

REFINING THE QUALITY MATRICES FOR UPGRADING EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Educational standards are constantly confronted with new benchmarks. Therefore, it gets imperative for educational institutions to improve upon their performance matrices by drawing legal mileage from quality parameters prescribed by accreditation bodies of India. Adherence to quality norms can yield a two-way benefit for educational institutions: (i) Facilitate branding (ii) Up-gradation of teaching standards. This conceptual paper employing qualitative data analysis aims at revisiting and subsequently refining the quality parameters of educational institutions. Inductive mechanism has been applied after subjecting the extensive literature to content analysis and conceptual framework analysis. The exploratory nature of the paper holds promise for policy makers, quality assurance personnel and academicians in higher education and would act as a curtain raiser for those academic institutions which are yearning for excellence via quality based momentum.

Keywords: Accreditation bodies, Branding, Higher education, Quality assurance, Quality parameters.

1. OBJECTIVE

To refine the mannerism in which convergence of various quality parameters possess the potential to drift the status of higher education in India in the direction of excellence.

2. INTRODUCTION

Quality remains a prime concern of academia across the globe and numerous efforts in multiple directions are constantly being made by the administrators and academicians to encourage this component into the teaching-learning scenario. The requisite to boost the quality of higher education is muscicularly felt when the students are observed struggling in the global work environment, professions and technical fields oppressed with compromised professionalism and excellence. This in creates obstacles in way of national growth and prosperity. A fact that is evident from the establishment of Quality Enhancement Cells in general and that of professional universities, Quality Assurance office in the Higher Education Commission and ISO Certified academic institutions, is that, even in the local contexts quality is becoming the pivotal point of all academic policies and practices. In the developing nations also, currently, there is a paradigm shift in the value system pertaining to education and those involved intensively in education have laid impetus on the missing quality factor in their respective education scenario which has condensed all efforts in the direction of training and grooming of masses as completely ineffective. The NAAC and NBA are frolicking a crucial role by accrediting the institutions of higher learning and awarding the grades of quality and excellence. In case of NAAC, various quality parameters have been emphasized like a) Teaching & Learning b) Student Support & Progression c) Infrastructure & Learning Resources d) Research & Extension Activities e) Governance & Leadership f) Innovative Practices g) Best Practices h) Financial Requirements i) Stakeholders Role. Quality resources can take various forms like

physical, i.e. infrastructure, labs, furniture, building, books, research journals, equipment, etc.; human resource, i.e. faculty members, administration and other support staff; financial, i.e. funds to carry on diverse projects and operational cash to run day to day affairs. Satisfactory, incessant and timely availability and utilization of such resources assure the proper execution of policies that are pertinent to achieve quality objectively. This paper aims at focusing on various quality parameters and the extent to which these quality parameters need to be adhered to in order to accentuate concrete branding of institutions of higher learning.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality in education is perceived as a positive and dynamic ideology that is achievable by design with meaningful investment (Crawford and Shuttler, 1999). The pursuit for quality should necessarily reflect a customer-oriented approach with continual up gradation of the products / services, and equally of the processes brought about by the (i) planning (ii) implementing (iii) evaluating and (iv) decision making methods (Navaratnam, 1997). Quality management is a process of (i) value addition (ii) conformance of education output to planned goal (iii) specifications and requirements, observed as a unique opportunity to answer to global challenges in achieving a predictable outcome and to better serve their stakeholders (Mukhopadhyay, 2002). Quality, in the present epoch, has emerged as a decisive factor in determining the success / failure of any service (Singh, 2008). In view of the significance of quality, there is a dire need in the nation for the development of knowledge & understanding of the practice of quality assurance in context to higher education (Dahiya, 2001). Teacher education is accountable for producing quality educators, where documentation of quality norms and the overall process of their operationalization is extremely intricate (Yadav et al., 2011). In context to teacher education, quality refers to the continuous quest for excellence, consistency in fairness, client satisfaction, suitable identification, optimum utilization of resources and also augment the generation of resources finally leading to the achievement of institutional goals (Arya, P.P., 2006). Quality philosophies in higher education are (i) meeting customer needs (ii) continuous improvement (iii) leadership (iv) human resource development (v) motivation (vi) appreciation and reward (vii) coordinated teamwork (viii) evaluation and (ix) decision making (Seymour, 1992). Quality education is attained when educational output follows the planned goals, and adheres to specifications and all requirements (Crosby, 1979).

