A REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

ANJU VERMA

Department of Education, School of Professional Studies Sikkim University (A Central University) 6th Mile, Samdur,

Tadong, Gangtok, East Sikkim, India

ABSTRACT

In recent years India has seen a tremendous growth in the number and types of institutions providing higher education. In order for organizations and individuals to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment, demand for education and training has become more critical than before. To respond to this demand, new institutions have continued to emerge. At present, India has about 304 Universities, including 62 Deemed Universities, 11 open Universities, and 15,000 colleges, incorporating approximately 10 million students and 0.5 million teachers. The performance of higher education institutions is a growing concern. The pressure for quality assurance poses a major challenge for higher education as in case of many developing countries including India. With increasing interaction of commerce, trade and education across national borders, needs for measures of the quality of education in a given country or region are growing each year. NAAC is an autonomous institution, established by the UGC in 1994. The primary objective of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. The aim is to provide universities with the best evidence for informing their focus and models for quality improvement. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, India, only about 10-11% of the population in the relevant age-group is enrolled in higher education, and a mere 5% graduate with degrees. Quality assurance refers to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced. Accreditation refers to an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certificate status. The purpose of this paper is to determine the state of research in a review of quality assurance in higher education institutions based on a review of the academic literature.

KEYWORDS: Quality Assurance, Higher Education Institutions, UGC, AICTE, NAAC, NBA, QAA

INTRODUCTION

Today majority of the governments in developing countries are under great pressure to restrain public spending on higher education. India's Education scene today is at a tipping point. Opportunities abound, yet the challenges are unprecedented. As the Indian economy strives to grow at 9% plus GDP, the higher education sector of India has to respond with dynamic changes to meet the escalating shortage of skilled and educated manpower. Students who want to be 'industry-ready' are also demanding world class education in conventional as well as non-conventional streams of Education. However, as India prepares to face the knowledge challenges of the 21st century, higher education presents a rather dismal picture. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, India, only about 10-11% of the population in the relevant age-group is enrolled in higher education, and a mere 5% graduate with degrees. The paper commences with a brief summary of the literature on the quality assurance process in higher education. The changing economic scenario throughout the world has made several developing countries including India to give utmost importance

to higher education. Economic development is correlated with the development of higher education.

At present, India has about 304 Universities, including 62 Deemed Universities, 11 open Universities, and 15,000 colleges, incorporating approximately 10 million students and 0.5 million teachers. It is this feature that labels it with the second largest higher education system in the world. The overall expansion over the period of time has been appreciable, even student enrolment growing at 5 percent annually over the past two decades. In spite of all this increase in enrolment, only 7.2 percent of the population in age group 17 to 23 constitutes the participating group.

The performance of higher education institutions is a growing concern. The pressure for quality assurance poses a major challenge for higher education as in case of many developing countries including India. Available literature on quality of higher education in India have dealt with issues ranging from professional examination results to internal aspects of inputs i.e. accreditation, students intake, basic infrastructure, qualifications of teaching faculty etc. HEIs need to improve their information policies. Both HEIs and the state must offer independent information through institutions on the local and national level, which gather all the information about the HEIs and make it available to all students and people who want to enter HEIs. These institutions should issue publications on the HEIs where the specific developments, programmes and specialised fields of research of the HEIs are promoted.

Quality in the context of higher education can be defined as a judgment about the level of goal achievement and the value and worth of that achievement. It is also a judgment about the degree to which activities or outputs have desirable characteristics, according to some norm or against particular specified criteria or objectives. The scope of quality includes manufacturing activities, business processes, and services for focuses on the need of the both external and internal customers. The quality of care has three components:

- The goodness of technical care, judged by its effectiveness

- The goodness of the interpersonal relationship, judged partly by its contribution to technical care

- The goodness of the amenities

WHAT IS QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION?

Quality assurance refers to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced. Accreditation refers to an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certificate status. The status may have implications for the institution itself and/or its students qualified for certain employment. In fact the underlying purpose of accreditation is to determine the extent to which institutions are discharging their responsibilities for realising their goals and for the quality of education provided to enable the students to attain standards. Thus accreditation is the process of examining institutional procedure for assuring quality and assessing the arrangements for effective implementation of strategies for achieving stated objectives.

