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NAAC and Quality Improvements in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIS) in India

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Abstract

India has one of the largest and diverse education systems in the world. Quality higher education is need of the hour to sustain in this competitive era. The quality of education is very important to build youths in the country. Privatisation, widespread expansion increased autonomy and introduction of programmes in new and emerging areas have improved access to higher education. At the same time, it has also led to widespread concern on the quality and relevance of the higher education. To address these concerns, the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1992) spelt out strategic plans for the policies, advocated the establishment of an independent National accreditation agency. Consequently the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in September, 1994 as an autonomous body of the University Grants Commission (UGC) with its Head Quarter in Bangalore. The Primary objective of NAAC is to assess and accredit institution of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of higher education. The Vision and Mission statements are guiding Principles to function in the area of higher education. The accreditation framework (Core Values) and benefits of Assessment and Accreditation by NAAC are also focused (highlighted). The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the institution is functioning smoothly to develop a system for conscious and consistent improvement in the overall performance of institutions.

Introduction: Education plays a vital role in the development of any Nation. India has the third largest education system in the World, after the United States (US) and China. A focus on quality access and relevance of higher education to achieve the required social transformation for sustainable economic development of the country has been the National priority. According to Ronald Barnett there are four predominant concepts of higher education:

- Higher education as the production of qualified human resources.
- Higher education as the training for a research Career.

- Higher education as the efficient management of teaching Provision.
- Higher education as a matter of extending Life chances.

Higher education refers to education in the Colleges and Universities. It constitutes the top most stage of formal education and it is concerned with process in the more advance phases of human learning. The recent dramatic progress in establishment of higher educational institutions both under Private and Public sectors in India. These institutions offer a variety of programmes through On and Off Campus and adopt different strategies of teaching and learning, enroll heterogeneous group of learners in diverse discipline and engage themselves in multifarious activities of teaching, research and extension services. The concern for quality improvement has therefore required paramount significance.

Theoretical Background of the Study: The U.G.C. formed in 1945 to oversee the work of the three Central Universities of Aligarh, Banaras and Delhi. Its responsibility was extended in 1947 to cover all Indian Universities. After independence, the University Education Commission was set up in 1948 under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and it recommended that the UGC be reconstituted on the general model of UGC of the United Kingdom (UK). The UGC was formally inaugurated by late Abdul Kalam Azad, the Minister of Education, National Resources and Scientific Research on 28th December, 1953. However, the UGC was formally established in November, 1956 by an Act of Parliament in 1956, as a Statutory Body of the Govt. of India. In order to ensure effective Region-wise coverage throughout the country, the UGC has decentralised its operations by setting up Six Regional Centres at Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Guwahati and Bangalore. The Head office of the UGC is located at New Delhi. National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) was established by the UGC in September, 1994 at Bangalore for evaluating the performance of the Colleges and Universities in the country. NAAC mandate includes the task of performance evaluation assessment and accreditation of the Colleges and Universities in India. The philosophy of NAAC is based on objectives and continuous judgment. So that all institutions of higher education learning are empowered to maximize their resources, opportunities and capabilities. Assessment is a performance evaluation of an institution and/or its units and accomplished through a process based on on-line submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI), submission of Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA), preparation and submission of Self Study Report (SSR) and Peer review using defined criteria. Accreditation refers to the Certification given by the NAAC which was valid for a period of 5 (five) years. NAAC accreditation is mandatory for all the higher learning institutions and without NAAC accreditation institutions are not eligible for UGC grants, RUSA grants, financial aid, etc.

Objectives of the Study:

The study is designed with the following objectives:

- To study the importance of NAAC in Quality improvement in higher education.
- To study the Process and Criteria of NAAC for assessment and accreditation of higher educational institutions.

- To analyse the grading system of NAAC on the basis of quality of the institution.

Methodology of the Study: Methodology is a systematic procedure of investigation of problem starting from its initial identification of the problem to the final conclusion. The present study is descriptive in nature to describe NAAC and Quality improvement in higher education in India. This is a Library based study. The paper is basically compiled with the help of various Secondary sources such as Newspaper, Magazines, Journals, Books and Publications, Reports, Research paper, Internet, etc. related to the quality improvement in higher education.

