities.

The core mission of higher education is to educate, train, undertake, research and provide service to the community. The Higher Education in India is the Second largest system in the world. It has witnessed many fold increase in its institutional capacity since independence- from 1950 to 2012, the number of universities from 20 to about 431, colleges from 500 to 20,677 and teachers from 15,000 to 5.05 Lakhs with student enrolment from 1.00 lakh to over 116.12 Lakhs. Then to protect the quality of the higher education institutions, the National Policy Mission propose the Accreditation unit. Based on this, University Grants Commission (UGC), under section 12 CCC of the UGC Act (Act 3 of 1956), established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an Autonomous Institution on 16 September 1994 with Registered Office at Bangalore.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council is in its 23rd year of operation now. Twenty-two years may not mean a long time in the annals of Indian higher education, which may data back to the ancient period of 'Nalanda' and 'Takshashila', but it can certainly be a sufficiently long period for a National Quality Assurance Agency to take stock of its policies and practices. The two decades-old history of NAAC is a story of many triumphs and tribulations. Addressing the quality concerns of world's second largest higher education system has meant, adding several dimensions to the experiences of quality assurance initiatives of NAAC. Quality assurance models, as with higher education systems themselves, are designed to fulfil long- term collective needs. The quality assurance agencies are obliged to face enduring questions such as defining and maintaining standards of quality and equally important need to keep their methodologies up- to –date and responsive to shifting societal needs. The important actions and methodologies of NAAC are explained here.

2. Quality Movement in Indian Higher Education

The British Standard Institution (BSI) defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" (BSI, 1991). As teachers, principals, heads of departments and planners and policy makers in education, you may be having this question in your mind – why worry about quality? This is because of the following reasons:

1. **Competition**: We are entering a new regime, where competition among educational institutions for students and funds will be highly significant. In order to survive in such a situation, educational institutions need to worry about their quality.

2. Customer Satisfaction: Students, parents or sponsoring agencies as customers of the educational institutions are now highly conscious of their rights or getting value for their money and time spent.

3. Maintaining Standards: As educational institutions, we are always concerned about setting our own standard and maintaining it continuously year after year. In order to maintain the standard, we should consciously make efforts to improve quality of the educational transactions as well as the educational provisions and facilities.

4. Accountability: Every institution is accountable to its stakeholders in terms of the funds (public or private) used on it.

5. Improve Employee Morale and Motivation: Your concern for quality as an institution will improve the morale and motivation of the staff in performing their duties and responsibilities with adequate salary.

6. Credibility, Prestige and Status: If you are concerned about quality, continuously and not once in a while, it will bring in credibility to individuals and your institution because of consistency leading to prestige, status and brand value.

7. Image and Visibility: Quality institutions have the capacity to attract better stakeholder support, like getting merited students from far and near, increased donations/ grants from philanthropists/ funding agencies and higher employer interest for easy placement of graduates.
The important quality enhancement movements in India are explained below:

The University Grants Commission (UGC) with its statutory powers is expected to maintain quality in Indian higher education institutions. Section 12 of the UGC Act of 1956 requires UGC to be responsible for "the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations and research in universities". To fulfil this mandate, the UGC has been continuously developing mechanisms to monitor quality in colleges and universities directly or indirectly. In order to improve quality, it has established national research facilities, and Academic Staff Colleges to re-orient teachers and provide refresher courses in subject areas. The UGC also conducts the National Eligibility Test (NET), but, now NET is conducted by CBSE for setting high standards of teaching. Various committees and commissions on education over the years have emphasized directly or indirectly the need for improvement and recognition of quality in Indian higher education system. The concept of autonomous colleges as recommended by Kothari Commission (1964-66) has its roots in the concept of quality improvement. Since the adoption of the National Policy on Education (1968), there has been a tremendous expansion of educational opportunities at all levels, particularly in higher education. With the expansion of educational institutions, came the concern for quality. The constitutional amendment in 1976 brought education to the concurrent list making the central government more responsible for quality improvement. The New Education Policy (1986) emphasized on the recognition and reward of excellence in performance of institutions and

checking of sub-standard institutions. Consequently, the Programme of Action (PoA) in 1986 stated, "As a part of its responsibility for the maintenance and promotion of standards of education, the UGC will, to begin with, take the initiative to establish an Accreditation and Assessment Council as an autonomous body". After eight years of continuous and serious deliberations, the UGC established NAAC at Bangalore as a registered autonomous body on 16th September 1994 under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.

3. History of NAAC

The milestones in the emergence of NAAC can be identified as follows:

- 1986: UGC constituted a 15-member committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council under the chairmanship of Dr. Vasant Gowarikar.
- 1987-1990: Nine regional seminars and a national seminar organized to debate Gowarikar Committee report.
- 1990: Dr Sukumaran Nair's project report submitted to UGC that reflected a consensus to have an accreditation agency accountable to UGC.
- 1992: The revised New Education Policy reiterated all round improvement of educational institutions.
- 1994: Prof. G. Ram Reddy committee appointed to finalize the memorandum of association and rules and regulation of the accreditation board (July 1994).
- 1994: National Assessment and Accreditation Council established at Bangalore (September 1994).

