ROLE OF IQAC IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Higher education system is on the brink of great transformations to cape with globel competence. It is the prime responsibility of IQAC to initiate, plan and supervise a various activities which are necessary to increase, the quality of education imparted in institutions and colleges. The roll of IQAC in maintaining quality standards in teaching, learning and evaluation becomes crucial and the present research is therefore undertaken on a smaller scale to determine the exact status and function of IQAC and its outcome. This system is one of the third largest higher education system in the world, comprising 975university, 39671 affiliated colleges 1015695 teaching faculty and 23764960 students. The overall quality of higher education is the main concern in policy framing and for that it has been made mandatory to obtain accreditatin higher education institution (HEGs) by the NAAC to improve quality. Maintaining quality is a long term goal, To reach this long term goal NAAC has established detailed guidelines from time to time. It can promote and determine quality related activities and issues through various programmes and activities such as seminars, workshops, sysmosia, conferences, panel discussion, role playing exercises, demonstration, case studies, academic meeting and any such kind of event or programme for all the stake holders of the institutions .

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India was established as an autonomous body in September 1994 by the University Grants Commission (UGC), as an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (1986). It was intended both to assess and accredit institutions of higher education and to assess the quality of education that they offered. Although the experience of accreditation in India is therefore only ten years old, it should be seen in the context of the quality controls that have been exercised in the Indian higher education system for the past 150 years, most of them a legacy of the British rule. In independent India, the various regulations on minimum requirements for the establishment and expansion of institutions of higher education are well established. The inspections and audits by the state governments, the affiliating function of the universities (for colleges), the performance appraisal of universities by the UGC, and the reviews by the funding agencies—all have contributed to ensuring 'satisfactory functioning'. Inspection and certification by professional bodies, which is primarily a recognition or approval process, has been in place for a long time. With such regulatory and

recognition mechanisms already in place, the process of national accreditation aims at higher levels of quality assurance.

Contextualising the Assessment Model:

The variations in the international practices of quality assurance are mainly a reflection of unique national contexts. The NAAC interpreted the experiences of other countries in the light of the distinct characteristics of the Indian context. Based on the contextual, considerations, the NAAC took a clear line in addressing aspects such as: its role in

1.   Quality assessment,
2.   The nature of the assessment process,
3.   The focus of assessment,
4.   The linking of the assessment outcome to-funding,
5.   The unit of assessment,
6.   The policy on disclosure of the assessment report,
7.   The assessment outcome and the period of validity.

Quality Assessment

Quality assessment is a part of quality assurance that focuses on assessment of fulfilling quality requiremeuts. Quality assessment is a way of preventing mistakes of defects in present process and avoiding problems when delivering solutions.IQAC incorporate teacher quality assessment as well as student quality assessment. In quality assessmentthere should other factors alsoinclueded

1.Quality binding   2.Quality conlrol

3.Quality factor   4. Quality of life

The Nature of the process :

The NAAC made assessment voluntary and promoted the concept that accreditation was meant for quality institutions and that my not be suitable for the ones that might be still struggling with basic problems. This was because in India,there are many factors that affect the quality of education.which range from financial constraints to sociological factors. Assessment and accreditation by the NAAC cannot possibly address all the factors and cannot provide the answers to the all problems releted to the quality of higher education .Many quality related issues can be resolved simply by giving them attention and the affiliating function universities and the state reviews have in-built quality checks to address many such concerns .The assessment and accreditation process is valuable for providing and outcome that could be used in the prioritisation and decision making processes of institutions and other stakeholders. But it is a substantial task that requires resources and commitment. Such a mechanism should have clear priorities of a high order.

Focus of Assessment:

External quality assessment can serve different purposes, some leaning towards accountability and others helping in self-improvement of the institutions. The NAAC consciously adopted improvement as its main objective. Accountability concerns were addressed unobtrusively as an incidental outcome: it was felt that in the London model of higher education which prevails in the country, there are adequate checks and balances built in to ensure the accountability of institutions. Moreover, India has to go a long way to ensure access and equity to a larger percentage of the population: in spite of the huge higher education network, only 6% of the 17 to 22 years age group is enrolled in higher education. Therefore, it was felt that an overemphasis on accountability might become counter-productive.

Unit of Assessment:

The unit of assessment chosen should be appropriate to the objectives of assessment, and be viable, feasible and practical in the national context. In a country like India where there is a large number of small institutions, the most obvious unit of assessment is the institution. With more than 14,000 higher education institutions in the country, departmental accreditation would imply that the number of entities to be assessed at the department level would be at least ten times 14,000. Most departments in a typical Indian university have fewer than five academics and there may be just two programmes offered, which do not have the critical size or quantum of activity to be assessed as an entity.