Importance of NAAC Accreditation: The NAAC is an autonomous body established by the UGC of India to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. It is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (1986) which laid special emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India. To address the issue of quality, the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Plan of Action (1992) advocated the establishment of an independent National accreditation body. Consequently the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 with its headquarter at Bangalore. The primary objective of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education.

NAAC-Vision and Mission:

Vision: The Vision of the NAAC is

- To make quality defining element of higher education in India through a combination of Self and External Quality Evaluation, Promotion and Sustenance initiatives.

Mission: The Mission of NAAC is

- i) To arrange for periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects.
- ii) To stimulate/ evaluate the academic environment for promotion of quality teaching-learning and research in higher education institutions.
- iii) To encourage Self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education.
- iv) To undertake quality- related research studies, consultancy and training programmes and
- v) To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

Guided by its Vision and striving to achieve its Mission, the NAAC primarily assesses the quality of institutions of higher education that volunteer for the process through an internationally accepted methodology.

Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC): Maintaining the momentum of quality consciousness is crucial in higher education. IQAC, in fact is conceived as a mechanism to build and ensure a quality culture at an institutional level. Every institution should have an Internal Quality Assurance System, with appropriate structure and process and with enough flexibility to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders. The internal quality assurance mechanism of the institution may be called IQAC. The IQAC is meant for planning, guiding and monitoring Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE) activities of the institution.

The IQAC may channelise and systematise the effect and measure of an institution toward academic excellence. It is not just another body to keep academic records and follow only hierarchical structure in HEIs, but it has been made obligatory by the NAAC for keeping quality initiatives being upgraded and updated in all HEIs. The IQAC should become a driving force for ushering in quality by working out intervention strategies to remove deficiencies and improve quality.

The COMPOSITION of the IQAC: Like any other committee in HEIs, IQAC is also constituted under the Chairmanship of the Head of the institution with heads of important academic and administrative units and a few teachers and a few distinguished educationists and representatives of local management and stakeholders.

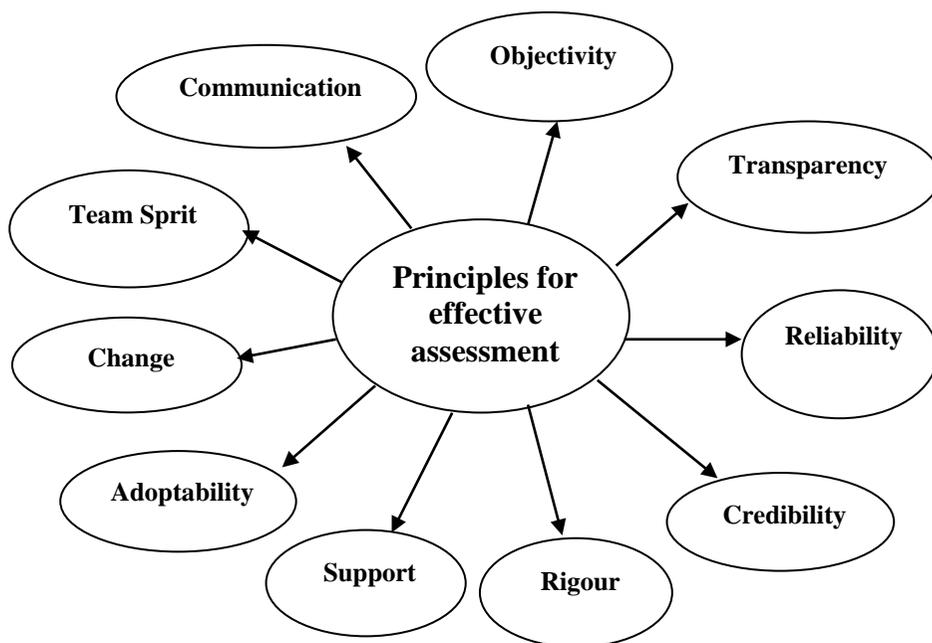
The composition of the IQAC may be as follows:

1. Chairperson: Head of the Institution
2. Teacher to represent all level (Three to eight)
3. One nominee from the Management
4. Few senior administrative officers
5. One nominee each from local society, Students and Alumni
6. One nominee each from Employers /Industrialists/stakeholders
7. One of the senior teachers as the coordinator/Director of the IQAC

The composition of the IQAC will depend on the size and complexity of the institution, accordingly the representation of teachers may vary. It helps the institutions in planning and monitoring. The membership of such nominated members shall be for a period of two years. The IQAC should meet at least once in every quarter. The quorum of the meeting shall be two- third of the total number of members. The agenda, minutes and action taken reports are to be documented with official signatories and maintained electronically in a retrievable format and on the institutional website. It is necessary for all the members of the IQAC to shoulder the responsibilities of generating and promoting awareness in the institution and to devote time for working out the procedural details.

