

Quality Management in Indian Higher Education System: Role of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)

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Abstract: The primary objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of both the higher education institutions and students on the various quality deliverables in the Indian higher education system along with careful observation of the role of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in sustaining quality delivery of education service. The research study reviewed the germane literature on higher education and quality management in higher education. Then, the researchers used two separate questionnaires to gather the opinions of 10 higher education institutions and 250 students on quality of education service delivery in the first quarter of this year from the Pune district of Maharashtra state. The collected data was analyzed with the support of Microsoft Excel software packages. The findings of the analysis confirmed that institutions were confidently provided academic activity reflecting their goals and objectives with highly qualified faculty through an eclectic approach with the support of research with ample focus on library and community services. Students also expressed different wavering perceptions on the academic activity, faculty communication skills, motivation and mentoring etc. Only 33 and 80% students uttered positively about the faculty subject knowledge and sports, and infrastructure facilities provided by the institution. In a nut shell, both institutions and students insisted for more constructive role from the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in protecting the quality of higher education.

Key words: Higher education, higher education institutions, students, Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), quality

INTRODUCTION

In the present era of knowledge driven economic situation, every country in the World always planning to improve the quality of their human resources with the support of most successful and vibrant economic policies viz., Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization (LPG). In improving the quality of human resources, higher education institutions in India has been playing prominent role in developing knowledge community or societies and knowledgeable youth with an intention to present a status to the country as a "Modern Knowledge Hub of World". Eleventh five year plan has focused on the development of "Inclusive Education System" (equitable distribution of education) of higher education. Globalization of higher education needs to be treated as an opportunity to Indian higher education system to stretch and further strengthen so as to meet aspirations and the demands of the young generations of the country. Subsequently, Central Government and HRD Ministry of India planned and successfully introduced "Higher Education Reform Bill-2010 (NCHER Bill, 2010) with a mission in mind to

completely revamp the higher education system in the country.

After the establishment of University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1953, India has formulated "National Policy on Education" of 1986 and Program of Action of 1992. The 1986 policy and Action Plan of 1992 was based on two land marks report viz., the "University Education Commission" of 1948-49 (popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission), and the "Education Commission" of 1964-66, (popularly known as Kothari Commission Report). The National Policy on Higher Education of 1986 translate the vision of Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commission in five principal goals for higher education which include Greater Access, Equal Access (or equity), Quality and Excellence, Relevance and Promotion of Social Values. Higher education is a powerful tool to build knowledge for an information based society. The core mission of higher education is to educate, train, undertake, research and provide service to the community. In the rapidly changing global scenario the accent is on change and much more than that adopting to change through enabling operational structure. Therefore, knowledge commission has suggested