4. Vision and Mission

Vision
To make quality the quality defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives.

Mission
i) To arrange for periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects;
ii) To stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality of teaching-learning and research in higher education institutions;
iii) To encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education;
iv) To undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training programmes, and
v) To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

Guided by its vision and striving to achieve its mission, the NAAC primarily assesses the quality of institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process, through an internationally accepted methodology.

Value Framework

To promote cognizance developments and the role of higher education in society, NAAC (2004) has developed five core values:
1) Contributing to national development
2) Fostering global competencies among students
3) Inculcating a value system in students
4) Promoting the use of technology
5) Quest for excellence

5. Governance Structure

NAAC's working is governed by the General Council (GC) and the Executive Committee (EC) on which University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Association of Indian Universities (AIU), Universities, Colleges and other professional institutions are represented. Senior academics and educational administrators are nominated as members on these two bodies.

President- General Council: - Prof. Ved Prakash has held eminent positions in a number of premier organizations dealing with Higher education, School education, and Personnel selection.

Chairman- Executive Committee: -Clause 19(b) of the Rules of NAAC- Every meeting of the executive committee shall be presided over by the Chairperson of the executive committee and in his/her absence by the Vice Chairman of UGC, and in the absence of both the senior most member of the Executive Committee.

Committees

NAAC functions through its General Council (GC) and Executive Committee (EC) and other academic, advisory and administrative sub committees. NAAC draws its expertise from senior academics of undoubted integrity from all over India.

Important committees under NAAC are as follows:
1. General Council
2. Executive Committee
3. Finance Committee
4. Building Committee
5. Appeals Committee
6. Purchase Committee
7. CRIEQA Committee

6. Instrumentation and Methodology

A new methodology was introduced in April 2007, as per this methodology, the higher education institutions are assessed and accredited in a two step approach.

In the first step, the institution is required to seek Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA) and the second step is the assessment and accreditation of the institution. NAAC has identified seven criteria-Curricular Aspects, Teaching, Learning and Education, Researches, Consultancy and Extension, Infrastructure and learning Resources, Student support and Progression, Governance and Leadership and Innovative practices.

The methodology of NAAC is evolved over 15 years and has undergone several changes based on feedback from stakeholders to match pace with changing higher education scenario. In keeping with this tradition NAAC has initiated stakeholder consultation process of a long time also having contributed to the evolution of NAAC.

The Assessment and Accreditation is in three dimensions which are explained below:

1. On-Line Submission of A Letter

2. Preparation of Self Study Report" – The first and most important step in the process of assessment is the submission of the self study report to NAAC. NAAC believes that an institution that really understands itself- its strengths and weaknesses, its potentials and limitations. Self- study is thus envisaged as the backbone of the process of assessment. NAAC insists that the report contain two parts. Part I may contain data about the institution under the seven criteria for assessment for which NAAC has developed a format. Based on the data collected in part I, the institution is expected to analyze its functioning and performance, and self-analysis becomes part II of the self- study report.

3. Peer Team Visit: -The selection of team members and their subsequent visit to the unit of accreditation are stages in a process that begins as soon as an institution submits its self- study report. The visit by the peer team gives the institution an opportunity to discuss and find ways of consolidating and improving the academic environment. As the first step to constitute the peer team, NAAC identifies a panel, from the extensive database of experts, with national-level representation and consults the institution about any justifiable reservations it may have regarding any member of the panel. During the on-site visit, keeping in mind philosophy of NAAC, the peer team does an objective assessment of the quality of education offered in the institution through three major activities- visiting departments and facilities, interacting with various constituencies of the institution and checking documentary evidences.

7. Quality Initiatives by NAAc

1) Quality Sustenance and Promotion by sensitizing institutions to the concepts such as credit transfer, student mobility and mutual recognition
2) Establishment of State-Level Quality Assurance Co-ordination Committees (SLQACCs) in different States
3) Networking among accredited institutions in order to promote exchange of "Best/Innovative Practices"
4) Dissemination of Best/Innovative Practices through seminar/workshops and NAAC publications
5) Financial support to accredited institutions for conducting seminars/conferences/ workshops etc. on quality issues in Higher Education
6) Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cells
7) State-wise analysis of Accreditation Reports for policy initiatives

8) Promoting the concept of Lead College and Cluster of Colleges for Quality initiatives
9) Research grants for faculty of accredited institutions to execute projects on different themes / case studies
10) Initiation of student involvement for quality enhancement
11) Developing international linkages for mutual recognition through accreditation

8. Role of NAAC in Changing Scenario

Role of NAAC in the changing scenario of higher education needs to be redefined with respect to recognition cum accreditation, programme accreditation, national level ranking of universities, preparation of national benchmarks, national and international database, research and development centre, developing reports and policy papers to Government of India (GOI), accreditation of multiple accreditation agencies, recognition of regional/state level accreditation bodies etc.