Source: *Guidelines for the Creation of the IQAC and Submission of AQAR by Accredited Institutions (For Universities), Revised on 26th Sept., 2019, Page-8*

The TEN essential PRINCIPLES for effective assessment



Source: Assessors Hand Book, Page-20

National Assessment and Accreditation Council, Bangalore, India

Functions of IQAC- As per UGC guidelines

Some of the functions of the IQAC are:

1. Development and application of quality benchmarks/parameters for the various academic and administrative activities of the institutions.
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. Arrangement for feedback responses from students, parents and other stakeholders on quality-related institutional processes.
4. Dissemination of information on the various quality parameters of higher education.
5. Organization of inter and intra institutional workshops, seminars on quality related themes and promotion of quality circles.
6. Documentation of the various programmes/ activities of the college leading to quality improvement.
7. Acting as a nodal agency of the institutions for coordinating quality-related activities, including adoption and dissemination of best practices.
8. Development and maintenance of institutional database through MIS for the purpose of maintaining / enhancing the institutional quality.
9. Development of quality culture in the institution.

10. Preparation of the Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) as per guidelines and parameters of NAAC, to be submitted to NAAC.

The co-ordinator has a major role in implementing these functions.

Strategies of IQAC: IQAC evolves mechanisms and procedures for: Ensuring timely, efficient and progressive performance of academic, administrative and financial tasks like:

1. The relevance and quality of academic and research programmes.
2. Equitable access to and affordability of academic programmes for various sections of society.
3. Optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning.
4. The credibility of evaluation procedures.
5. Ensuring the adequacy, maintenance and proper allocation of support structure and services.
6. Sharing of research findings and networking with other institutions in India and abroad.

Eligibility criteria for NAAC Assessment and Accreditation: The NAAC has adopted its new methodology of Assessment and Accreditation from 1st April, 2007.

1. Universities recognized u/s 2f, 2f and 12(B) of the UGC Act 1956 or established u/s 3 of the UGC Act, which has completed 5 years since establishment or with a record of at least 2 batches of students having completed their degree, programmes whichever is earlier.
2. All Universities recognized under section 3 of the UGC Act are eligible, regardless of the number of years of establishment.
3. Colleges/Autonomous Colleges affiliated to a recognized University and Constituent Colleges coming under the jurisdiction of recognized Universities which have the same record as mentioned in the case 1.
4. Institutions coming under the jurisdiction of Professional Regulatory Councils are eligible if they are duly recognized by the concerned councils.
5. Any other institutions/Universities may also be taken up for Assessment and Accreditation by NAAC, if directed by the UGC and /or Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India.

Guidelines for Assessment and Accreditation: This Section presents the NAAC framework for Assessment and Accreditation based on the Core Values and Criteria for assessment and Key Indicators. Further, it details out the procedures for institutional preparation for filling the Self Study Report, Online, Peer Assessment and the final Outcome of Accreditation. The procedure for re-assessment, mechanism for institutional appeals and accreditation of subsequent cycles are also presented.

Value Framework (Core values) for Assessment of HEIs

The Accreditation framework of NAAC is based on five core values

Sl. No.	Core Values	Suggested activities/Parameters
1	Contributing to National Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More access with equity. • Developmental thrust in identification of research areas and academic programmes. • Community engagement.
2	Fostering Global Competencies among Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of generic skills. • Development of application skills. • Development of Life skills.
3	Inculcating a Value System among Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value integration in academic programmes. • Value integration in management practices. • Value inculcation through co-curricular and extra curricular activities.
4	Promoting the Use of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For enrichment of learning. • For increasing the access online programmes. • For system management.
5	Quest for Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of benchmarks of excellence. • Application of best practices • Institutionalization of continuous improvement system.

