

The concept of 'Quality' and the role of IQAC in Higher Education in India: A Case study of Bankura District, W.B

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Abstract

Indian higher education with a view to advancing the students to new frontiers of knowledge and thus paving for them the way to promote international cooperation through internationalization of research is always linked with the 'quality' criteria which has a distinctive connotative dimension in the academic sector. The issue has also been harped upon by the academic commissions constituted for the promotion of higher education here. Different autonomous bodies like NAAC,AICTE,NCTE by way of establishing certain academic quality assurance, enhancement and sustenance cells as IQAC(quality enhancement and sustenance), NBA (Assurance of Quality and Relevance of Professional Education) have been working here with regular academic updates towards a qualitative development of Indian higher education.

The present study is a modest attempt to provide an account of the roles and functions of IQAC in some select Higher Education Institutions in Bankura District in regard to quality sustenance and enhancement for promoting holistic academic excellence at large in the higher educational sector in the district of Bankura, West Bengal.

KEYWORDS:- Higher education, Quality, Assurance, Enhancement, Sustenance.

Introduction :

In the book *Improving Higher Education: Total Quality Care* Ronald Barnett has referred to four predominant concepts of higher education:

i) **Higher education as the production of qualified human resources** : In this view, higher education is eyed as a process in which the students are counted as "products" absorbed in the labour market. Thus, higher education becomes input to the growth and development of business and industry.

ii) **Higher education as training for a research career** : In this view, higher education is seen as a 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 rigour to do quality research.

iii) **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.

iv) **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 (Barnett : 1992, 21).

If we look slight backwards regarding the goals and roles of higher education in India, we can allude to the report of the Kothari Commission (1964-66) which begins with :

The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavour to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values (qtd. in Kumar :1977, p.153-4)

and subsequently in conformity to these objectives, the Commission listed the following activities on the part of a university in the higher education sector in India :

- to seek and cultivate new knowledge, to engage vigorously and fearlessly in the pursuit of truth, and to interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries;
- to provide the right kind of leadership in all walks of life, to identify gifted youth and help them develop their potential to the full by cultivating physical fitness, developing the powers of the mind and cultivating right interests, attitudes and moral and intellectual values;
- to provide the society with competent men and women trained in agriculture, arts, medicine, science and technology and various other professions, who will also be cultivated individuals, imbued with a sense of social purpose;
- to strive, to promote quality and social justice, and to reduce social and cultural differences through diffusion of education. (GOI: 1966, p. 497-8).

Later, however, with a view to fostering in the teachers and students and the society at large, the attitudes and values needed for developing the ‘good life’, in 1992 the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education in the 21st Century titled “Learning: The Treasure Within”(popularly known as Delors Commission) emphasized four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. While, higher education already intends to inculcate all these four in individuals and the society, this report has highlighted the following specific functions of higher education:

- To prepare students for research and teaching;
- To provide highly specialized training courses adapted to the needs of economic and social life;
- To be open to all, so as to cater to the many aspects of lifelong education in the widest sense; and
- To promote international cooperation through internationalization of research, technology, Net working, and free movement of persons and scientific ideas. (UNESCO,1996).

Higher education is, thus, a complex system facilitating teaching, research, extension and international cooperation and understanding. It is at the same time very true that from its initial stage the issue of quality in higher education that again decides the quality of human resources in a country at large has always been emphasized and remains too vital a point in each of the committees that have been formed for the upliftment of the higher education of India.

Concept of ‘Quality’ and its meaning in Higher Education Sector :

The word quality comes from the Latin word *qualis* meaning ‘what kind of’. The British Standard Institution (BSI) 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”.(BSI, 1991) Green and Harvey, however, identified five different approaches to defining quality :

- in terms of *exceptional* (exceeding high standards and passing a required standard) ;
- in terms of *consistency* (exhibited through “zero defects” and “getting right the first time”, making quality a culture) ;
- as *fitness for purpose* (meaning the product or service meets the stated purpose, customer specifications and satisfaction) ;
- as *value for money* (through efficiency and effectiveness) ; and
- as *transformative* (in term of qualitative change). (Harvey and Green:1993, p.9-34)

At the same time, quality has a few central ideas around which the whole concept revolves: Quality as absolute, Quality as relative, Quality as a process, and last but not the least Quality as culture which recognizes the importance of organizational view of quality as a process of transformation, where each entity is concerned and acknowledges the importance of quality. In educational institutions we are particularly concerned with the latter, though all other ideas of quality too have their respective places. Subsuming a wide range of discussions, Barnett quotes a ‘suggestive’ definition by Barrow to define ‘quality’ in higher education:

...a high evaluation accorded to an educative process, where it has been demonstrated that, through the process, the students’ educational development has been enhanced ... not only have they achieved the particular objectives set for the course but, in doing so, they have also fulfilled the general educational aims of autonomy of the ability to participate in reasoned discourse, of critical self-evaluation, and of coming to a proper awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action. (qtd. in Barnet: 1992, 61)

