Assuring Quality Higher Education in India: Challenges and Prospects

Prof. Md Faiz Ahmad

Principal, MANUU,CTE, Darbhanga

md_faizahmad@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

India is a wonderful country that has attracted all types of people across the world, given space to all cultures, and in this way developed a unique composite culture. The education system of India is one of the oldest systems in the world, but unfortunately, India could not become a developed country. Our education, particularly the higher education system, needs to be developed in such a way that quality may be assured. This paper is an analysis of our education system, especially the higher education system. It presents conditions and measures to ensure the quality and role of NAAC and IQAC. What are the challenges and government measures to assure quality higher education, and what are its prospects, especially when NEP 2020 is being implemented?

Keywords: Quality, Higher Education, Challenges, Prospects

Introduction

India is a beautiful country with different castes, creeds, cultures, regions, languages, and religions that all live together. It has a unique heritage. It has been the place of attraction for all the people in the world. Our history is glorious, and our education system is also one of the oldest in the world. We had a good education system during the Vedic, Buddhist, Jainism, and Islamic periods. In fact, we are proud to be called the mother of democracy, and Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramshila are the oldest universities in the world. At that time, Nalanda had a wonderful system of education with hostel facilities, and many students from other countries were also living in the hostels. During the British period, there were problems, and in 1835, English was introduced as a medium of instruction. After wood dispatch in 1854, three universities were established in 1857, i.e., Kolkatta, Madras, and Bombay universities. Many reforms were also made in 1902 and 1904. The Curzon policy and the 1917 Sadler Commission report also suggested improving our higher education system. At the time of independence, we had only 19 universities, and our literacy rate was around 15%. Now we have around 1113 universities, of which 54 are central universities, 441 are state universities, and 455 are private universities. 126 are considered to be universities, 159 are institutions of national importance, and 53000 are colleges. A total of around 35 crore people are involved in our education system. It is one of the largest systems in the world. But as far as quality is concerned, it is unfortunate that we could not get a proper place in the world ranking as the QS World Ranking 2025 was released on June 4, 2024, in which IIT Bombay secured 108 rank, last time it was 149, and IIT Delhi secured 150 rank. India ranked second in the Asian Region; 61% of Indian universities improved; 24% maintained the status quo; and 9% markedly declined. It was assessed on the basis of 40% academic reputation, 10% employer reputation, 20% research citations, H. index, 20 % faculty student ratio, and 10% international network. Many other agencies also evaluated the performance of the universities on the basis of various parameters, and even till date, we could not get the right place in the world rankings. After independence, many committees and commissions were constituted to make suggestions for the improvement and reform of the higher education system. Just after independence,

the University Education Commission was established under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1948–49), which highly emphasized the aims of the University education system, faculty, duration of the courses, reforms in the examination system, medium of instruction, rural universities, women's education, scholarship, and moral education. The Indian Education Commission, known as Kothari Commission, also emphasized the aims of education, the structure of education (10+2+3), rural universities, 6% GDP on education, and 186 NEP made a comprehensive recommendation to ensure quality in higher education and accordingly professional bodies like NCTE, NAAC, and Academic Staff College, now MMTTC. The 2005 National Knowledge Commission emphasized the need to establish more universities. Our constitution also pledges to develop India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, republican, and democratic country, and its basis is equality, liberty, social justice, and fraternity. Articles 15.17, 21 (a), 24. 26, 28, 29, 45, 46, 51(k), 350, and 350 (i) mentioned education, and education was also placed on the concurrent list by the 42nd Amendment in 1976.

NEP 2020

National Education Policy 2020 made all efforts to transform the higher education system by evolving stand-alone institutions into multidisciplinary education institutions and developing a holistic education system. NEP 2020 found some of the major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India which include, a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem, less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes, a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study, limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages, limited teacher and institutional autonomy, inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders, lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines, suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs, an ineffective regulatory system; and, large

affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education. This policy made effort to bring some changes in the current system i.e., moving towards multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with more HEIs across India that offer medium of instruction in local/Indian languages, moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education, moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy, revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, student support, reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions, establishment of a National Research Foundation , governance of HEIs by independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy, "light but tight" regulation by a single regulator for higher education i.e., NHECI , National Higher Education Commission of India, NHERC, National Higher Education Regulatory Council, NAC National Accreditation Council, General Education Council, PSSB Professional Standard Setting Body. It made provision for only three types of institutions: teaching intensive universities, research intensive universities, autonomous colleges, multiple entry and exit systems, four-year integrated graduation courses, and academic banks of credit to establish the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to develop technology-enabled education systems, including distance and online education. Achieving GER 50% by 2035 and making India a developed nation by 2047. The beauty of this policy is that it is holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible. It will reduce the dropout rate in higher education and increase the gross enrollment ratio.

NAAC

On the recommendation of NEP 1986, the UGC established the National Assessment Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 with its headquarters in Benglaru to assess and accredit the higher education institutions in India to assure quality. It consists of seven criteria, i.e., curricular aspects, teaching, learning, and evaluation; research and community outreach; infrastructure and learning resources; student support and progression; governance; leadership and management; and institutional values and best practices. It is of about

1000 numbers, and accreditation is done in the grading system, which starts from D to A++. Now it is being changed on the basis of Dr. Radhakrishnan, former chairman of ISRO, and it will be accredited in a binary form, meaning accredited or not accredited. At present, a total 362 universities and 6176 colleges are accredited.