Quality assurance is the main driver for accreditation of on-campus programs by national and international accreditation agencies. It is ultimately the responsible of the institution themselves. The real and enduring quality can only come from by the universities as a result of self-evaluation and peer review. Quality assurance protects and enhances quality through system design and performance monitoring. Monitoring may occur informally in the course of collaborative practice. Quality assurance in higher education is

- Defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by a higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved quality.

- Quality assurance aims to give stakeholders confidence about the management of quality and the outcomes achieved.

While quality assurance has always been a matter of concern and significance in education, in general, and in professional education such as technical education in particular, the recent quantitative expansion of an unprecedented nature, in India, has caused educators to devote careful attention to the quality aspect. There already exist several regulatory mechanisms for ensuring minimum standards before an institution is started. However quality assurance entails an assessment of the performance of the institution in delivering Education of the prescribed quality. Over the coming decades the accreditation/quality assurance universe in higher education is likely to become more complex as higher education itself evolves at an increasingly rapid pace. The tension – already present – between aspirations for excellence and the achievement of such excellence is bound to rise. The present nationalistic modes of quality assurance, including institutional and programmatic accreditation will inevitably have to work in conjunction and/or give way to global forms of public protection and educational quality.

There are two major purposes which accreditation serves:

- Quality assurance, which determining standards of quality and performance for minimum acceptability in the interest of public.

- Quality improvement, which provides the service that is designed to improve institutions and programmes through an external review process.

Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education is defined as systematic management and assessment of procedures adopted by higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality improvement. Likewise Quality Assurance Agencies at the national level should focus on the efforts of internationalizing the education through assessing the seriousness of purpose, extent of the efforts taken so far at the policy and implementation level.

Accreditation refers to a process of assessment and review which enables a higher education course or institution to be recognised or certified as meeting appropriate standards. The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Institutions and/or programs that request an agency's evaluation and that meet an agency's criteria are then "accredited" by that agency.

The need for quality assurance and accreditation has been established especially in the context of globalization and financial constraints impinging on higher education. This article provides an introduction to the twin and the integrated issues of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. There are over 300 university level institutions and over 15000 colleges, which offer various types and levels of programmes. These institutions widely differ in terms of the mandate to offer programmes and courses, student enrolment, infrastructure, delivery systems, sources of funds and governance. They are established by the central and state governments and therefore, the power to award

degrees/diplomas/certificates id vested in them by the respective governments. The higher learning institutions have its own internal and external procedures for assuring and enhancing quality of its programmes and maintain standards. In the recent times, several developments have taken place which has changed the perceived requirements for quality assurance in higher education.

TYPES OF ACCREDITATION

There are two basic types of educational accreditation, one identified as "institutional" and one referred to as "specialized" or "programmatic." Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of an institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily all at the same level of quality. The various commissions of the regional accrediting associations, for example, perform institutional accreditation, as do many national accrediting agencies. Specialized or programmatic accreditation normally applies to programs, departments, or schools that are parts of an institution. The accredited unit may be as large as a college or school within a university or as small as a curriculum within a discipline. Most of the specialized or programmatic accrediting agencies review units within an institution of higher education that is accredited by one of the regional accrediting commissions. However, certain accrediting agencies also accredit professional schools and other specialized or vocational institutions of higher education that are free-standing in their operations. Thus, a "specialized" or "programmatic" accrediting agency may also function in the capacity of an "institutional" accrediting agency. In addition, a number of specialized accrediting agencies accredit educational programs within non-educational settings, such as hospitals.

THE ACCREDITING PROCEDURE

- Standards: The accrediting agency, in collaboration with educational institutions, establishes standards.

- Self-study: The institution or program seeking accreditation prepares an in-depth self-evaluation study that measures its performance against the standards established by the accrediting agency.

- On-site Evaluation: A team selected by the accrediting agency visits the institution or program to determine first-hand if the applicant meets the established standards.

- Publication: Upon being satisfied that the applicant meets its standards, the accrediting agency grants accreditation or reaccreditation status and lists the institution or program in an official publication with other similarly accredited or reaccredited institutions or programs.

- Monitoring: The accrediting agency monitors each accredited institution or program throughout the period of accreditation granted to verify that it continues to meet the agency's standards.