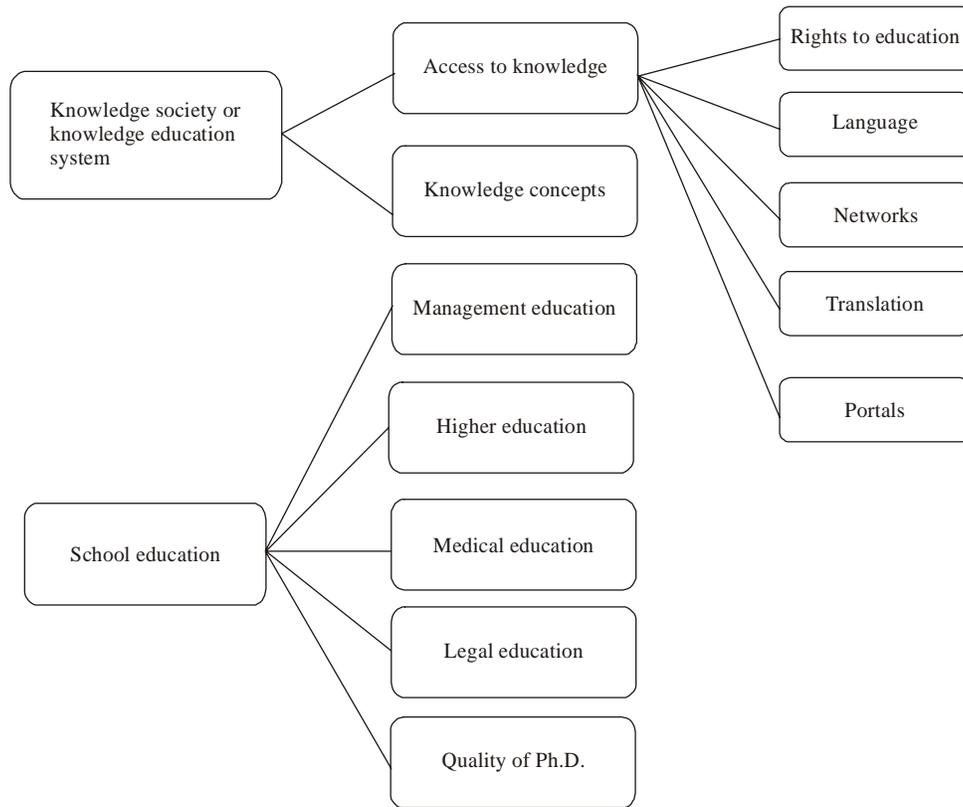


Fig. 1: Structure of knowledge education system suggested by knowledge commission

knowledge society or knowledge education system structure as provided in the following Fig. 1.

As seen from the above chart knowledge will be generated through education systems. Access to knowledge, knowledge concepts, creation of knowledge, knowledge applications all these concepts make knowledge hub approachable to globally from India (National Knowledge Commission Report, 2009). Knowledge means the awareness or familiarity gained by experience, a person's range of information, a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

HIGHER EDUCATION

In a society full of miscellany, thoughts and beliefs, higher education means diverse things to dissimilar people. The pluralism of views is quite unavoidable and some would opine it should be like that only. According Barnett (1992) there are four predominant concepts of higher education:

- Higher education as the production of qualified human resources. In this view, higher education is seen as a process in which the students are counted as "products" absorbed in the labor market. Thus,

higher education becomes input to the growth and development of business and industry.

- Higher education as training for a research career. In this view, higher education is preparation for qualified scientists and researchers who would continuously develop the frontiers of knowledge. Quality within this viewpoint is more about research publications and transmission of the academic rigor to do quality research.
- Higher education as the efficient management of teaching provision. Many strongly believe that teaching is the core of educational institutions. Thus, higher education institutions focus on efficient management of teaching-learning provisions by improving the quality of teaching, enabling a higher completion rate among the students.
- Higher education as a matter of extending life chances. In this view, higher education is seen as an opportunity to participate in the development process of the individual through a flexible, continuing education mode.

Quality in higher education: Quality means the ability of a product or service to deliver its function. Quality does not apply only to the product or service itself; it also

applies to the people, processes and organizational environment associated with it. For instance the quality of an institution is judged not only by the quality of faculty, staff and course offerings but also by the efficiency and accuracy of processing paper work. Quality means performance, reliability, durability, service ability, tangible factors, consistency, responsiveness to students' needs/friendliness, timeliness, atmosphere. Juran (1989) defined quality as 'fitness for purpose'. According to him, a product or service can meet its specification and yet not be fit for its purpose. The specification may be faulty and thus the specification should be what the customer wants. The British Standard Institution (BSI) (1991) defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". Quality is an attribute which can be seen or observed when no one is watching you. "What is quality education?" A simple question but one that is difficult to answer: A quality education depends on what your objectives are and what you are going to do with the education. For example, a quality education will differ depending on whether you want to get a management position at a small business or a Ph.D. in philosophy. Defining a quality education depends on the stake you have in the institution that provides the education, whether you are a professor, student, administrator, or a company that hires students and graduates. In addition, a definition of a quality education must recognize that any education is a part of a system (Stoner *et al.*, 2008). Quality of higher education completely depends on the quality of faculty and the quality of the students' support system. In simple words quality is 100% purity of knowledge acquired by faculty and standards set up by the higher education institution to transform the present state of knowledge of the students' community to face upcoming challenges effectively and efficiently. Quality management in higher education sector consists of quality assurance, quality control and quality improvements. The term quality management has been using by higher education institutes towards overall development of education system.

The Indian Higher Education system is in a constant state of change and flux due to the increasing needs of expanding access to higher education, impact of technology on the delivery of education, increasing private participation and the impact of globalization. After careful consideration of these, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (2004) has developed the following five core values which were mentioned in NAAC (2004) document on Guidelines for Re-Accreditation. These five core values are: contributing to national development, fostering global competencies among students, inculcating a value system in students and promoting the use of technology and quest for excellence. Brilliance in all that they do will put in to the overall progress of the system of higher education. The

seven criteria developed by NAAC to measure excellence are in fact the main processes for developing the capabilities of an institution. The seven criteria are: curricular aspects; teaching, learning and evaluation; research, consultancy and extension; infrastructure and learning resources; student support and progression; governance and leadership; and innovative practices. Establishment of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in each of the Higher Education Institution would help develop and raise their capabilities as institutions. With an intension to monitor and improve the institution's internal quality in all the above mentioned seven criteria given by NAAC, establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) is imperative.