IQAC

In pursuance of its Action Plan for performance evaluation, assessment, accreditation, and quality upgrading of institutions of higher education, NAAC proposes that every accredited institution establish an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) as a post-accreditation quality sustenance measure. Since quality enhancement is a continuous process, the IQAC will become a part of the institution's system and work towards the realization of the goals of quality enhancement and sustenance. The prime task of the IQAC is to develop a system for conscious, consistent, and catalytic improvement in the overall performance of institutions. For this, during the post-accreditation period, it will channel all efforts and measures of the institution towards promoting its holistic academic excellence. IQAC shall evolve mechanisms and procedures for:

Ensuring timely, efficient, and progressive performance of academic, administrative, and financial tasks; the relevance and quality of academic and research programs; equitable access to and affordability of academic programs for various sections of society; the optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning; the credibility of evaluation procedures; ensuring the adequacy, maintenance, and functioning of the support structure and services; and research sharing and networking with other institutions in India and abroad. Some of the functions expected of the IQAC are to development and application of quality benchmarks/parameters for various academic and administrative activities of the institution, 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, arrangement for feedback response from students, parents and other stakeholders on quality-related institutional processes, dissemination of information on various quality parameters of higher education, organization of inter and intra institutional workshops, seminars on quality related themes and promotion of quality circles, documentation of the various programmes/activities leading to quality improvement, acting as a nodal agency of the Institution for coordinating quality-related activities, including adoption and dissemination of best practices, development and maintenance of institutional database through MIS for the purpose of maintaining/enhancing the institutional quality, development of quality culture in the institution and preparation of the Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) as per guidelines and parameters of NAAC, to be submitted to NAAC.

Ranking agencies

The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) was established by AICTE to assess and accredit diplomas and PG levels in engineering and technology, management, and pharmacy. In 2013, it was made independent to see the objectives, missions, organization, governance, infrastructure, teaching, learning, curriculum, and support services in institutions. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was approved by the MHRD and launched by the Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development on September 29, 2015. This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country. The methodology draws from the overall recommendations and broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MHRD to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions. The parameters broadly cover "Teaching, Learning, and Resources," "Research and Professional Practices," "Graduation Outcomes," "Outreach and Inclusivity," and "Perception." Teaching and Learning Resources (TLR)

Government Initiatives

The government of India takes measures from time to time to ensure quality in higher education, like the establishment of AISHE in 2010 by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to build a robust database and assess the correct picture of higher education in the country. AISHE sees and prepares the data base of

the institution on the basis of basic details, teacher details, details of non-teaching staff, programs conducted under various faculties, schools, departments, and centers, students enrolled in these programs, examination results of the terminal year of each program, financial information such as receipts and expenditures under various heads, availability of infrastructure and scholarships, loans, and accreditation. In 2013, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) was the central government's contribution to furthering the promise held by the rich expanse of India's state universities. The country's future lies in empowering these campuses with all that it takes to enhance learning, conduct better research, and promote innovation. A centrally sponsored scheme, RUSA understands that sometimes the most important lessons of life are learned outside the classroom. So whether it is upgrading libraries or computer laboratories, promoting autonomous colleges, or clubbing them to consolidate their strengths and form cluster universities, this program realizes that every institution holds the power to enrich lives through top-class education.

Challenges

Higher education in India still faces the challenges of access, equity, excellence, exploration, quality research, infrastructure, inclusiveness, governance, leadership, the gross enrollment ratio, the faculty student's ratio, and many more. Proper allocation in the budget. Implementation of NEP 2020 and getting to the top of the world ranking is also a big challenge.

Prospects

Higher education is of vital importance for the country, as it is a powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society in the 21st century. India possesses a highly developed higher education system that offers facilities for education and training in almost all aspects of human creative and intellectual endeavors: arts and humanities; natural, mathematical, and social sciences; engineering; medicine; dentistry; agriculture; education; law; commerce and management; music and performing arts; national and foreign languages; culture; communications, etc. The Indian higher education system has the potential to become the world's best education system and to lead in the field of education, especially higher education at the global level.

Conclusion:

The Indian higher education system is one of the oldest in the world. It has a robust system and is one of the largest education networks. It has many challenges, like access, equity, excellence, and quality, but it has full potential to become the best-quality higher education in the world. There is a need to implement NEP 2020 properly and use its infrastructure, including human, physical, and digital, to attract more and more talent as a teacher and student. By developing a sound system based on the principles of democracy, student interest, and flexibility, we can become the world's best education system, and our institutions will get a good ranking in the world ranking of higher education institutions.

References :

1. National Education Policy-2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi, 2020

2. National Education Commission Report-1964-66, Education and National Development, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1966.

3. National Policy on Education, 1986, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, May 1986

4. Quality Management System in Higher Education, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), 2020

5. Pursuit of Quality in Higher Education: An Indian Perspective, Research and Analysis Wing, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), June 2020.

6. http://naac.gov.in/index.php/en/

7. http://rusa.nic.in

8. aishe.gov.in

9. ugc.gov.in

10. https://www.qs.com/rankings-performance/

11. https://www.nbaind.org/

❖❖❖