

Intellectual Leadership and Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Critical Perspective on Accreditation Practices in Rural India

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Abstract: *Education in India has always been an upfront agenda of the Nation's Development. Today we stand holding the third largest education system in the world. The echelon of Indian Higher Education molds with an aptitude of taking the curriculum structure, the newly designed NEP Scheme of 2020 at the Higher Education Institutions and Universities with the frame work of accreditation and ranking standards. How far this precipitation needs an intellectual visionary is all about this paper deal with. The outlook of Indian Education System is very much different from its interior in depth, particularly at the near and far ends of the rural India. The accreditation and ranking modules however to think beyond dynamic seems to be quite skeptic. As far as the vigilance is concerned, the challenges and constraints pertained to equilibria of standards, equivalence, access, admittance and attainments at the turns of rural Institutions of Higher Education in India seems to be meagre and deprived compared to the urban sector institutions. Firstly, our higher education needs a strong haul to meet the global standards irrespective of urban/rural nor the private/government sectors. Secondly, education must scatter equally with fixed norms of infrastructure and facilities with urban and rural near far ends and corners by accommodating the diverse population in India. Thirdly, the integrity of technology access that needs to be equipped ensuring a definite digital platform for higher educational standards. Fourthly, to compete with the strategies of innovations and adaptations need quality enhancement of the subjects oriented with skill - oriented programs and methodological approaches and lastly the outcome parameters and attainments may smartly be classified. Taking these issues, the (HEI) accreditations and ranking and measuring parameters need immense standardizations to be followed by its operational structure and methods. This article reviews the essential necessities with works on the processes and measures undertaking the quality enhancements for ranking parameters. The article explores the important criterion key indicators that would provide a meaningful insight to academic institutions of the emerging competitiveness. This study would further help fostering new ideas towards setting up of contemporary globally viable and acceptable academic quality standardization.*

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEI), National Education Policy (NEP), Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), Quality Circles, Adaptations, Approaches, Accreditations, Youth, Research, Innovations, Rural India, Skill - oriented education, Technology

1. Introduction

Every country has its own capabilities to beat up the competency that the world is throwing upon higher education. India seeking the largest youth population growing with a high speed of 66% under the age of thirty - five. Higher Education Institutions have great responsibility in building up the qualitative and quantitative structures for accreditation ranking which is very challenging. The government funds and supplies play a vital role to build this quality enhancement. However, to ignite valuable knowledge in this digital era requires infrastructure. The biggest challenge is to gear up on Higher Education Institutions situated in Indian Rural Sectors which demands attention. According to the All - India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020 - 2021, rural areas in India host a significant portion of the country's higher education infrastructure Universities holds 43% which are located in rural regions and Colleges holds 61.4% which are situated in rural areas. Despite this substantial presence, many rural colleges face challenges related to student enrolment figures approximately 65.5% of colleges have fewer than 500 students, and 16.6% enrol fewer than 100 students. The Gross Enrolment (GER) ratio at Higher Education Level is lower in rural areas compared to urban areas. As per the AISHE the rural areas hold 25.7 % whereas 33.4 % in urban areas. While specific data on the youth population pursuing higher education exclusively in rural India is limited, existing statistics highlight significant disparities in higher education enrolment between rural and urban areas. According to the All - India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019 - 20,

the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education for the 18 - 23 age group is 27.1% nationwide. However, this figure masks substantial differences between rural and urban regions. Studies have indicated that the GER in rural India is approximately 7%, whereas urban areas boast a GER of about 23%. This disparity underscores the challenges faced by rural youth in accessing higher education, including limited infrastructure, financial constraints, and a shortage of qualified educational institutions. Addressing these issues is crucial for bridging the educational divide and promoting equitable development across the country which would substantiate for the accreditation and ranking process.

