

IQAC's Role in Quality Enhancement of Higher Education in Manipur

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Abstract

Quality education is one of the most hackneyed notions, which is yet eluding a clear-cut definition not only in the common parlance but even also in the academic circle. Still more elusive is the idea of quality higher education. At present, higher education is regarded as an engine of growth for any society. It is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources of any country. In India, higher education is of vital importance to build the nation a knowledge-based society in the 21st century, because especially, after independence, the objectives of education in India have changed. Now, the main objective of imparting education to the masses is to achieve the sustainable growth and the production of good citizens of the country, having the basic qualities of the Head, Heart, Hand, Health, Humanity, Harmony, etc. In the 21st century, the war of ideas dominated the scene and the wherewithal for it, no doubt, is higher education. In the arena of education, sustaining quality requires constant efforts. As Foster rightly said, "Quality is never an accident, rather it requires high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution." Quality does not come to us accidentally; rather it requires constant efforts for an individual or an institute to achieve it. Therefore, in terms of enhancing and sustaining quality in higher education, various agencies like UGC, ICSSR, ICHR, ICPR, and NAAC have been making constant efforts by introducing new concepts, guiding principles and measures for developing quality in the institutes of higher learning. Since quality enhancement is a continuous process, the Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) will become a part of the institution's system and work towards the realization of the goals of quality enhancement and sustenance. The present paper attempts to highlight a brief review of the role of IQACs in improving quality education and how they are functioning in higher educational institutes in Manipur.

Key words: Quality education, human resources, sustainable growth, goals of quality enhancement, IQAC.

Introduction:

The Indian system of education, in general, and higher education in particular, has undergone so many changes and also tackled with many challenges since independence. The main objectives of imparting education in India also have changed from time to time according to the changed historical, social, economical and political situation. From teaching the learners the lore of the weapons i.e. *Asthasashtra* and the teaching of Vedas i.e. *Vedasashtra* during the days of Vedas to giving the natives the knowledge of 3 R's i.e. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, to perform menial and clerical jobs during the British period, and now aiming for the sustainable growth and the production of good citizens of the country, having the basic qualities of the *Head, Heart, Hand, Health, Humanity, Harmony*, etc., it has undergone a sea change in its objectives. Higher education in India has also acquired special significance since independence. This has to be gauged in terms of what the society expects from it and the fulfillment of these expectations in terms of

its requirements. Referring to the twenty-first century, which has been acknowledged worldwide as the knowledge-society, every nation now finds itself operating in an increasingly competitive and globalized international environment where the information, infrastructure, research and innovative systems, sustainable education and lifelong learning and regulatory framework are crucial variables.

At present, higher education is regarded as an engine of growth for any society. It is the quality of higher education that decides the quality of human resources of any country. According to a UNESCO Report, in the twenty-first century “higher education is the mandate to bridge the knowledge gap between countries and communities enriching dialogues between people, culture, international living and networking of ideas, research and technologies.” In the 21st century, the war of ideas dominated the scene and the wherewithal for it, no doubt, is higher education. Considering the importance of education in the modern era, the Government of India, under Article 21(A) of the Constitution, has declared for the universalization of primary education for the children between the ages 6 to 14 years. The Government has already launched the much-hyped and ambitious schemes like the *Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)* for the lower primary and upper primary education and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)* for middle school and secondary education. However, these are not the end of the road, particularly keeping in view the needs of the individual as well as the societal demands. There is also the need for universalization of higher education to establish a knowledge-based society. Keeping this hope alive, the Government of India initiated the *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)*. In order to make the mission successful, 278 new universities and 388 colleges have been proposed to establish throughout the country. However, ironically, without the internal quality assurance, the mere establishment of institutes of higher study could not fulfill the dream of having a knowledge-based society.

Quality education has become a necessity as well as a matter of concern in the last one decade or so. The uneasiness prevails among the various stakeholders of education namely, the parents, teachers, students, and employers, etc. In recent times, the number of institutions engaged in providing higher education in the country and the number of students enrolled there increased tremendously. However, now the ‘quality’ in education in comparison with the ‘quantity’ has become the defining element in the twenty-first century. Now quality and excellence should be the vision of every higher educational institute. Consequently, acquisition and enhancement of quality is the greatest challenge faced by almost all the higher educational institutes.