FACETS OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PARAMETERS

a) Curriculum

Curriculum is the blueprint which identifies the direction in which the educational journey has to be made. Therefore, theory and practicum (application based study) should be in justified proportion in the curriculum. Additionally, myriad of contemporary issues & challenges evolving in the field of modern education system should also be included (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Quality in education profoundly rests on the quality of the curriculum in terms of the (i) objectives and outcomes (ii) materials and methods (iii) contents and credits and (iv) assessment criteria (v) audio-visual aids. The effect of different religious, social, linguistic, racial and regional groups in emergent India's amalgamated culture and nationhood need to be clearly given due weightage (NCTE, 2004). Sensible usage of technology might provide a platform to the educators to facilitate learning via such a multi-cultural mode (Banks, 1997). There must necessary be the provision of curricular evaluation that follows a scientific and systematic approach. Innovative experiences should be fused in the new curriculum in view of all the above mentioned essential considerations (Arya, 2006). The process of curriculum development and the final product is prejudiced by the facts that change in curriculum is the normal expected outcome of changes in the environment. Draft members of curriculum own the responsibility to seek multiple ways of making continuous enhancements in the curriculum; curriculum is a body of knowledge and skills for which training and it represents an organized set of principles; curriculum planning gets activated with empirical study of the needs of (i) students (ii) society and (iii) the disciplines and curriculum planners should essentially conduct systematic needs assessment to detect the discrepancies existing between desired and actual performance of students (Oliva, 1997; Oliver, 1977; Taba, 1962).

b) Evaluation

Summative as well as formative mode of evaluation both are essential for a holistic evaluation. Evaluation of both the students and teachers should always be comprehensive and unceasing (Ahmand, 2008). Due importance needs to be given to the opinions of school teachers and supervisors who maintain the progress record of the students & teachers. Emphasis for student performance evaluation should be given on the internal examination, rather than on external pattern (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). The major concerns of evaluation should be (i) the capacity to organize thoughts and express them coherently (ii) using teaching aids and ICT carefully at the appropriate moment (iii) taking notes from reading materials (Singh, 1990). Latest evaluation techniques like (i) self-assessment (ii) peer group evaluation of trainee teachers (iii) evaluation in terms of teacher educators' opinion by making use of rating scale etc. may be introduced. The end semester examination should be supplemented by continuous evaluation, on the basis of which holistic feedback may be provided to the pupils. Continuous evaluation need to be practiced throughout the entire tenure of the academic program.

c) Faculty Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

Faculty knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) are pivotal in bringing quality to higher education. Curriculum, policies and socioeconomic factors can improve academics only if the teachers are fortified with the knowledge, skills and supports. Quality is observed to be directly proportional to the quality of teachers because what students learn is directly an outcome of what and how teachers teach; and this, in turn, is dependable upon the knowledge, skills and commitments they bring to their teaching tactics (Nemser, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Reeves 2000). Educational establishments are also termed as human systems since the process is carried out by faculty (as the primary input) and is enacted on students (as the output of the entire effort). In practice, they are observed as the primary agents of invigorating quality in education (Zaki, 2006). Besides providing opportunities for further education and research enrichment programs, both (i) pre-service and (ii) in-service trainings could be organized to work on faculty KSA. Training & development should be premeditated in three areas viz. (a) subject domain (b) education psychology (c) modern teaching methods.

d) Institutional Design and Strategy

Structural dimensions include (i) formalization (ii) hierarchy of authority (iii) centralization (iv) specialization and (v) professionalism; whereas contextual dimensions consist of (i) size (ii) environment (iii) organizational technology (iv) goals and strategy and (v) culture (Greenberg and Baron, 2003). An education institution essentially provides the sustaining support to implement the strategies and policies premeditated to achieve holistic quality education. Such a quality institution can have numerous dimensions and designs of structure; however, two basic dimensions viz. (i) structural dimension and (ii) contextual dimension are considered substantial (Daft, 2001). An effective design augments the quality and helps in accomplishing the desired results. It also provides the platform for setting up various quality metrics to compute and measure the 'quality' on a continuous basis. The organizational design principally interacts with various other factors like curriculum, faculty KSA, and transferring of knowledge.

e) Institutional Leadership

Leadership is a distinctive trait which is exhibited via special characteristics of the individual entities, and the kinds of accomplishments they visualize and eventually carry out for leading their association and the set of people who are to follow them. House et al. in 1999 has defined leadership as "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization...." (as described by Yukl, 2006). The overall concept of leadership also embraces the ability to (a) "envision strategic contingencies" (Daft, 2001, p. 453) (b) to counter uncertainty (c) to implement dynamic decision making and (d) to organize interdependencies and networks (Daft, 2001).