The obstacles that the rural HEI facing mainly on the infrastructure and the facilities requires a very keen and critical attention. A great chasm is found by the challenges to coup up with recent innovations and technological stand ups. To build up the quality circles in terms of accessibility and impact are seen by; Infrastructure & Digital Divide that many rural HEIs lack proper classrooms, libraries, and labs. Unreliable electricity and internet connectivity hinder digital learning and need for smart classrooms and digital learning tools. The faculty & teaching quality visualize shortage of qualified teachers, especially in specialized subjects. Many faculty members lack exposure to modern teaching methods. and need for regular training and faculty exchange programs. The curriculum & skill development issues are seen that outdated syllabus that doesn't align with the present industry needs. Focus should be on vocational training, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship and collaboration with local industries

and businesses for hands - on experience. The funding and financial support have to be increased by the government and private agencies especially for rural colleges. Need for scholarships and financial aid for students from low - income backgrounds. Encouraging CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) investments in education. The industry & research collaboration must have partnerships for internships and research. Encouraging local startups and businesses to work along with HEIs by setting up incubation centres and innovation hubs. Student awareness programs, career counselling and guidance, Job opportunities must be initiated with placement cells at the institution levels. Essential need for mentorship and alumni networks. The government and policy support focusing on rural sectors. Simplifying accreditation processes for colleges to improve their standards, and encouraging local governance to take ownership for further improvising the institutions.

Accreditations and ranking of higher education institutions (HEI) is an approach ensuring the quality circles with various measures under taken by the internal quality assurance cell (IQAC) The IQAC farmouts the institution for upgradation and entrust especially the youth, with required skills and capabilities. The policy makers have been working relentlessly to improve the HEI standardization by establishing and setting up the ranking body parameters. However, to determine its efficacy in improving academic quality, to some extent leaving the private organization, the short comes are pertinent particularly within government institutions particularly at the rural sectors. An Overhaul of the Indian HEI is very challenging in being globally competitive and to penetrate at the rural sectors is even more pathetic. As per the survey of secondary data sources it is seen that the performance gaps of the Indian HEI meeting with global standardization, though the study identifies that teaching, learning, along with research and industry in collaboration and with common parameters in accreditation and ranking process awards high with its scores in urban sectors yet, says Jerald Ozee Fernandes and Balgopal Singh that ***"Indian Universities are trailing"*** in his study and exposes the Indian academic fraternity that they lacks prominence in research, publication and citations as per the global accreditation and ranking standards which need a serious consideration. They observed the reasons behind Indian universities lagging in global rankings. They identified that while Indian accreditation bodies often award high scores on parameters such as teaching and learning, these do not align with the rigorous standards of global accreditation practices. Specifically, they highlight that ***"research" and "citations"*** are critical parameters for securing prestigious positions in global rankings, and Indian universities often trail in these areas. This shortfall is attributed to a lack of prominence in research, publication, and citations as per global accreditation and ranking standards. To improve the global standards of Accreditation and ranking the Indian universities need to enhance their research output, increase international collaborations, and address systemic issues related to funding and autonomy.

Practical Implications to improve the Quality Circles

Every Country is known for its competency to act before the rest of the world. The capability to function promptly and effectively comes with having an energetic and mindful

population that is ***'youth'***. India among the countries is known as the youngest country This huge population of youth in India offers the country a chance to go beyond its limits and exceed its potential while also creating a responsibility in front of the government authorities to channelise their ability in the right direction. Because there is a high risk when the same energy and abilities of youngsters turn into the wrong path and create blunders for society. According to the data from International Labour Organisation (ILO), The Indian labour force is set to grow by over 8 million per annum over the coming decade, most of which will be driven by youth entering the labour market. In this case, the biggest responsibility lies on the shoulder of policymakers to turn this youth population into a source of capital so that they work as an asset for the country. Educating, skilling and grooming the youth is the only way for the policymakers to work along with the HEI and its potentiality. The present scenario of higher education under the Skill India Mission, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) are implementing the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) for skill - based learning and the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) across the country. As per the data provided by the Indian Brand Equity Forum (IBEF), funds worth ~Rs.7, 279 crore (USD 977.40 million) have been issued to implementing agencies as of February 2021. In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared the 15th of July as World Youth Skill Day in order to push countries to skill their youth population to bring the best out of them. The theme for the day in 2023 was ***"skilling teachers, trainers and youth for a transformative future"***. Skill based education has not only become the fundamental requirement of every firm and industries, when it comes to hiring, rather it nourishes the people for sustaining in the service sector. Especially, after the pandemic when companies laying off people in order to cut their production costs, skill - based education is considered as a source of drive and a sustainable means that the Higher education institutions can help the society and industry grow full - fledged.