Source: “Value Framework for Assessment of Higher Education Institutions”- Page-10
Published by NAAC, Bengaluru, Jwalamukhi Job Press, Bengaluru- 4

Criteria for Accreditation: Since the accreditation framework of the NAAC is expected to assess the institutions contributions towards the above five core values, the NAAC has integrated these into seven criteria identified for Assessment and Accreditation which are-

1. Curricular Aspects-

- * Curriculum Design and Development
- * Academic Flexibility
- * Feedback on curriculum
- * Curriculum update
- * Best practices in curricular aspects

2. Teaching-Learning and Evaluation

- * Admission process and Student profile,
- * Catering to diverse needs,
- * Teaching-Learning process,
- * Teacher quality,

- * Evaluation process and reforms,
- * Best practices in teaching-learning and evaluation
- 3. Research, Consultancy and Extension
 - * Promotion of research,
 - * Research and publication output,
 - * Consultancy,
 - * Extension activities,
 - * Collaborations,
 - * Best practices in Research, Consultancy and Extension.
- 4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources
 - * Physical facilities,
 - * Maintenance of infrastructure,
 - * Library as a learning resources,
 - * ICT as a learning resources,
 - * Other facilities.
- Student support and progression
 - * Student progression
 - * Student support
 - * Student activities
 - * Best practices in student support and progression.
- 5. Governance and Leadership
 - * Institutional vision and leadership,
 - * Organisational arrangements,
 - * Strategy development and deployment,
 - * Human Resource Management
 - * Financial management and resource mobilization,
 - * Best practices in Governance and Leadership.
- 6. Innovative practices
 - * Internal quality assurance system,
 - * Inclusive practices,
 - * Stakeholder relationship.

Source: *Criteria for Accreditation, Self Study Report, Volume-I, Cycle-III, Page 2 and 3*
Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, Rajasthan

Process of Assessment and Accreditation of NAAC:

The assessment and accreditation is in five dimensions which are explained below:

1. Online submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI).
2. Submission of Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA) required in case of certain higher educational institutions coming forward for assessment and accreditation for the first time and feedback to the applicant institution regarding specific improvements needed for reaching the threshold level of quality for applying for the comprehensive assessment and accreditation by NAAC.

3. Preparation and submission of Self-Study Report (SSR)/Self-Appraisal Report (SAR)/Re-accreditation Report (RAR) as the case may be by the higher educational institutions according to the guidelines formulated by NAAC. The institution has to prepare the Self-Study Report in two parts, where part-I is the organization of data and part-II is the self-analysis based on part-I. This will be an internal exercise by the institution to measure its effectiveness and efficiency and to identify areas of its strengths and weakness.
4. Peer team visit to the institution
On receiving the Self Study Report from the institution, NAAC will decided on the panel of peer and inform the institution. The team will visit the institution and look for patterns of evidences to validate the Self Study Report. The peers will interact with the various constituents of the institution and also check documentary evidence to understood and functioning of the institution. (On-site visit Peer Teams for validation of the SSR/SAR/RAR and reporting the assessment outcome to the NAAC and)
5. Final decision on assessment and accreditation by the NAAC
The Executive council of NAAC will review the report and take decision about the Grade of the institution. The Grade will be valid for a period of five years.

Grading (The assessment outcomes): The Final Grade

There are two outcomes of Assessment and Accreditation: the qualitative part (30%) of the outcome is called Peer Team Report and quantitative part (70%) would result in a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), a letter grade and a performance descriptor. The final declaration of the accreditation status of an institution is as given below:

Range of institutional CGPA	Letter Grade	Performance Descriptor/ Status
3.51-4.00	A++	Accredited
3.26-3.50	A+	Accredited
3.01-3.25	A	Accredited
2.76-3.00	B++	Accredited
2.51-2.75	B+	Accredited
2.01-2.50	B	Accredited
1.51-2.00	C	Accredited
≤ 1.50	D	Not Accredited (Unsatisfactory)

With effect from July, 2017

Source: NAAC Institutional Accreditation,
 “Manual for Self- Study Report of Universities”, page-30

Institutions which secure a CGPA equal to or less than 1.50 will be intimated and notified by the NAAC as “Assessed and found not qualified for accreditation”. The accreditation status is valid for 5 years from the date of approval by the executive council/ committee of the NAAC.