Assessment and Accreditation by NAAC may be made mandatory for all higher education institutions of the country.

NAAC may start programme accreditation

Ranking of institutions may not be very much relevant when compared to grading
All accreditation agencies including NAAC are to be accredited once in three years.

While NAAC could be accredited by recognized international accreditation bodies, NAAC could perform this function for all the multiple accreditation agencies getting recognized by Government of India (GOI).

NAAC grading and duration of accreditation may be linked and longer period of accreditation may be considered for the third cycle of institutional accreditation.

NAAC needs to continue to be an Apex Assessment and Accreditation body for higher education institution, in the country providing vision and leadership.

9. NAAC suggestions

NAAC suggestions for overall development of the higher educational institutions, given below;
1) Since the state Govt. is deputing a large number of teachers for undergoing B. Ed programme, this is making the classes a bit crowded.
2) Further, the Govt. colleges in the state are under the dual control of the University on one side and the Govt. on the other. Would it be possible for the Govt. & the University to make these colleges as constituent colleges of the University, thus paving the way for their better growth & development?
3) In view of the increased number of seats & diversification of courses, the college needs to have more number of teachers, especially in languages.
4) Laboratory facility needs to be enriched and expanded.

5) College should have a well equipped language lab, especially in view of the fact that every B.Ed Trainee opts for one language.
6) The college caters to the academic needs of the students who came from far off areas like Kargil and Ladakh; it needs to have hostels for boys and girls students.
7) As internship & practice of teaching are separately shown in the syllabus, internship needs to be streamlined & broad based.
8) Provision of some merit cum means scholarships need to be made for students from weaker section of society in view of the trend of increase in fee structure every year.
9) The suggestions put forth by the faculty to the University that the Project work should not be group work, needs immediate attention to avoid discrimination.
10) The Computer lab should be expanded, have more qualified Teachers; Faculty improvement programme should be strengthened.

10. Challenges ahead in Higher Education

The recent trends and developments mainly globalization of education and the extensive use of educational technology have made the issue of quality measurement even more complex. The quality assurance systems have to constantly modify their procedure to address a growing variety of open and distance learning opportunities, which is stimulated by the use of information technologies. The review procedures developed for conventional system are hardly sufficient for electronic delivery methods, which has a wider reach.

A large number of institutions are offering distance education programmes. They use multimedia strategies, enrol higher number of students of heterogeneous backgrounds and differ considerably in their capacities to use electronic media and delivery infrastructure. The development has serious implications for quality assurance agencies.

A similar concern arises in the context of international students' mobility due to globalization of education. When student enrol in other countries of foreign universities offering programmes in the students home country, the study plans must be evaluated to establish equivalence of their degree programmes.

The emergence of private higher education institution is also a greater concern to maintain quality and standard. Privatization creates little problem but the commercialization of self financing institutions create lot of problems for maintaining quality as making profit is their main concern. They run the institution without well qualified staff, needed infrastructure, student facilities, research etc. In such type of institutions, the relationship between the capacity to offer quality programmes and the scale of delivery of services is hard to establish. Because of the internationalization of education, the solution to the major issues and problems concerning quality assurance should be sought through co-operation among institutions and countries. Therefore, global effort is needed to deal with the challenge to quality assurance.

11. Conclusion

To conclude I would say that NAAC accreditation is playing a major role in ensuring quality in higher educational institutions and colleges with NAAC accreditation should not aim at just getting higher grades, but should aim at quality education in real sense .Which would in turn help in building a strong, qualified and highly motivated young team India that can assist in nation building.

An Internal Quality Assurance Cell has to play crucial role in enhancing and protecting the quality of education service in India. The establishment of this cell is a mandatory task before every higher education institution that is planning to go for NAAC accreditation. Educational Institution, NAAC, AICTE, UGC and state and central governments has to impose certain kind of restrictions on every higher education institution in quality aspects of the service delivery which will place them in certain pressure in different quality dimensions. Now everybody has realized the importance of quality deliverables in this sector to protect the local institutions from the foreign institutions which has already entered into the country and received prominent response from the prospective students'. If our higher education institutions and regulatory bodies failed to maintain quality aspects in delivering the quality education service; those institutions definitely will disappear from the education map of India. Therefore sustaining quality in this crucial sector which will mould the future of our upcoming generations is a prime responsibility of our education system which will be possible only through continuous monitoring with the support of Internal Quality Assurance Cell of every Higher Education Institution.

12. Suggestions and Recommendations

The following are the few important suggestions and recommendations for the overall enhancement of Higher Education Institution in India in the near future:
1) To initiate UGC scale salary to all the NAAC accredited colleges and universities in India;
2) Encouraged NAAC accreditation to all the colleges and universities of India;
3) To initiate awareness programme to all parents or guardian of the students;
4) Regular supportive supervision to NAAC accredited colleges and universities by a NAAC nominated team etc.

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