Experience indicates that in view of the highly centralised governance structure of Indian institutions, institutional accreditation is more appropriate to ensure that systems are in place, good systems being a pre-requisite for quality education. It was also recognised by the Academic Advisory Committee of the NAAC that institutional assessment and department or programme assessment are not alternatives, with one to be neglected at the expense of the other. However, to properly focus the assessment efforts, institutional assessment has been promoted in the first cycle of assessment and accreditation. After the first cycle based on institutional assessment, departmental/programme accreditation may be taken up in the proposed second cycle of assessment.

Assessment Outcome:

The appropriateness of the measure of the assessment outcome depends on the degree of governmental control in higher education, the size of the system and the variation in the quality of education among institutions. When the measure of the assessment outcome was discussed, the NAAC considered various options including the two-point scale, ranking and scoring in percentage.

The two-point scale (accredited/not accredited) may hold good for systems where there is not much governmental control in the establishment of higher education institutions. In such systems, the two-point

scale outcome does the basic sifting of `good quality provisions' from the 'substandard' ones and the outcome would be useful to stakeholders in making simple straight-forward decisions. In the Indian context, which has adequate regulatory mechanisms to ensure the satisfactory functioning of institutions and with a strong affiliating system, the two-point scale may not add much value. Stakeholder decisions can always consider factors like whether an institution is affiliated to a parent university or not; whether an institution is recognised by the UGC or the state government for funding or not. Assessment outcome of the NAAC need not serve that purpose. Further, given the large size of the Indian system, and the wide variation in quality among the institutions of higher education, it is appropriate that the assessment outcome should classify institutions in more than just two categories.

Lessons From Experience

The NAAC has learnt many lessons from the development of the model. The NAAC's process has been strengthened by the way it encouraged internal structures for quality initiatives, built on the experience of the first batch of higher education institutions that underwent assessment, evaluated itself with transparency, and handled the reactions to the process, from the initial stages to now. Some unintended outcomes and problem-causing policy have taught some valuable lessons.

Handling the Reactions to the Process

During the first three years, which focused on strategies to gain acceptability by the majority, the institutions were either indifferent or reluctant to volunteer for assessment by the NAAC. Besides the general inertia and the fear of getting assessed by others, there was also a lingering doubt in the minds of some about the relevance of assessment and accreditation to the Indian context. Bearing this in mind, the NAAC invested considerable time and effort in information dissemination on its philosophy and principles, targeting the various stakeholders. Care was taken to ensure that the strategies had:

1.   broad involvement and consensus-building to ensure widespread support in evolving the norms and criteria;

2.   careful development of the methods and instruments for assessment;

3.   transparency in all its policies and practices;

4.   rigorous implementation of procedures;

5.   safeguards to enhance the professionalism of assessment.

Conclusion

It has been a decade of successes and struggles for the NAAC. Gradually it has moved from the phase of rejection by academia to the present phase of appreciation and a large volume assessment. The experience of the NAAC may not lead to the best set of policies and strategies for quality assurance. However, it adds useful insights to the ongoing debate on many critical issues of quality assurance. In national quality

assurance systems throughout the world, in debates around quality assurance, one question continues to be posed: 'Is there a better way of doing things?' The Indian experience, which is dynamic and rich, but still evolving, could help in devising better ways of doing things.

The experience of the NAAC has to be seen in the light of the national context and the objectives for which the NAAC has been established. It is obvious that the instruments and methods adopted by one country in assessing the quality of higher education may not be totally applicable to another. Even within a country, one agency may have a different mandate from another. Successful strategies may not be intrinsically good but depend on a multiplicity of factors and the task of quality assurance is no exception. The Indian experience has to be seen with this understanding.

In fact, it was in this spirit that the Indian system of accreditation, drawing on the experiences of other countries, evolved during 1986-1994. India also had the advantage of lessons learnt through its own regulatory mechanisms. A lot of efforts were put into analysing the systems elsewhere and adopting them to suit the Indian context. During the process of implementing the strategy and fine-tuning it during the past ten years, the hurdles the NAAC had to face, the strategies adopted to overcome them, and the unintended consequences the NAAC came across have been many. As the system evolved, both strengths and weaknesses have emerged, and sharing the lessons learned should be useful to other countries.

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