QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
Quality in higher education has become the prime task of countries worldwide. The role of higher education is vital in the development of a nation. Our higher education system is the third largest higher education system in the world. But when we compare the quality and innovations in higher education, we find that we are far behind from others in the world. Our higher education institutions struggled hard to secure a respectable position in the world ranking forum. What are the factors responsible in bringing down the quality in higher education? Now, time has come to think together seriously where we lack? What are the causes for the degradation of quality in higher education in India? The present study is unique because, it tries to investigate the issues and challenges of higher education in India to bring quality. In this context, the present paper intends to highlight on the issues and challenges of higher education in India to bring quality.
Keywords - Quality, Higher Education

Quality in higher education has become the prime agenda of countries worldwide. In the changing context marked by globalization of economic activities, education has become a national concern with an international dimension. To cope with this changing context, India is being pressurized to ensure and assure quality in higher education at a nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standard. Indian higher education system has grown significantly in last five decades. The need of hour is to go for assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher Education- How should one go about this? What do we mean by quality in higher education? Can we think of a process that would be suitable for India? Like other countries, India has initiated national quality assurance mechanisms and process of evolving suitable strategy.

The Indian higher education system has its origin in the nineteenth century. The structure and governance of the most of the Indian institutions of higher education are modeled on the British example known as the London Model. Institutions of higher education are established either by act of Parliament or by State legislation. The first three Indian universities set up in 1857 during British Period were Calcutta University, Bombay University and Madras University.

There were 21 Universities in the country at the time of independence in 1947. Today, India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. It is the third largest in terms of students, next to China and the USA. Now, it has 795 universities, more than 42, 634 colleges, more than 33 million students and more than 70 lakhs teachers. State governments play the main role in the higher education system in the country. They are responsible for the establishment of state universities and colleges. Grants are provided for development and maintenance of colleges and universities by both central and state government. Although, states are major providers, the central government has a special constitutional responsibility in education. As an outcome of constitutional amendment in 1976, education is in the concurrent list by which the Central Government enjoys exclusive legislative power for co-ordination, determination and co-operation in education with states through the Central Advisory Board of Education.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) serves as a link among the Union, state governments and institutions of higher learning. Established by an Act of Parliament in 1956, it has been discharging the constitutional mandate of co-ordination, determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, and research in higher education.UGC receives both plan and non-plan grants from the Central Government to carry out responsibilities assigned to it by law. It allocates and disburses full maintenance and development grants to Central Universities and to some institutions accorded with the status of Deemed-to-be-Universities. State universities, colleges and other institutions of higher education receive UGC support (less than 5% of their budget in most cases) provided they fulfill the eligibility criteria laid down by UGC.

In addition, UGC provides financial assistance to universities and colleges under various schemes/programmes for promoting quality in higher education.

The accreditation experience in Indian higher education may seem to be nineteen years old, but it should be considered in the back drop of quality controls that the Indian higher education system had already for the past 156 years, most of them inherited from the British Legacy of higher education. In independent India, various regulations on minimum requirements for the establishment and expansion of institutions of higher education have been well in place for more than fifty years. Inspections and audits by state governments, affiliating function of universities (in the case of colleges), performance appraisal of universities by the UGC and review by funding agencies have all contributed for ensuring quality in higher education. Inspection and certification by professional bodies which is primarily a process of recognition or approval, has been in place for a long time. Consequently, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) were established in 1994 at Bangalore with an aim to lead institutions of higher education towards maximizing their potential for quality education. Recently MHRD also adopted another procedure to increase their potential for quality education by accrediting different higher education institutions through conducting Institutional Ranking Framework.   The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was first launched by Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development on 29th September 2015.This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country. The methodology draws from the overall recommendations broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MHRD, to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions. The parameters broadly cover "Teaching, Learning and Resources," "Research and Professional Practices," "Graduation Outcomes," "Outreach and Inclusivity," and "Perception". However, the national context in terms of limited resources available for improvement in quality, size and complexity of the higher education system adds a new challenge to the process of accreditation in India. Theway the national context can be balanced with international expectations may offer a valuable lesson for quality assurance strategies.

Basic Perspectives of Quality in Higher Education

How does one define quality in higher education? Various attempts have been made to elucidate the meaning of quality in higher education. Quality is not a destination rather it is a continuous journey. Oakland (1998) defined quality as 'the degree of fitness for purpose and function'. Sallis (1966) contends that 'quality is a dynamic idea and exact definitions are not particularly helpful'. Shejwalkar (1999) describes, 'quality is essentially a product of intensive investment of capital, talent and hard work'. The fact is that quality itself is a somewhat ambiguous term in education since it has connotations of both standards and excellence. Most debates on quality end up with the conclusion that quality and excellence are synonymous. There is also the notion of quality as conformation to a standard or specification. Once again, quality education is the education that best fits the present and future needs of the learners and makes them able to face the challenges confronting the humankind. In this rapidly changing situation, quality education of today might not meet the standard of what will be understood as quality for tomorrow. Perhaps, it is worthwhile to say that in higher education, the standard means a basis for measurement, or a yardstick to describe a required characteristic or a parameter and this would vary from country to country. Once the standards are set, the institutions can try to achieve quality so as to attain excellence.

