



QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

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Higher education is supposed to be the most complex system of the whole process of education which facilitates teaching, research, extension, and understanding. Quality in higher education means the educational process is such that it ensures students in achieving 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.

In India higher education system has grown in a remarkable way, particularly in the post-independence period, to become one of the largest systems 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.



Now, everyone is worry about quality as the quality in Higher Education in India is somehow in trouble. Actually, the higher system has come under severe criticism when it had allowed the mushrooming of higher education institutions compromising the quality of education. Though there are seventeen different Regulatory Bodies to look after the whole educational system mechanism these are not above criticism. These Regulatory Bodies includes:

1. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) (1987)
2. Bar Council of India (BCI) (1961)
3. Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) (1973)
4. Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) (1970)
5. Council of Architecture (CoA) (1972)
6. Dental Council of India (DCI) (1948)
7. Distance Education Council (DEC) (1985)
8. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)
9. Indian Nursing Council (INC) (1947)
10. Institute of Cost and Works Accountants of India (ICWAI) (1959)
11. Medical Council of India (MCI) (1956)
12. National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) (1993)
13. Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) (1948)
14. Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) (1992)
15. State Councils of Higher Education (SCHE)
16. University Grants Commission (UGC) (1956)
17. Veterinary Council of India (VCI) (1984)

The University Grants Commission which came into existence on 28.12.1953 became a statutory body of Government of India by an Act of Parliament in 1956. The **Section 12** of the UGC Act provides that the Commission shall in consultation with the concerned universities, take all such steps as it may think fit for the promotion and coordination of university education and for the maintenance of standards in teaching, examination and research. For teaching and research, extension was added as the third dimension of education by the Commission. The UGC serves as a vital link between the Union and State



Governments and the institutions of higher learning. In addition to its role of giving grants to universities and colleges, the University Grants Commission also advises Central and State Governments on the measures necessary for the improvement of university education. It also frames regulations such as those on the minimum standards of instruction and qualifications of teachers on the advice of subject specialists and academicians.

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 the 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 assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution or program (a) has clearly defined and educationally objectives (b) maintain 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.



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.

NAAC has unquestionably done the best since its formation in 1994. But is it adequate or sufficient to bring completeness in higher education in India? It may also be a disputable matter. However, the present scenario of Higher Education in India is not far away from satisfaction. As of 22 June 2012, the total number of universities in India is 567. There are universities of some kind in each and every of the 28 states of India as well as three of the union territories, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. The state with the most universities is Tamil Nadu with 55 universities. It is also the state with the most deemed universities, numbering 29. Andhra Pradesh has the most state universities (32), Rajasthan the most private universities (25), while Delhi and Uttar Pradesh have four central universities each, the largest number of all the states and territories.

Apart from the above universities, other institutions are granted the permission to autonomously award degrees. However, they do not affiliate colleges and are not officially called "universities" but "autonomous organizations" or "autonomous institutes". They fall under the administrative control of the Department of Higher Education. These organizations include the Indian Institutes of Technology, the National Institutes of



Technology, the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, the Indian Institutes of Management (though these award diplomas, not degrees) and other autonomous institutes. These institutes are not listed below. Also not listed are institutes which are under the control of the professional councils, without approval of the UGC, e.g. Agricultural Universities, which are under the control of the Agricultural Education Division of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), one of the professional councils. Similarly, the total number of colleges in India is 33023 (Source: UGC Brochure: Higher Education at a glance Feb. 2012). Out of which Maharashtra is in top with Total 4631 no of colleges while D & N Haveli is in last having a single college.

Though these total numbers of colleges and universities are not adequate for a country like India, on what level we are producing quality students is a questionable matter. It is true that all the regulatory boards or bodies including UGC along with NAAC have done their level best in maintaining quality in higher education in India. But it is painfully seen that a number of universities and colleges have produced degree holders either to enlarge their statistics or to earn financial benefits. If things go on in this order the quality in Higher Education will be in great threat. Therefore, it is the right time to stand united to fight against those institutions who never like to maintain quality. In this case people make take the help of the Regulatory Bodies that have already been mentioned.

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