f) Quality Management in Teacher Education

In contemporary times, education policy makers are fully aware of the fact that if quality in maintaining education is ignored, then, reflective adverse effects are bound to be created in the society. This, in turn, condenses the concept of viewing, "education as means to harmonize and develop societies" to a sheer fantasy (Holt, 2000, UNESCO, 1996). Various indispensable and necessary criterion and initiatives to be taken for an operative quality

management program in the field of teacher education has been suggested by Singh, G (2009, in Yadav *et al.*, 2011). These may be broadly summed up as follows- (a) Commitment of management and governing body (b) Identification of Quality areas (c) Appointment of Quality Assurance Cells (d) SWOT analysis (e) Design of Process and Objectives (f) Awareness about quality aspects (g) Establishment of various steering committees. The insinuation of quality management via this manner may help an establishment to achieve quality standards in various fields by ensuring accountability, customer satisfaction, credibility and finally in maintaining a certain standard of excellence.

g) Quality oriented Challenges & Opportunities in way of Higher Education

Challenges		Opportunities	
1	To escalate the enrollment of students.	1	By assisting the poor via financial assistance.
2	To diminish the dropout rate at school level.	2	By motivating the students to enroll in courses of Higher Education.
3	To utilize distance education mode for knowledge seekers.	3	By imparting personal counseling at school level to stimulate them to continue learning till P.G. level.
4	To deliver fair and free education to the enrolled students.	4	By adoption of 'earn while learn system' for all the courses at higher education.
5	Adoption of Student- centric approach in the education system.	5	By using knowledge centric examination system and emphasizing on application aspect.
6	Maintenance of proper control by the Government bodies to ensure quality.	6	Stringent action against those institutions which do not maintain quality.
7	Making usage of ICT to assist audio visual based learning.	7	Use of numerous advanced techniques for learning and teaching.
8	To augment research awareness among students and teachers for finding various solutions to social problems.	8	By connecting research with daily life and consumption.

[Source: NASSCOM Survey Report 2011.]

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Type of Research: Qualitative research
- Type of Research Paper: Conceptual
- Research Design: Exploratory
- Tools of Qualitative Research used: (a) Content Analysis
(b) Conceptual framework analysis
- Data Mining Technique: Systematic search methodology
- Source of Data: Secondary data repositories (both online and print journals)

5. FINDINGS

As per the vast review of literature and the conceptual framework analysis applied, the following are possible deductions:

- Curriculum development is perceived as a multilevel, multi-sector process and as a collaborative effort for achieving institutional branding on a global scale.

- The educational curriculum needs to be devised so as to involve the affective, spiritual, societal, psychological and cognitive personality traits of the learners and practicable in diverse pedagogical settings inside the class and the workplace, through appropriate pedagogical actions.
- Historical, philosophical, psychological, and sociological aspects of education are foundation pillars on which the brand elements of higher educational institutions may be based.
- Knowledge, skills and attitudes are the basis of developing a branded institution of higher learning but regular quality assessment of the same is imperative.
- Accreditation bodies need to lay impetus on strengthening the research acumen of the faculty and students enrolled in higher education courses.
- Quality analysis of the higher educational centers should have quantitative metrics so that determination of quality may be quantified in real world corrective terms.

6. CONCLUSION

Quality in higher education will escalate the quality of the students passing out which will open frontiers of employability in organizations not only in India but also abroad which will, in turn, upsurge the status of the students and subsequently help the country in producing quality wise good citizens. The practices and policies of higher education should be in coherence with the international criteria and must be strictly considered as the standard framework for all individuals and institutions working within the ambit of higher education. In Indian context, in order to sustain the interest of the pupils' community, the quality of higher education needs to be purposefully sustained so that it attracts the best of the youth intellectual capital. Rather than merely acting as a policy drafting and regulatory body, the role of Higher Education, through its quality parameters must attempt to act as umbrella institution to push forward the existing reference point of current quality standards in a positive direction. The nexus between quality parameters such as course curriculum, knowledge, skills and attitudes of faculty members, departmental research acumen and the concept of feedback for improvement must be tightly knitted. Nation empowerment would be arduous without a quality bait for the youth to educationally grow and advance. This paper has also identified some of the key concerns of higher education and the probable solutions for the same. The role of effective governance and sustained leadership to manage the undertakings of higher education was also found to be of paramount importance for aiming excellence. However, conquering quality at its excellence as an upshot of the academic interventions, is still surmounted by immense impeding factors that inhibits the basic appreciation of the present scenario of higher education and retards in achieving full bloom.

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