Quality enhancement and sustenance measures in IHE : An overview

As far as the quality is concerned the University Grants Commission (UGC) has laid down indicators under provision what it called, 2(f) and 12 (b). These two together assess the minimum quality requirements to provide the grants to the universities and colleges. The college is recognised under 2(f) if it is a register body with a temporary affiliation and carrying under graduate program. The recognition under 12 (b) is granted provided the college has a permanent affiliation with university. The university provides permanent affiliation after satisfying the required minimum conditions. Thus 2(f) & 12 (b) is the initial and presumably the minimum framework of regulation of quality for the colleges. In order to improve quality, it has established national research facilities, and Academic Staff Colleges to re-orient teachers and provide refresher courses in subject areas. The UGC also conducts the National Eligibility Test (NET) for setting high standards of teaching. Besides the UGC has set up National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to asses the quality of higher education institutions, which used fairly expanded criteria of quality for universities and colleges in the country.(Thorat:2006,13) Like NAAC (which is responsible for colleges and universities), there are other statutory bodies in India to assure quality in professional education. Some of these are:

- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

- Medical Council of India (MCI)
- Indian Nursing Council (INC)
- Bar Council of India (BCI)
- Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)
- Distance Education Council (DEC)
- Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR)

The AICTE established the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in 1994 to accredit programmes offered by technical institutions. The NBA accredits programmes and it is a voluntary process like that of NAAC. Other professional statutory bodies mostly undertake review exercises to recognize or de-recognize the institutions on the basis of their quality audit. Thus, quality issue is on the top of the agenda of Indian higher education. (Mishra : 2006, p.21-22)

The vision of 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) is also to promote the quality of higher education by forming new universities and increasing the intake capacity of present universities and colleges. For enhancing quality the various measures in the 12th FYP are :

- Continuance of the reforms agenda in higher education will have to be followed in the field of academic, administration, curricula, pedagogy, programme offerings, research, etc.
- Structural and systemic reforms on a huge scale with healthy policies and realistic programmes to facilitate all the measures required for improving quality and to promote excellence in higher education, including good governance.
- Providing incentives through funding for academic reforms like introduction of semester system, grading, choice-based credit system, examination reforms, accreditation, etc. can go a long way towards enhancing quality.
- Focus in the 12th FYP will be on generation of a new knowledge society from the learners' perspective, satisfying the national and international demands of the society.
- Development of new models of accreditation and systems for implementation with the dual objectives of national level coverage and compulsory accreditation of all higher education institutions shall be undertaken in a time bound manner. (qtd. in Bhalla : 2012, 28).

Quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution, though the top management sets the policies and priorities. Thus, assuring quality should be a continuous and ongoing process. It should not be considered as a one time activity for accreditation alone. However, accreditation as external quality monitoring (EQM) can be found in all types of higher education systems. In spite of the importance of EQM and the credibility attached with the impartial and objective system, developing an internal quality assurance mechanism in every educational institution is highly important. Therefore, in order to internalize quality inputs, all universities, government and government-aided colleges are to be supported with full-fledged Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) as a UGC-supported scheme, on regular basis with the required Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and supportive manpower. (qtd. in Bhalla : 2012, 28).

IQAC : An Introduction

In pursuance of its Action Plan for performance evaluation, assessment and

accreditation and quality up-gradation of institutions of higher education, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body established by the U.G.C proposes for establishment of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in every institution as a part of the institution's system and work towards realisation of the goals of quality enhancement and sustenance. The prime task of the IQAC, therefore, is to develop a system for conscious, consistent and catalytic improvement in the overall performance of institutions and to promote measures for institutional functioning towards quality enhancement through internalization of quality culture and institutionalization of best practices.

IQAC may be constituted in every institution under the Chairmanship of the Head of the institution with heads of important academic and administrative units and a few teachers including a Coordinator and a few distinguished educationists and representatives of local management and stakeholders and is expected to perform certain functions relating to quality sustenance and towards promoting holistic academic excellence at large.

Some of the broadly categorised functions expected of IQAC :

1. Development and application of quality 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. Organization of inter and intra institutional workshops, seminars on quality related themes and promotion of quality circles.
4. Arrangements for feedback response from students, parents & documentation of various programmes leading to quality improvement.
5. Acting as a nodal agency for coordinating quality related activities, development of quality culture, development and maintenance of institutional database through MIS for quality enhancement and preparation of AQAR to be submitted to NAAC. (Guidelines : 2013, p.1-8)

Apart from these NAAC has also proposed a 7 point criteria in regard to quality sustenance & enhancement in HEIs . These are :-

- (1) Curricular Aspects (2) Teaching, Learning and Evaluation (3) Research, Consultancy and Extension (4) Infrastructure and Learning Resources (5) Student Support and Progression (6) Governance, Leadership and Management (7) Innovations and Best Practices .