- Reevaluation: The accrediting agency periodically reevaluates each institution or program that it lists to ascertain whether continuation of its accredited or reaccredited status is warranted.

FUNCTIONS OF ACCREDITATION

- Verifying that an institution or program meets established standards;

- Assisting prospective students in identifying acceptable institutions;

- Assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits;

- Helping to identify institutions and programs for the investment of public and private funds;

- Protecting an institution against harmful internal and external pressure;

- Creating goals for self-improvement of weaker programs and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions;

- Involving the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning;

- Establishing criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation; and

- Providing one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for Federal assistance.

GLOBAL USED QUALITY INDICES FOR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

- Alumni achievement

- Applications/seat

- Depth of course work

- Endowment

- Faculty Quality etc.

- Laboratories

- Library/ BW

- Pass ratio

- R& D papers/ Patent

- Reputation / placement

- Staff student ratio

Ensuring the quality and standards of the educational offering will constitute the first step towards internationalization of higher education. This in turn would involve restructuring of the contents, duration, quality and standards of educational offerings in line with the broad frame of higher educational systems in vogue in most of the countries of the world. With an effective and acceptable mechanism of Quality Assurance at the national level in place, re-orienting them towards assessing the educational system for the international stakeholders may not be difficult. The reorientation of the quality assurance exercises and the outcome would in turn ensure the recognition of the qualifications across the national borders in the long run. In this context, National level External Quality Assurance (NEQA) mechanism becomes important. The National Quality Assurance processes, whether it is assessment, academic audit or Accreditation used to assess and accredit the educational institution/programs should also conform to the international practices.

Table 1: Quality Assurance Components

Human Resources
• Faculty
• Staff
• Students
		• Teaching
		• Learning
		process
			OUTPUT
			Tangible outcome
			• Man power
			• Research papers
			• Products &
			  Process
			• Patents
			• Books
			• Short term
			  course
			• International /
			  National
			  Conference
			• QIP
			• MOUs
			• Participation in
			  National decision
			  making
			• Professional
			  Society
			  Activities
			• Editorial Board

INPUT →			

Physical Resources
• Lab
• Library
• Infrastructure
		• R & D
		• IC & SR
			Intangible outcomes
			• Brand equity
			• Scholarship
			• Reputation
			• Credibility
			• National image /
			  Pride
			• Excellence
			  ,Quality
			• Role model

Financial Resources		• Continuous Resources	

Current Criteria and Procedures for QAA (Quality Assurance and Accreditation)

Universities are established by the state under legislation with authority to accredit their own programmes and are primarily responsible for their quality assurance. The central and state governments are responsible for establishment of institutions or for approving new applications from institutions wishing to operate as universities within a well-defined jurisdiction. The govt. bodies like University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have evolved norms and guidelines for establishment and operationalization of higher education institutions. Universities have internal process to assess new course proposals and promote staff development, and most have entered into relationship with other universities to facilitate staff exchange, collaboration in research, and benchmarking of standards of course delivery. For various reasons, it has become a common practice to arrange programme reviews carried out by external assessors to compare the quality of academic activities with other leading institutions. The quality assurance mechanism as evolved by external reviewers, depend on one or a combination of a number of methodologies, the most important of which are self-studies or self-evaluation, peer review by panels of experts, use of relevant statistical information and performance indicators and service of key groups, such as students, graduates and employers.

Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by autonomous institutions established by the University Grants Commission:

- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)

- Distance Education Council (DEC)

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

- Bar Council of India (BCI)

- National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)

- Medical Council of India (MCI)

- Pharmacy Council of India (PCI)

- Indian Nursing Council (INC)

- Dental Council of India (DCI)

- Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH)

- Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)

- Veterinary Council of India (VCI)

These National Quality Assurance Agencies (NQAA) were originally conceived to serve the national interests. By and large their outcomes are designed either to promote quality enhancement. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body, has been established by the University Grants Commission in 1994 in pursuance of the recommendations made by the National Policy of Education, 1986 and the Prgramme of Action (POA), 1992 which lay special emphasis on evaluating the quality of higher education in India. The prime mandate of NAAC, as envisaged in its Memorandum of Association (MoA), is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning, universities and colleges or one or more of their units, i.e., departments, schools, institutions, programmes, etc. The NAAC functions through its General Council and Executive Committee where educational administrators, policy makers and senior academicians from a cross-section of system of higher education are represented

Under the new methodology introduced by NAAC w.e.f. 1st April, 2007, the higher education institutions are assessed and accredited by a two-step approach. In the first step, the institution is required to seek 'Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA)'. The process of accreditation is as under: NAAC has formulated a three stage process for assessment and accreditation as given below:

- Preparation of the self-study report by the institution to be submitted to NAAC.