Higher Education and Establishment of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC):

The Indian higher education system faces many challenges since independence; however, our system has responded positively during all these years. An institution that really understands its strength, weaknesses, potentials and limitations is likely to be more effective in carrying out its educational mission. Continuous improvement, self-evaluation and an external peer evaluation are inevitable for quality assurance. There is an urgent need for coordination among different agencies for promotion, advancement, evaluation, assessment and accreditation of quality in higher education. UGC in its 12th plan guidelines focuses on access, equity, quality, promotion of talent, skill development and stand alone schemes. One such substantial change came in the form of NAAC which was established by the UGC at Bangalore as its headquarter in 1994 to ensure and enhance the quality of Indian higher education. NAAC has been instilling a momentum of quality consciousness among higher educational institutions. The prime objective of the accreditation process is to develop a quality-conscious system in higher educational institutes where excellence, relevance to market needs and participation by all the stakeholders are ensured.

NAAC and Establishment of IQACs in the Institutes of Higher Education:

Maintaining the momentum of quality consciousness is crucial in higher educational institutes. NAAC proposes that every accredited institute should establish an IQAC as a post accreditation quality sustenance measure. Since quality enhancement is a continuous process, the IQAC will become a part of an institution's system and work towards realizing the goals of quality sustenance and enhancement. The major concern of the IQAC is to develop a system for conscious and consistent improvement in the overall performance of institution. The IQAC is supposed to look after the improvement of the quality of the colleges in the coming years and accordingly get prepared for the next assessment. The well-defined parameters and guidelines provided by NAAC would facilitate the institutions in the creation and operation of the IQAC. The function of the IQAC and the efficiency of the college administration being interrelated, there should be constant check and balances.

Aims and Objectives of IQAC:

1. To develop a system for conscious, consistent and catalytic action to improve the academic and administrative performance of the institution.
2. To promote measures for institutional functioning towards quality enhancement through internalization of quality culture and institutionalization of best practices.

IQAC Strategies:

1. Ensuring timely, efficient and progressive performance of academic, administrative and financial tasks.
2. The relevance and quality of academic and research programmes.
3. Equitable access to and affordability of academic programmes for various sections of society.
4. Optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning.
5. The credibility of evaluation procedures.
6. Ensuring the adequacy, maintenance and proper allocation of support structure and services.
7. Sharing of research findings and networking with other institutions in India and abroad.

Some of the functions expected of the IQAC are:

1. Development and application of quality benchmarks/parameters for various academic and administrative activities of the institution.
2. Facilitating the creation of a learner-centric environment, conducive to quality education and faculty maturation to adopt the required knowledge and technology for participatory teaching and learning process.
3. Arrangement of feedback response from students, parents and other stakeholders on quality-related institutional processes.
4. Dissemination of information on various quality parameters of higher education.
5. Organization of inter and intra institutional workshops, seminars on quality related themes and promotion of quality circles.
6. Documentation of the various programmes/activities leading to quality improvement.
7. Acting as a nodal agency of the institution for coordinating quality-related activities, including adoption and dissemination of best practices.
8. Development and maintenance of institutional database through MIS for the purpose of maintaining/enhancing the institutional quality.
9. Development of quality culture in the institution.

10. Preparation of the Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) as per guidelines and parameters of NAAC, to be submitted to NAAC.

(Revised Guidelines of NAAC, 2013, p. 3-4)

Role of IQAC Coordinator:

The role of the coordinator of the IQAC is crucial in ensuring the effective functioning of all the members. The coordinator may be a senior person with the expertise in quality aspects. He/she may be a full-time functionary or, to start with, he/she may be a senior academic administrator entrusted with the IQAC as an additional responsibility. Secretarial assistance may be facilitated by the administration. It is preferable that the coordinator may have sound knowledge about the computer, its various functions and usage for effective communication. The coordinator, supervisor of the IQAC and the secretary has a major role in implementing these functions. The IQAC may derive major support from the already existing units and mechanisms that contribute to the functions listed above. The operational features and functions are broad-based to facilitate institutions towards academic excellence and institutes may adapt them their specific needs.