The present study is a modest attempt to provide an account of the roles and functions of IQAC in three Colleges in Bankura District in regard to quality sustenance and enhancement there.

Method :

The study is primarily empirical. But both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. Secondary data were collected from various documents such as books, magazines, journals, old research papers as well as from internet(e resource). Primary data were collected from the IQAC cell of three colleges in Bankura. The techniques of primary data collection were Observation method and Unstructured Interview Schedule.

Names of the Colleges (Study Area) in Bankura :

1. Bankura Christian College, Po & Dist – Bankura, 722101.
IQAC formed in 14.08.06; present grade is A in 2013 in 2nd cycle.
2. Khatra Adibasi Mahavidyalaya, PO. Khatra, Dist. Bnakura, 722140.
IQAC formed in 02.02.08; present grade is B+ in 2016 in 2nd cycle.
3. Pandit Raghunath Murmu Smriti Mahavidyalaya, jamboni, Bankura.
IQAC formed in 23.06.11; present grade is B+ in 2017 in 2nd cycle .

Significant Activities and Contributions of IQAC in regard to Quality Sustenance:

Bankura Christian College – Selected for the second phase of CPE by UGC; introduction of new courses ; publications of journals including 2 UGC approved and edited volumes ; research projects; foreign visits of the faculties ; organising Seminar / Workshops / Conferences; Extension activities like a sample survey on old age, a national integration camp, State level NSS orientation Programme, District Athletic meet , Almnii meet , Website upgradation, Infrastructure development. At present total 38 courses including 33 UG & 2 PG courses are running with a total faculty strength of 66 and total pass percentage touching nearly 90% with 44 total class rooms, 33 laboratories and 4 seminar halls, 67038 books and 50339 journals incl. E journals. 15 members are in IQAC.

Khatra Adibasi Mahavidyalaya – IQAC consisting of 12 members has been contributing to the following developments in the college :

Upgradation of college website as per advice of the IQAC; upgradation of college admission software for online admission; upgradation of college office management software CAMS 3.0 as per IQAC guidelines & modernization of library management system by SOUL 2.0.

PanditRaghunath Murmu Smriti Mahavidyalaya –IQAC (14 members) has been functioning well by virtue of following activities :

Meeting with faculty, staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders; Collected and analysed feedback from students and alumni; organised workshop on choice based credit system and on skill development for teacher , students and staff; mentored different cell for healthy and quality education etc.

Plan of Action by IQAC / Outcome by IQAC :

The plan of action chalked out by the IQAC in the beginning of the year towards quality enhancement and sustenance and the outcome achieved by the end of the year :

Bankura Christian College –The proposals regarding CPE, introduction of new courses, promotion of research publications, proposals for MRPs, foreign visits of the teachers, focus on bringing together academicians from the disciplines of Science and Technology, organisation of seminars etc, intensifying extension activities, establishment of alumni association, upgradation of college website, initiatives on infrastructural development, promotion of soft skill among the staff and ICT based works – all are successfully achieved by the end of the year, 2017.

Khatra Adibasi Mahavidyalaya – Improvement on infrastructural development,

purchase of books, establishment of virtual class room – all that have been planned by the IQAC for quality sustenance in the college are successfully completed by the end of the year.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu Smriti Mahavidyalaya – Proposal for opening Mathematics Hons , PG course under NSOU and Job oriented certificate course; enhancement of books in the central library; initiatives for a permanent structure (cultural stage), introduction of some elective subjects and imitatives for opening “Community College” as per guide line of UGC – all are achieved with nearly 90% success at the end of the year. Post Graduate in Bengali has been introduced under Bankura University w.e.f. 2017-18.

Plan for the future relating to quality enhancement & sustenance & the role of IQAC :

Bankura Christian College – The counselling cell will be motivated for proper career-planning of students ; Initiatives will be taken for the construction of a Social Science Block ; Full automation of the office ; Unique Password for students may be generated for providing them access to Infilbnet ; IQAC Plans to lay emphasis on research projects to be undertaken by the teachers ; Focus will be given to departmental seminars involving the students in particular.

Khatra Adibasi Mahavidyalaya – Boundary wall for the remaining portion of the College campus be done ;To open Honours Course in Geography and Education ;Use of free and open source Software for operating computers ; To collect artefacts from various places and also archaeology remaining’s from various sources for College Museum ; To publish journals with ISSN number ; To upgrade the laboratories in an advances level ; To increase the number of smart class rooms ; To increase the number of books in Library ; To increase the number of computer and laptop.

Pandit Raghunath Murmu Smriti Mahavidyalaya – Building for PG departments be constructed; Open stage (Mukta Mancha) be constructed ; Lab in Mathematics be imitated.; More books in the central library be purchased as per new syllabus ;Tribal museum & research Centre be introduced; Teachers hostel be constructed ; Sports equipment be enhanced for Physical Education Department & Bio-metric system for staff attendance be introduced for smart institute

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