- Validation of the self-study report by peers visiting the institution

- The final decision of NAAC based on the self-study report and the recommendations of the team of peers.

The second step is the assessment and accreditation of the institute under the grades 'A', 'B', 'C' for accredited institutions; and 'D' for those which are not accredited. NAAC has identified seven criteria:

- Curricular aspects,

- Teaching-learning and evaluation,

- Research, Consultancy and extension,

- Infrastructure and learning resources,

- Student support and progression,

- Governance and leadership and

- Innovative practices as the basis for its assessment procedure

National Board of Accreditation (NBA), a body under AICTE, is the only authorized body in India entrusted with the task of undertaking accreditation of technical education programmes. All programmes on technical education including those offered by University Departments are accredited by NBA. The NBA evaluates the quality of programmes offered by educational institutions from Diploma to the Postgraduate levels in Technical Education. Accreditation is based on 8 point criteria which include:

- Organisation and governance

- Financial resources

- Allocation and utilization

- Physical resources

- Human resources

- Teaching/learning processes etc.

There has been a substantial increase in the number of accredited programmes in India.

As the responsibility of maintenance of standards of higher education is vested with UGC, the UGC has established NAAC for assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges. A three stage procedure is followed, which involves:

- Preparation of the self-study report by the institutions based on the defined parameters

- Validation of the self-study report by a team of peers through on-sight visit and interaction with the functionaries of the institutions

- Final decision on assessment and accreditation by the NAAC.

Table 2: Purpose of Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education

Purpose / Focus	Planning of Funding	Validating	Accrediting	Awarding	Maintaining Enhancing
University					
Department					
Programme					
Teacher					
Learning					

Table 3: Outline Display of Characteristics of Quality and their Evaluation

Focus of Evaluation	Characteristics of Quality	Criteria of Each Character	Purpose of Evaluation	Method of Evaluation
University				
Department -Teaching -Research				
Programme				
Teacher				
Learning				

The outcome of accreditation exercises undertaken by the agencies like NAAC and NBA have significant impact on improvement of quality of higher education, the strengths and shortcomings of the institutions are detected for initiating appropriate action. The institution dedicates themselves to enhancing the quality of their program and services within the context of their missions, resources of capacities and create an environment in teaching, public services, research and learning occur.

SELF-ASSESSMENT (SWOT)

Self-assessment is often performed through a SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym for

- **S- Strengths**

- **W-Weaknesses**

- **O- Opportunities**

- **T- Threats**

It refers to the internal strengths and weaknesses of an organization or institution, and the environmental opportunities and threats facing the organization. SWOT analysis involves a systematic identification of these factors and the strategy that reflects the best match between them. It is based on the premise that an effective strategy maximizes an institution's strengths and opportunities, but at the same time minimizes its weaknesses and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the institution and are within its control; they may be manipulated to suit a particular situation. The term efficiency describes the relationship between inputs and outputs. While analysing the education, both 'internal and external efficiency' must be taken into account. The benefits of higher education investments derive largely from skill formation. So the investments in higher education must respond to the economy's demand for workers by level and type of education.

RECENT PROGRESS AND BENEFITS OF QAA

There has been a dramatic progress in establishment of HEIs both under the public and private sectors. Higher Education Institutions offer a variety of programmes through on and off-campuses, adopt different strategies of teaching and learning, enrol heterogeneous group of learners in diverse discipline and engage themselves in multifarious activities of teaching, research and extension services. NPE-1986 and the Programme of Action-1986 suggested and encouraged the colleges and the universities to make a voluntary self-assessment of their performance. The following major benefits, as identified by NAAC are derived from the process of quality assessment and accreditation:

- Employers have access to information on standards inn recruitment.