The Higher Educational Institutions vibrant quality circles binding to The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) plays a vital role in ensuring the quality and continuous improvement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Implementing NAAC recommendations effectively lead to significant improvements in teaching, research, infrastructure, governance, and student outcomes that capitulates the Curriculum Development and Academic Excellence which need to be in regular revision of curricula based on industry needs and global trends. Implementation of Choice - Based Credit System (CBCS) to provide flexibility to students. Promotion of experiential learning through internships, projects, and fieldwork. Integration of ICT - based teaching tools (e - learning platforms, smart classrooms). It is not only the students but the felicitators must encompass Faculty Development and Research Enhancement throughout their career for timely updation. Encouraging faculty to attend FDPs, workshops, and international conferences. Incentivizing research publications in UGC - CARE, Scopus, and Web of Science journals. Establishment of Research & Development (R&D) cells for interdisciplinary research and collaborations with industries,

universities, and research organizations for innovation and development.

The most essential task is the student - Centric Learning and Skill Development areas where the institution takes initiatives in Conducting skill - based certification courses to improve employability. Strengthening mentorship and counselling systems for student well - being. Organizing entrepreneurship programs, hackathons, and startup incubation centres and encouraging participation in extracurricular activities, sports, and cultural events. Further to focus on Governance, Leadership, and Institutional Policies the institutions must engage in Establishing Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) for continuous quality monitoring. Implementation of E - Governance for transparency and efficiency in administration. Effective feedback mechanisms from students, parents, alumni, and employers and adopting a decentralized decision - making process for better governance. Additionally, the infrastructure, resources, and digital transformation necessarily needs constant encouragement for upgrading the library resources with digital access to journals and e - books. establishing well - equipped laboratories, research centres, and innovation hubs. Strengthening ICT - enabled learning, including Learning Management Systems (LMS) and implementing green campus initiatives (solar energy, rainwater harvesting, waste management). Adding to it, the Alumni Engagement and Industry Collaboration in forming active alumni associations to enhance networking and placements. Collaborating with industries for internships, guest lectures, and MoUs. Conducting placement drives, job fairs, and industry visits for students. Encouraging alumni contributions towards scholarships and infrastructure development. Finally, constant and Continuous Quality Improvement through accreditations. Regular self - assessment and preparation for NAAC accreditation cycles. Benchmarking with national and international best practices. Implementing Annual Quality Assurance Reports (AQARs) for tracking progress. Strengthening grievance redressal and ethical practices in academic and research fields. By effectively implementing NAAC's guidelines, HEIs can improve academic excellence, research output, student employability, and overall institutional quality. It helps institutions gain better ranking, funding opportunities, and global recognition, ensuring a student - centric and future - ready education system.

Significance of Skill – Oriented Education

As per the ILO, the total global number of unemployed youths was estimated to reach 73 million in 2022, a slight improvement from 2021 (75 million) but still six million above the pre - pandemic level of 2019. India that consists of huge population and has the objective to become 3 trillion economies in the coming years. Youth can play the role of the power section to help India in achieving its vision. Commenting on the important role of skilled youth in India, Meenu Bhatia, Co - Founder & Director, VMentor. ai (a 'tech - enabled, human intervened' mentorship platform), said, ***"I believe the youth of today can be the change agent of tomorrow if they are given all the right ammunition in terms of knowledge, skills with a constant focus on attitude and aptitude. India has the largest youth population in the world; around 66 per cent of the total population (more than 808 million) is below the age of 35. She asserts that with the***

right combination of knowledge, skills, and a focus on attitude and aptitude, today's youth can become tomorrow's change agents. To look in depth about these issues it is seen as an exacerbated mismatch between educational outcomes and job market demands, leaving many graduates without appropriate employment opportunities. Significantly, India must align educational and mentorship initiatives with market needs. Platforms like VMentor. ai play a crucial role by providing tailored mentorship, bridging the gap between academic learning and industry requirements. By equipping the youth with relevant skills and guidance, such platforms aim to transform India's demographic dividend into a catalyst for sustainable economic growth. To leverage on this pool, skills are important to make use of the youth potentiality and the demographic dividend to boost employability, entrepreneurship and capacity development in tier 2, 3, 4 towns in India." In order to make the youth section capable enough, inducing skilling programmes in higher education and employment policy need to be influential enough. Foundational learning plays a vital role in creating a firm and stable career, in this regard Manju Balasubramaniam, Principal of Delhi Public School North, Bengaluru, said, ***"I believe that we can give our students a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy, Socio - emotional learning, and ICT. To do this, teachers must reskill themselves with emerging tech tools to teach and learn.*** While teachers across the world demonstrated that they could embrace technology effectively during the pandemic. " Which was the significant force of adaptability towards the Digi - Tech Era. Balasubramaniam highlights that there is a continuous need for upskilling to create inclusive classrooms that cater to personalized instruction. Organizations FDPs are instrumental in training teachers and youth with technological tools, preparing them for the future workforce. Balasubramaniam's vision reflects a commitment to leveraging technology in education, ensuring that both educators and students are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Challenges in Skilling Indian Youth