The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) being promoted by NAAC has the task building on the benefits of self study process. The IQAC is to make the internal quality checks and robust functioning in upgrading of the specific areas viz., curriculum design and development, teaching, learning and evaluation process; research and consultancy; infrastructure development which are essential to get a prominent response from NAAC. The NAAC also has an effective and efficient internal coordinating and monitoring mechanism which is closely monitors the IQAC's efforts in improving the quality of education in the respective education institution. As per NAAC guidelines, establishment of IQAC in every higher education institution who is planning to get NAAC grading is an imperative task to continuously monitor the quality of education. Quality assurance is the core responsibility of everyone in an educational institution, though the think-tank of the institution sets the policies and priorities. Hence, assuring quality should be an incessant and enduring process in delivering the best services in any higher education institution. It should not be mull over as a onetime activity for accreditation along. Here, IQAC has to take up the responsibility to maintain consistency in delivery of quality educational services to the students' community by frequent monitoring of all the quality dimensions in higher education viz., various tangibles, competence of academic staff, attitudinal displays of all the staff in the institution, relevance of content and its delivery, and reliability in every aspect.

Total Quality Management (TQM) based model that helps to create a world- class higher education system for performance excellence and global leadership. TQM is a guide to continuous improvement. If we have been adopting TQM as an integrated philosophy in higher education systems helps to improve the quality at each and every level. Effective implementation of TQM definitely requires sufficient and proper time because ever growing number of students, increasing competitions, access to education through distance mode, easy accessibility to Internet, inadequate involvement of students in learning, lack of proper communication among faculty, staff and students, lack of accountability and

responsibility, governments' poor policy framework etc. TQM is management approach or strategy aimed at embedding awareness of quality in all higher education institutions processes, on which higher education institution must strive to continuously improve these processes by incorporating the knowledge and expertise of students.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted with a principal objective to know the role Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in the Pune city's educational institutions in improving the quality of deliverables in all aspects of the institution. In enhancing the quality in any higher education institution, it is an imperative to establish IQAC to enjoy the benefits to improve the overall quality of the human resource. Sustainable growth in human development index is a challenging task to country's higher education system in general and every higher education institution in particular in achieving the goal to become a superpower by 2020 in every aspect. This study was carried out in India's most advanced city Pune by using both primary as well as secondary sources of information gathering with a sample of ten higher education institutions along with two hundred and fifty students from those ten institutions to cross validate the opinions of higher educational institutions. The researchers collected the data from the higher education institutions of Pune district of Maharashtra state in the first quarter of this year that went for NAAC accreditation with the support of their Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) which has established to continuously check the quality aspects in delivering the expecting level of service. The researchers used the simple random sampling for choosing the respondents and with the support of both questionnaires and personal interviews from different authorities along with the main respondents, the data was collected and analyzed by using simple frequency distribution. The researchers also used some important secondary data sources like past research studies, NAAC documents, commission reports, books,

journals, magazines and Internet to get crucial information about the concerned literature required to support this study. This study was limited only to the higher education institutions and students of those institutions from the Pune district of Maharashtra state.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers used two kinds of questionnaires each for higher education institutions and students of those institutions to exactly know the opinions about the quality dimensions of the service delivery particularly in the Pune city which is a knowledge hub of India. Those institutions that went for NAAC recognition only approached to gather the perceptions on different quality aspects while delivering the service as well as the nurtured efforts from the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) while maintaining those standards in the higher education institutions.

As per the perceptions of higher education institutions depicted in the Table 1, researchers found that institutions provide academic activities reflecting their goals and objectives and also make available library, community services and received research grants as per the standards of NAAC. These institutions also recruited highly qualified faculty with the qualifications of either NET/SLET/Ph.D. and has been delivering expected level of quality lectures keeping in mind the quality faculty is the backbone of any higher education institution. These higher institutions totally failed in finding new collaborative projects as well as to generate patents also. Again in arranging faculty development programs, and conducting seminars, workshops, and providing sports and recreation facilities, genuine evaluation process, 90% success these institutions are enjoying. Regarding placements, these respondent institutions are not that much confident because corporate sector is choosing professional course students to fill their vacant positions in view of the knowledge and maturity these students' have. While maintaining quality aspects throughout the service delivery process, all the higher education

Table 1: Higher education institutions' perception on different quality dimensions