- Gives the institution a new sense of direction and identity.

- Helps in identifying internal areas of planning and resource allocation   Enhances collegiality on the campus.

- Helps the institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities through an informed review.

- Initiate institution into innovative and modern methods of pedagogy.

- Promote intra institutional and inter institutional interactions.

- Provides the society with reliable information on the quality of education offered by the institution.

- The outcome of the process provides the funding agencies with objective and systematic database for performance funding.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions indicate there is very little research on quality management, despite quality's role growing in importance as universities strive to compete in an increasingly underfunded market for students and research funds. This paper provides the rationale for strong quality assurance systems for higher education as a factor in enhancing global interactions, and makes recommendations for countries and regions which do not yet have effective systems in place. Quality is a judgment about the degree to which activities or outputs have desirable characteristics, according to some norm or against particular specified criteria or objectives. The performance of higher education institutions is a growing concern. The pressure for quality assurance poses a major challenge for higher education as in case of many developing countries including India. While quality assurance has always been a matter of concern and significance in education, in general, and in professional education such as technical education in particular, the recent quantitative expansion of an unprecedented nature, in India, has caused educators to devote careful attention to the quality aspect. National policy of Education, 1986 updated in 1992 envisage improvement and expansion of education in all sectors, elimination of disparities in: access and laying greater stress on improvement of quality and relevance of education at all levels. National Board of Accreditation (NBA), a body under AICTE, is the only authorized body in India entrusted with the task of undertaking accreditation of technical education programmes. The prime mandate of NAAC, as envisaged in its Memorandum of Association (MoA), is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning, universities and colleges or one or more of their units, i.e., departments, schools, institutions, programmes etc.

REFERENCES

1. "Global Education" (2015). University Analytics. Retrieved 10 December 2015.

2. "NCTE : National Council For Teacher Education" (2012). Ncte-india.org. Retrieved 16 August2012

3. Almeida, E., Alvaro, A., Meria, S. (2007). A Component quality assurance process. Foundations of Software Engineering, doi: http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1295074.1295093

4. Antony, S. (2001). Impact of Assessment and Accreditation on Institutions of Higher Learning. University News, Vol.39

5. Arcelo, Adriano A (2001). Graduate Tracer Studies. In Higher Education Research Papers. Pasig City: CHED.

6. Bacivarov, Ioan (2015). "The Standard ISO 9001:2015 - A Milestone in the Evolution of Quality Management" (PDF). Asigurarea Calitatii - Quality Assurance. Retrieved14 October 2015.

7. Bacivarov, Ioan (Coordinating Editor) (2015). Special issue "ISO9001:2015". Asigurarea Calitatii - Quality Assurance 21 (83), ISSN 1224-5410.

8. India (2009). A Reference Annual (53rd edition), 237.

9. Mayes, J.T. (2001). Quality in an e-university. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 26(5), 465-474.

10. Meirovich, G. and Romar, E.J. (2006). The difficulty in implementing TQM in higher education instruction. The duality of instructor/student roles. Quality Assurance in Education, 14, 324-337.

11. NAAC (2003). Institutions Accredited by NAAC, Bangalore. Bangalore: NAAC

12. O'Neill, M.A. & Palmer, A. (2004). Importance-performance analysis: a useful tool for directing continuous development in higher education. Quality Assurance in Education, 12(1), 39-52.

13. Osseo-Asare, A.E., Longbottom, D. and Chourides, P. (2007). Managerial leadership for total quality improvement in UK higher education. The TQM Magazine, 19, 541-560.

14. See http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Standards-and-Guidelines-for-QA.pdf

15. Tilak, J.B.G. (2001). Education and Globalisation: The Changing Concerns in Economics of Indian Education, Editorial, Perspectives in Education, Vol. 17, Special Issue.

16. Valisno, Mona Dumlao. Ed (2000). The Reform and Development of Higher Education in Philippines. Manila: UNESCO.

17. Vrat, Prem (2006). "Indian Institutes of Technology", Encyclopedia of India (vol. 2) edited by Stanley Wolpert, 229–231, Thomson Gale: ISBN 0-684-31351-0.

18. Zhao, F. (2003). Enhancing the quality of online higher education through measurement. Quality Assurance in Education, 11(4), 214-221.