As of 2nd November, 2018, 568 Universities and 11,816 Colleges were accredited by NAAC. Of these, 1856 institutes (206 Universities and 1650 Colleges) were graded 'A'.

Benefits of NAAC Accreditation for Institution:

- * NAAC accreditation helps the higher learning institutes to know its strengths, opportunities, and weaknesses through an informed review process.
 - * NAAC identifies the internal areas of planning and allocation of resources.
 - * NAAC accreditation will help funding agencies with objective data so that they can take a decision on the funding of higher learning institutes.
 - * NAAC grade/ assessment will help educational institutes to initiate modern or innovative methods of pedagogy.
- In all, NAAC is one of the major accreditation agencies in India, which is mandatory for all the higher learning institutes.
- * NAAC grade also determine the value of degree offered by the higher learning institutes.

Revised Assessment and Accreditation Framework: The Revised Assessment and Accreditation (A & A) Framework was launched in July, 2017. It represents an explicit paradigm shift making it ICT enabled, objective, transparent, scalable and robust. The shift is

- * From qualitative peer judgment to data based quantitative indicator evaluation with increased objectivity and transparency,
- * Towards extensive use of ICT confirming scalability and robustness,
- * In terms of simplification of the process drastic reduction in number of questions, size of the report, visit days, and so on,
- * In terms of boosting benchmarking as quality improvement tool. This has been attempted through comparison of NAAC indicators with other international QA frameworks,
- * Introducing pre-qualifier for peer team visit, as 30% of system generated score,
- * Introducing System Generated Scores (SGS) with combination of online evaluation (about 70%) and peer judgment (about 30%),
- * In introducing the element of third party validation of data,
- * In providing appropriate differences in the metrics, weightages and benchmarks to universities, autonomous colleges and affiliated/constituent colleges,
- * In revising several metrics to bring in enhanced participation of students and alumni in the assessment process.

Source: *National Assessment and Accreditation Council, Bengaluru, 27th July, 2017*
Revised Accreditation Framework, Page 1 and 2

Conclusion: In the context of globalization, without assuring quality of relevant programmes, it is not possible to ensure credit transfer and student mobility, prepare a cadre of manpower, which can ensure efficient use of resources, improve productivity and competitiveness of economy. It is imperative, therefore to identify the characteristics of

quality, evolve strategies for fostering it, identify the factors affecting it, examine the relationship between quality and resources, and explore the measures of monitoring changes overtime. To do this, common framework is needed for gathering qualitative and quantitative data and for analyzing them, to assess quality and to assure the stakeholder of their quality.

As the responsibility of maintenance of standards of higher education is vested with University Grant Commission, the UGC has established NAAC for assessment and accreditation of Colleges and Universities. A five-stage procedure is followed which involves; (i) On-line submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI); (ii) submission of Institutional Eligibility For Quality Assessment (IEQA); (iii) preparation and submission of Self Study Report(SSR)/Self-Appraisal Report (SAR)/ Re-accreditation Report (RAR) by the institutions based on the defined parameters; (iv) validation of the Self Study Report by a team of Peers through on-site visit and interaction with the functionaries; and (v) the final decision on assessment and accreditation by the NAAC.

The final result (outcomes) of accreditation exercises undertaken by the NAAC has significant impact on improvement of quality of higher education; the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the institutions are detected for initiating appropriate action. The Stakeholders, the Government, Institution (management), Academic World (Teachers and others), Students, Employers and Society at large- duly benefit from information and analysis of institutional performance.

To conclude I would say that NAAC accreditation is playing a major role in ensuring quality in higher educational institutions with NAAC accreditation should not aim at just getting Higher Grades, but should aim at quality education in real sense, which would in turn help in building a strong qualified and highly motivated YOUNG TEAM INDIA that can assist in National Building.

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Web Links:

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<http://www.aicte.ernet.in/>
2. Distance Education Council, India
<http://www.dec.ac.in>
3. National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India
<http://www.naac-india.com/> and <http://www.naacindia.org/>
4. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
<http://www.qaa.ac>
5. Quality Council of India
<http://www.qcin.org/>