Higher Education Scenario in Manipur:

The history of higher education in Manipur is of recent origin. The first institution of higher education in Manipur was established in 1946 due to the hue and cry of the students who have completed the secondary stage of education. It was an undergraduate college established with the initiative of some local educationists. Later on, it was taken over by the Government and was named after Maharani Dhanamanjuri Devi for her generous donation towards the development of the college. With the establishment of the college, 60 students could receive collegiate education in Manipur. Dhanamanjuri College (D.M. College) played a vital role in the history of higher education in the state. The college was first affiliated to the Calcutta University; later it followed the curriculum and educational programmes of the Guwahati University. The first batch of graduates of D.M. College received their degrees in 1950. D.M. College also served as the nucleus of many other institutions, such as B. T. College, G. P. Women's College, and P.G. Regional Centre of J.N.U., New Delhi. Later on the college has been bifurcated into Arts College, Science College and then a College of Commerce stream is added. At present, D.M. Colleges along with some adjoining institutions are on the verge of converting into a State University (D.M. University) under RUSA scheme. Upto 1948, there was no college for imparting professional education such as Law, Agriculture, Medicine, Engineering, Fine Arts, Dance and Drama, etc. However, in 2017 there are more than 20 professional institutes in Manipur.

Higher education has expanded over the years in Manipur. The number of institutions and the students enrolled there also increased manifold. From only a single college in 1946, today the state has two full-fledged Central Universities and another regional centre of a Central University (Indira Gandhi National Tribal University with its headquarter at Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh). In the year 2016, three universities, two governments and another private, viz. Manipur University of Culture, Manipur Technical University and Sangai International University, were established. At present, a RUSA funded State University is in the pipeline. The two Central Universities mentioned above are Central Agricultural University, Iroisemba, Imphal with various constituent colleges located in all the North-Eastern States including Sikkim, and Manipur University, Imphal, having one constituent college and eighty-six affiliated colleges. Manipur University was established on 5th June, 1980 under the Manipur University Act 1980 as a teaching-cum-affiliating University at Imphal with territorial jurisdiction of the whole of the state of Manipur. Later on, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi Centre of P.G studies at Canchipur, Imphal was merged with the

Manipur University in 1981. On 13th October 2005, Manipur University was converted into a Central University.

In Manipur, the total number of NAAC accredited Colleges is 17 out of 86 Colleges/Institutes. The percentage is very low if we compare it with some other advanced states in the country. The detail is given below:

Sl. No.	Type of College/Institute	NAAC accredited Colleges/Institutes
1.	Government Colleges	11
2.	Private Colleges	02
3.	Aided Colleges	04
4.	Technical Institutes and others	00
Total		17

Quality education is one of the most hackneyed notions, which is yet eluding a clear-cut definition not only in the common parlance but also even in the academic circle. Still more elusive is the idea of quality higher education. To give a quantitative measure of the quality of education achieved by a student is a really hazy concept. Many academic authorities are still groping to find the appropriate devices to quantify the achievements of their graduates. The progress of higher education in the state in terms of quality is not encouraging. The quality of education provided in the colleges has been deteriorated due to the mushroom growth of private colleges in the state. These colleges are without proper infrastructures and proper facilities. In the government institutions, at the organizational level, the anti-education attitude and the policies of the politicians and the mismanagement, corruption, and antagonistic method of working by the cumbersome bureaucrat officers provide the greatest obstacle in the development of higher quality education.

At the individual level, majority of the students in the colleges of Manipur appear to have anticipated at the time they entered the college that their higher education at the secondary school stage would help them better their employment prospects. They seem to continue their study without definite objective. Many of them do not have keen interest in higher learning. They come to the colleges in the hope of getting mere degrees and jobs for which only such education would qualify them. The number of competent teachers in the college is short of requirement. The norms set out by the UGC are ignored in recruiting the teachers. The gap between the students and teachers, and students to students has also widened in Manipur. The academic interactions between teachers and students and among students themselves have been very limited. Even the serious-minded students do not have much chance of developing their potentialities.