Quality dimensions	Positive opinion (%)	Negative opinion (%)
Academic activities reflecting goals & objectives of the institution	100	00
New academic programs initiated (UG/PG) and Innovations in curriculum design	40	60
Examinations reforms implemented	10	90
Faculty qualified NET/SLET/Ph.D.	100	00
Initiation towards Faculty Development Programs	90	10
No. of seminars/workshops/research projects	90	10
New collaborative research projects/ patents generated	00	100
Research grants received	100	00
Honors and awards to faculty	80	20
Community services	100	00
Library strength	100	00
Genuinity in the evaluation process	90	10
Technology up-gradation, Internet & computer facilities	95	05
Sports and Recreation Facilities	90	10
Placement facilities	30	70

Table: 2: Studnets' perception on quality deliverables

Dimensions	Good (%)	Averag (%)	Poor (%)
Ability to bring conceptual clarity	29	54	17
Motivation and mentoring	38	18	44
Faculty communication skills	38	21	41
Faculty regularity and punctuality	23	24	53
Faculty subject knowledge	33	21	46
Faculty teaching skills	30	27	43
Perception towards curriculum and its suitability	40	35	25
Library and placement facilities	35	20	45
Sports and recreation facilities	80	15	05
Basic infrastructure facilities	80	10	10
Non-teaching staff cooperation	30	40	30

institutions are totally depending on the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC). While gathering information through informal personal interviews, these targeted institutions' officials expressed some mixed responses towards the establishment as well as on the working of IQAC. As per the perceptions of officials of these higher education institutions, this cell is too active before NAAC committee visit to the institution and after completion of the visit; it is utterly inactive just by simply forgetting the main objective in establishing this cell. Whenever this cell has shown this kind of duel nature, it is an uphill task to maintain and reach expected level of quality in delivering the education service. To avoid this sort of nature, the think-tank of the higher education institutions has to take some precautionary measures in activating and sustaining the existence of IQAC throughout the academic year and also take necessary action to deliver its basic functioning without any lenience in protecting the quality aspects in deliver the basic function of any higher education institution. At the end, the existence of IQAC is imperative task of any higher education institution who plans to deliver best quality education but everybody realized only it can be possible with the existence of this cell round the year.

The researchers succeeded to gather the perceptions of students in receiving quality education service by raising the questions related to different quality deliverables like the abilities of faculty to provide basic infrastructure. The researchers observed quite contrasting perceptual displays on different quality issues of higher education when compared to the opinions of higher education institutions.

As mentioned in the Table 2, the researchers used another questionnaire to gather the perceptions of students' community about the quality deliverables of the institution. Regarding the ability to bring conceptual clarity on different courses, only 29% students expressed positive opinion against only 17% negative whereas remaining 54% of students contend their satisfaction levels between positive and negative. While enquired about the motivation and mentoring, 44% students were

stated that these skills were poor among the faculty as against 38% said moderate skills in this regard. Concerning the faculty communication skills, regularity and punctuality, 47% students were dissatisfied while 30% expressed satisfactory replies. Pertaining to the teaching community's subject knowledge and teaching skills, 31.5% students in the total 250 respondents articulated that their teaching staff was good enough in this aspect. Relating to library, placements, and perception towards curriculum, only 25% students come-up with poor response as against 37.5% students' positive opinion. 80% of students were come across with positive response towards sports and infrastructure facilities provided by the higher institutions and 30% of students positively reacted towards the cooperative of non-teaching staff as against another 30% reacted negatively. In our informal discussion with the targeted students' community, they are demanding more constructive and lead role from the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in monitoring as well as introducing breakthrough mechanism to continuously watch over the quality affected areas in the higher education institution and also demanding for frequent interactions with all the stakeholders of the institutions to introduce modifications in the existing plans, policies, programs, strategies, as well as budgets of the institution.

CONCLUSION

An Internal Quality Assurance Cell has to play crucial role in protecting the quality of education service in India. The establishment of this cell is a mandatory task before every higher education institution that is planning to go for NAAC accreditation. Educational institution, NAAC, AICTE, UGC and state and central governments has to impose certain kind of restrictions on every higher education institution in quality aspects of the service delivery which will place them in certain pressure in different quality dimensions. Now everybody has realized the importance of quality deliverables in this sector to protect the local institutions from the foreign institutions which has already entered into the country and received prominent response from the prospective students'. If our higher education institutions and regulatory bodies failed to maintain quality aspects in delivering the quality education service; those institutions definitely will disappear from the education map of India. Therefore sustaining quality in this crucial sector which will mould the future of our upcoming generations is a prime responsibility of our education system which will be possible only through continuous monitoring with the support of Internal Quality Assurance Cell of every higher education institution.

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