Assessment of Quality in Higher Education in India

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Abstract: From time immemorial India has excelled as a centre of learning. Universities like Nalanda and Takshashila had worldwide reputation and attracted scholars from different corners of the world. Since then, the higher education system of India has evolved over time by addressing many challenges and difficulties, and today it has the status of being one of the largest educational systems in the world. Given that India’s growth is service sector-led and that bulk of India’s population is young, the hour has come when we focus on the quality of higher education in India. The paper identifies the major parameters that need to be emphasized on for improving quality of higher education in today’s age of digitization. Infrastructure, teacher-student ratio, qualification of teachers, are but some of the essential requirements. In this context, the assessment criteria adopted by NAAC and also NIRF are explored and compared and the correlation between them measured to understand the extent of their compatibility. The paper particularly analyses the relevance of NEP, 2016 in assuring quality of higher education in India and concludes by highlighting the areas of the Indian higher education system that need to be reformed.

Keywords: Higher education, quality assurance, infrastructure, NAAC, NIRF, NEP 2016

I. INTRODUCTION

“Education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity.”- Aristotle

From time immemorial India has excelled as a centre of learning. Universities like Nalanda and Takshashila had worldwide reputation and attracted scholars from different corners of the world. Since then, the higher education system of India has evolved over time by addressing many challenges and difficulties, and today it has the status of being one of the largest educational systems in the world.

Higher education, considered to be post higher secondary education, should be given prominence in India when it comes to research and policy-making for it can provide India with rich dividends. It is vital for the future of India, because unlike China or other Asian tigers who have experienced huge economic growth led by the manufacturing sector, India’s growth has been backed by the tremendous increase in the nation’s skilled workers. To sustain the positive trend, India must attend to the issues in higher education both in terms of quantity and quality.

India today also has the prospect of a huge demographic opportunity imminent in her sky. While the rest of the world is ageing, India has a younger population not only in comparison to advanced economies but also in relation to the large developing countries. Through the rightful investment in higher education, this young population can be converted into a national asset, thus endowing India with a large and highly productive workforce that can drive India up the growth ladder. Conversely, unless proper education is imparted to this youthful population, our tomorrow might be heavily affected. Thus, “it is time to let a thousand educational flowers bloom.” (Tharoor, S., Times of India, 2013).

A glance back at our past since independence clearly reflects that the political authorities in India have always been committed to progressing India in higher education. The number of higher education institutions in India has seen more than 50 fold growth in the last six and half decades.

Table 1: Capacity Expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>University Level Institutions</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Teachers (in thousand)</th>
<th>Students enrolled (in million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>7,346</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>16,885</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>9.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>18,064</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>37,204</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>38,498</td>
<td>1473</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>39050</td>
<td>1284</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author (compiled from the various reports of the University Grants Commission & AISHE)

But there has always been a crisis in this sector which seems to be confused and throttled by a maze of policies and regulations. There are 903 universities and 39050 colleges (AISHE, 2017-18) in the country where 36.6 million students are pursuing higher education. Although the enrolment of 36.6 million students appears to be huge in absolute terms, it is very small compared to the entire population and given the fact that 50 percent of
Quality of higher education has been a matter of concern to the society. There are many stakeholders in higher education – students, employers, teaching and non-teaching employees, government, funding agencies, regulatory bodies, professional bodies, and the accreditation agencies. Each of them has different perceptions about quality based on their personal interests and expectations from higher education. For example, for those willing to join the labour force, higher education is the producer of qualified manpower, and to them, the career earnings and employment of the outgoing graduates become the indicator of quality. For those willing to pursue a research career as an efficient management of teaching provision then PIs are efficiency indicators such as completion rates, unit costs, student-staff ratio and other financial data. On a larger scale, if higher education is thought to expand life chances, then the PIs are the percentage of or growth of students from less represented backgrounds. The question lies how to club all these into one single index for judging quality.

Assessment of Quality of Higher Education Institutions in India

We will all agree that a system of assessment and accreditation does sensitizes the quality issue and higher education institutions wake up to prove their worth. In India, NAAC, set up by UGC in 1994, National Board of Accreditation (NBA) established by the AICTE in 1994 and the Accreditation Board (AB), established by the ICAR in 1996 are involved in assess quality in higher education. Recently the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has been set up by the MHRD on 29th September, 2015. This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country. The parameters broadly cover “Teaching, Learning & Resources”, “Research and Professional Practices”, “Graduation Outcome”, “Outreach and Inclusivity”, “Perception”.

Correlation

NIRF has both its similarities and dissimilarities with the criteria set up by NAAC. To contrast the outcome of NIRF with that of NAAC, the correlation coefficient of NAAC score and NIRF score of 88 colleges was calculated and it turned out to be a very weak positive correlation of 0.353. This result may prove to be slightly agitating for colleges, because they will be in a dilemma for the standards set for quality assessment.


Quality of higher education has been a matter of concern to the Government of India. So, in the Draft NEP, 2016 the following provisions have been included: (i) It is now mandatory to get accredited by NAAC or
NBA. (ii) As a concern for low position of Indian HEIs in global ranking, NIRF has been set up to rank Indian HEIs on a regular basis. (iii) An expert committee will be constituted to study the system of accreditation in place internationally. It will draw from the experiences of some of the best practices followed by countries have well performing systems, and will suggest restructuring of NAAC and NBA as well as redefining methodologies, parameters and criteria. (iv) Evaluation/ accreditation details of each institution will be available to the general public through a dedicated website to enable students and other stakeholders to make informed decisions.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is high time for India to sensitize the issue of improving quality among all stakeholders of higher education in the face of a massively expanding higher education system. Without quality higher education, neither can we move forward as a country nor can we reap the rich demographic dividend that is knocking at our doors. Given the vastness of the system of higher education in India, there is too much pressure on NAAC and NBA to accredit the institutions. So, this centralized policy of accreditation should be broken up and power should be delegated to the local authorities to assess and accredit the institutions on a yearly basis, because, it is a common experience that a gap of four years before the next accreditation often diminishes the enthusiasm of the institutions to maintain quality higher education all the time.

V. REFERENCES