Role of IQAC in ensuring Quality Enhancement of Higher Education:

In such a scenario, the role of IQAC can be very instrumental in re-structuring and re-modifying the overall developmental parameters of the higher educational institutes. The Principal, being the chairman of IQAC, the coordinator and its members should be able to create a conducive atmosphere in terms of core elements stated by NAAC like teaching and learning, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, teachers' academic and professional development, research and consultancy, students' supportive services etc. The head of the institute and the coordinator of IQAC should chalk out a plan in the beginning of the academic year and try to implement as effectively as possible. The IQAC should see how maximum number of teachers shall participate in National and International Conferences and other research activities and trainings. The IQAC should also make constant efforts in terms of providing students supportive services

properly to the students of the college and also see how maximum numbers of students take part in all these students' supportive services.

The IQAC should play a key role in planning, monitoring and evaluating the academic activities of the institution. It should devise an academic calendar, and generally the academic calendar should incorporate teaching and practical schedule, examination slots, guest lecturers (if any), tours and excursion, local programme and institutional activities, industrial visit, co-curricular and extra-curricular and cultural activities and research activities. Moreover, IQAC should also conduct regular meetings of the faculty members and the staff to evaluate and monitor the academic plan from time to time.

The role of the IQAC can also be instrumental in bringing about some positive change in the administration of the college. It should also arrange some orientation sessions for administrative staff and other supportive staff of the college so that a sense of responsibility can be instilled among them. It should also see that the administrative work is decentralized. Another crucial thing is that IQAC should also involve other stakeholders like management, alumni and parent-teacher association members and industrial officials.

Expectations from the System:

Birds migrate in search of a favourable climate. Likewise, students who have just passed their secondary examinations are looking for better education in other states or abroad. The youthful energy thirst for a happening place and a college campus is one such place. Our colleges are not built up to the mark. The energy in the youth is made dull and dormant with no vision in the state. These can be solved by making our state an educational hub. The dream of an educational hub could be fulfilled if we can stop the larger percentage of migrating students. If the Government, the department concerned and various stakeholders are ready to accept this challenging task with the right step and rectify the previous wrongdoings, the climate will change. In this knowledge-age and knowledge-economy, our students should dance to the best tunes. Therefore, what every student and their parents are expecting is to let our college-goers enjoy well-equipped colleges, play in the big campus, have the best teachers, enjoy the world-class interactions through invitation lectures, surf the globe through ICT and internet. If the environment is not conducive and disturbing, there should be residential colleges for them. There must be very less political and bureaucratic interference in the functioning of these colleges and provided more autonomy. A congenial atmosphere for growth must be created to observe and witness the ability of these resourceful youths. Education in a knowledge-driven world, which is already flattened by a strong brainwave, needs to be reoriented keeping in view the imperatives of SCALE (thinking big), SKILL (professionalism) and SCIENTIFIC TEMPER (experimenting with truth, research, discovery and invention). We need to encourage our young minds "out-of-well-thinking", imagination and innovation. The investments made in education should be considered as long term investment for humanity.

We have good teachers and resourceful students but we lack investors in higher education. Planning and investment should be solely demand driven. Contractor-oriented ventures create wastage of public expenditure. The various institutions in the state are at different levels of development, and their needs and demands are different. It would be an excellent idea to create a "Knowledge pool" with resource persons drawn from surplus institutions to cater to the needs of deficit institutions. Besides, academic exchange programmes should promote knowledge sharing and sense of fraternity among the teachers as well as the institutions. All these are possible to a great extent when the academic institutions are vibrant and have good health. The IQACs in the colleges can actually go a long way in re-energizing the entire system.

Conclusion:

The role of IQAC for quality enhancement in higher education is distinct and important as it works for improving and maintaining the quality. The work of the IQAC is the first step towards internalization and institutionalization of quality enhancement initiatives. Its success depends upon the sense of belongingness and participation it can inculcate among the various constituents of the institute. Quality and excellence are results of team work spearheaded by the leaders like principal and coordinator of IQAC. However, the leaders should work on the guidelines with proper realization of the democratic role of the agencies and the accountability of their own role. If quality is to be assured, we need a structured quality assurance mechanism that makes it possible to monitor, improve and evaluate quality. Therefore, each and every institution will have to build its own IQACs keeping in mind certain objectives like monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance for specific activities etc. The role of IQAC is instrumental in bringing about so many positive changes in and around the college premises. Moreover, it can create a very good academic atmosphere in the institutional premises so that the quality is maintained and enhanced.

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