Challenges in bringing Quality in Higher Education in India

To ensure quality in higher education, the following challenges faced by the Indian higher education system must be highlighted properly.

1. Deterioration of Teaching Standard by the Teachers

Teachers play a significant role in improving the quality of higher education. Commitment, dedication, competency and innovation of the teachers improve the quality of education. But the acute shortage teachers in higher education institutions, appointment of less caliber teachers by

the influential people of the society, engagement of teachers in evil politics and lack of work culture among the teachers make the entire higher education system stagnant. The recruitment of the right kind of teacher with right kind of frame of mind can alone think for the betterment of the higher education. They should be highly committed and dedicated to their profession and their duties.

2. Political Interference

Colleges and universities are now being affected by the evil political interferences made by different political parties. We can see the burning example of Delhi University, Hyderabad University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi etc. No university is now being escaped by these evil politics. Higher education is completely unsafe in India now. So, as quick as possible we have to uproot this evil system to bring quality in higher education, unless expecting quality in higher education institutions will be possible in dream only.

3. Low Quality of Research and Innovation

In addition to teaching, original and quality research is an essential factor in higher education. But most of these researches in India are of very low standard. Only priority is given on cut and paste system in research project. Researchers are involved in scoring API scores in their account. As, higher education is vital for national development and international recognition, government should take proper step in bringing quality research work and innovation. If possible national level publication council be established for publication work as well as to check its Original, Innovative and Quality Research work.

4. Privatization of Higher Educational Institutions

It is a debatable question that privatization in educational institution is a boon or curse for the society. But it is sure that majority of the private sector institutions are not professional and are involve in plundering wealth in the name of providing quality education from the students and the parents. Money making is the only objective of these institutions now-a-days. Both the states and central government should take necessary step to check the monopoly of the private institutions to bring quality in education.

5. Less Financial Allotment to Higher Education Institutions

Government of India as well as state governments are spending very low amount of money for the development of higher education. Even in Union budget less than 5% GDP are allotted for the Education expenditure in whole India, which is very less than our country's defense budget. At least minimum 6% of GDP of our country should be spent on Education and minimum 2% be spent on Research and Innovation Activities, so that quality research work could have been expected.

6. Lack of adequate Infrastructure and facilities

Most Higher education institutions run by public sector are suffering from poor physical facilities and infrastructure. Even at present teachers are using traditional blackboard and chalk instead of smart classroom facilities. Many of higher education institutions even today lack suitable libraries, laboratories, workshops, urinals and lavatory facilities for both teachers and students etc. These issues must be seriously be taken to solve by the concerned authorities.

7. Unable to satisfy Customers' Needs and Expectations

Present education system is unable to meet the needs and expectations of the customers in higher education, the customers are students, parents and government. Downey (1992), defines 'quality as meeting, exceeding, and delighting customer's needs and expectations with recognition that these needs and desires will change over time'. Since higher education had come under the service sector, its customers or stakeholders are mainly students, parents, teachers and principals. Therefore, the quality of higher education must be studied in terms of how far the services provided by higher education institutions focus on customer's needs & expectations.

Emerging Perspectives

Quality in education has vital link with the quality of life. Realising this, UNESCO set up an independent commission on education for the 21stcentury which submitted its report on 1996. The commission, chaired by Jacques Delors of France and with membership of outstanding academicians and thinkers from around the world has titled its report "Learning: The Treasure Within". This is itself is a pointer towards curriculum objective and guidelines before education of the next century. While the entire world acknowledges the necessity of universalizing elementary education, countries, which are still deprived of the same, cannot ignore the critical role of higher education in these efforts. The commission has identified four pillars of education i,e 1.Learning to know 2.Learning to do 3.Learning to live together 4.Learning to be. In addition the report consistently emphasizes lifelong learning apart from the most significant statement: "Learning: The Treasure Within". It lays particular emphasis on the need to develop social cohesion and preparing individuals and societies to live together harmoniously with mutual respect and regard for varying cultures, economic situations, traditions, religions and other diversities. All these would require higher levels of quality researches, studies, interpretations, etc. This situation expects the improvement of quality in higher education every dimensions.

Conclusion

Creating a dynamic commitment to quality in higher education is going to be a great and exciting challenge of the next decade. It is this quality that will deliver results in spite of diminishing finances and resource crunch, the unprecedented challenge of continuous expansion and change. We cannot afford to carry much longer in the task of providing the country with an educational system of such a quality that is not geared to accept the challenges of the future.

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