Even if the government and other state authorities roll in various policies regarding skilling and educating youth. There is resistance to bad implementation, illiteracy and a dense population to the right execution of these programmes. In the remote region or ground regions, people are not exposed to the significance of the right skills in the betterment of their livelihood. They often take loans and credit from the market but do not utilise that in skilling themselves. Though the central government has been using the advertisement and campaigning to make people aware of the importance of skilling, and also provide financial assistance to help them to make their source of income. Counting on the challenges in skilling the Indian young population, Amit Vasistha, Founder and CEO, My Galf, said, ***"Many people are resistant to change and may be reluctant to learn new skills. This can be a challenge, as new skills are often required to keep up with the latest technologies and trends. Apart from this, there is a lack of modern skill development centres at scale in many countries.*** This means that people may not have access to the training and exposure they need to acquire the skills they are looking for. " The only way to pulley this segment of problem is through Higher Education and its programs where skill - based education becomes pertinent and

sojourn for better progression with multifaceted approaches. Resistance to changes is essential to keep with the evolving technologies and industry trends intact. Today we see that skill - oriented education is an investment that the higher education put forth for the future economic growth of India. Henceforth, collaborative efforts among governments, industries, and educational institutions are essential to foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, ensuring that the workforce remains aligned with the evolving demands of the global economy.

Technology a competitor or Companion?

The dominance of technology cannot be neglected at this time, right from primary daily needs to the advanced luxury life, technology has become an administer and plays an important role. Every sector and field have the prevalent intervention of technology. However, with the growing intervention of artificial intelligence, technology is also imposing a lethal replacement for human abilities. Whether it is a factory or compact newsroom, technology has enough competency to do every work on its own. Youth is the most affected group in this situation where money and employment are mandatory to live in. However, the functions of skill oriented differs human from machine. Ideally, technology should be used to skill up and empower the youth instead of going stereotypically with the same old methods of curriculum and learning patterns. Highlighting the same, *JB Singh*, Director Movin Express, said, ***“we believe in the transformative power of upskilling and nurturing young talent to drive the future of the logistics industry. On this World Youth Skill Day, we emphasize the criticality of investing in our youth, and equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge to excel in a rapidly evolving landscape.*** By empowering our educational system with advanced skills in supply chain management courses involving technological integration, and efficient resource utilization, we pave the way for innovation and growth. In the future, logistics will be driven by technology - data analytics, automation, robotics and AI will play a greater role in warehouse management, transportation and Supply Chain optimization, upskilling will strengthen the collective competence of the logistics sector. ” A nation can be developed only with the contribution of each unit of the population. The number of Indian youths is the major source of the power to the country. Along with the right set of policies and proper awareness, every vision of the country can be achieved. When the other part of the world is struggling to increase its youth population whereas India contains a demographic dividend were nothing is impossible or unreachable.

2. Conclusion

The System of Assessment and Accreditation (SAA) is aligned to the purpose of improvising the resources of an institution. It is as simple to understand that an average degree student to have certain forms of understanding skills, abilities and habits and therefore defining the concept of education as a distinct form of degree and certificates makes no sense. To enhance the quality circles educatedness would be the components of HEI upgradation. The 2020 scheme of Nep is rooted in transdisciplinary concepts and tools for inquiry. The higher order Cognition as an integral strand in assessing the

quality of students learning and engulfing the future tracks of availability are the most need of the hour. It is the not just the education but the way education stretches to its wants and needs makes the world impeccable.

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