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National Assessment and Accreditation Council: An Expedient Solution for Qualitative Change in Higher Education

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Appearing for the First Cycle of Assessment & Accreditation (A&A) by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in the last decade of 20th century, and in rural and remote colleges even in the first decade of 21st century was like picking up *Shiv-dhanushaya*. Hats off to those who accepted the drastic change; those who travelled a long way journey from a narrow, unsystematic and non-methodic world to a rather new systematic and methodic world by daring to appear for the First Cycle of NAAC. It will be very unjust to move forward without saluting the first Director, General Council (GC) and the Executive Committee (EC) of NAAC and the heads of higher education institutions and the NAAC Co-ordinators of those institutions.

India is incredible; it is a universally acknowledged fact. The very first line in the Introduction of NAAC Manual underlines the fact, but instead of generalizing, it particularizes education system in India. "India has one of the largest and diverse education system in the world." (NAAC, 2018)

Various factors like privatization, increased autonomy in higher education, introduction of new courses etc. in education sector increased access to higher education, which forms the base of the pyramid of the higher education, but the quality concern remained at the top of the pyramid.

M. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice President of India in his Convocation Address at Annual Convocation of Birla Institute of Management and Technology, Greater Noida on April 11, 2018, said that all educational institutions are engaged in the mission of transformation. His Address has many pivotal points which are some of the basic criterion according to NAAC for the HEIs in India. Out of total 8309449 research publications in 2016-17 in the world, only 336978 are from India said the Hon'ble Vice President. Here it is worth to note that NAAC has kept one separate Key Indicator for it in Criterion III i.e. Research, Innovation and Extension.

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He said that intelligence and character are the two sides on the same goal which can be achieved through true education. NAAC gives a good weightage to values of all type and extension activities along with teaching and learning in its assessment framework (Vice President, 2018).

One of the major issues of lack of interest in A&A of HEI's was the lack of interest in the progress of the students. It resulted in producing unemployable human-resource with a plenty of capital investment under both the heads—recurring and non-recurring; and unfortunately the investment made in it turned out to be unfruitful. The other is that previously A&A do not affect to the pecuniary or academic growth of the faculty and the institution.

Review of Literature

The Hon'ble Vice President of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu, in his Convocation Address at Annual Convocation of Birla Institute of Management and Technology, Greater Noida on April 11, 2018, said, "Here, I would like to recall that India was once known as 'Vishwaguru'." By giving reference of the best universities of the world i.e. *Takshashila* and *Nalanda*, he said that knowledge-seekers from various parts come there. More than 10000 students used to study at *Nalanda*. If the HEI become knowledge centers then knowledge -seekers from various parts will automatically assemble there. (India, 2018) That is what happened in India's ancient universities like *Nalanda* and *Takshashila*. And now, the same is happening in the top hundred universities of the world.

In the same Address Mr. Vice President made a great statement. In fact, it is not a statement but an inner urge of every citizen of India who loves India. He said, "We need to recapture the past glory and become the global knowledge hub of the 21st century." He further said, "Our institutions of higher learning must maintain excellent standards without compromising on the rigors of teaching and research" (Vice President, 2018).

And NAAC is playing very vital role in this regard. If every HEI in India took A&A seriously and

wholeheartedly then the dream of every true Indian in the form of the statement made by the Hon'ble Vice President will come true.

Conceptualization

NAAC in itself is a very broad subject; and the impact on HEI varies from place to place and state to state. A variety in HE in India broadens its horizon and increases its complexity. Quality in HE is such huge topic which has many dimensions; and which can be discussed in a number of ways. The other two aspects of NAAC i.e. A&A are core aspects of NAAC.

Methodology

The data used for the study is secondary. NAAC Manual, NAAC Broachers, some reputed journals like University News and proceedings of the various national seminars are used for the study. Most of the data is available on internet in the PDF form. As the collected data, almost all qualitative, is analyzed and by using analytical methodology the study is carried out to reach at the certain conclusions.

A Brief History of NAAC

After much deliberation the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1988) and the Programme of Action (PoA, 1992) expressed the need of certain strategic plans and advocated the need to establish an independent National Accreditation Agency. As a result of it in 1994 the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established. It is an autonomous institution of the University Grants Commission (UGC). And its Head Quarter is in Bengaluru (NAAC, 2018).

Since its inception in 1994, till July 2017, NAAC made certain changes in its process and method of A&A. But the years 2017 and 2018 (till August) remained very stormy. The drastic changes which NAAC has made in its methodology of A&A created a type of emergency situation for the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). As a result of it, a number of workshops and seminars were organized by the universities and colleges at national, state level and college level. It created a type of mixed feeling of fear and confidence, about the understanding of NAAC. Those institutions, who will overcome the hurdles, will survive and those who will not overcome will not survive. A type of do-or-die situation is created now. To overcome the hurdles the HEI has to opt certain means to reach the goal of quality. Their journey may be slow and full of impediments, for the goal of quality cannot be achieved over night. It is

slow and steady process. It requires both inspiration and perspiration.

Vision of NAAC

The vision, with which NAAC has been working, makes our vision clearer. NAAC has been working with a vision: "To make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives." (NAAC, Manual for Affiliated Colleges, 2018)

NAAC had started its journey with a vision of making 'quality' a defining element of higher education in India. And to achieve this goal it provides two steps – the first, self study and the second, assessment and accreditation by the external agency. The initiatives taken by the institutions for the qualitative change must be promoted and sustained then only quality can become a 'defining element'. It makes one point very clear i.e. making quality the 'defining element' of HEI is the core concern of NAAC. The focus of NAAC is on creating 'quality culture' in HEI. Without it India cannot dream of Knowledge Capital and 'knowledge hub' of the world.

To understand the vision of NAAC, to make quality a defining element of HE; it is essential to understand the five Core Values given by NAAC. They are:

- i. Contributing to national development
- ii. Fostering global competence among students
- iii. Inculcating a value system among students
- iv. Promoting the use of technology
- v. Quest for excellence" (NAAC, 2018).

By keeping students at the centre of higher education, for HEI's in India, NAAC added the dimensions of national development, global competence, value and technology to set out on the quest of excellence. All these objectives clearly reflect in the "Quality Indicator Framework (QIF) of NAAC, which is criteria based and "forms the backbone of A&A process of NAAC." All the seven criteria given by NAAC represent the core functions and activities of a HEI. NAAC believes, and it is true that 'Quality concerns are institutional.' Quality Assessment can better be done through self evaluation." (NAAC, 2018)

NAAC believes that the involvement of all the stakeholders right from management, faculty members, administrative staff, students, parents, employers, community to alumni of a HEI is essential to make "quality a defining element of higher education." It is a collective and collaborative work.

Rational

On the Home Page of NAAC portal, NAAC gave rational behind A&A. "Assessment and Accreditation is broadly used for understanding the 'Quality Status' of an institution." This 'Quality Status' gives a sense of pride to the HEI about the efforts that the HEI has taken to achieve it. It will also give a sense of belongingness to every stakeholder for contributing to the qualitative change, for it is a team work. It will also give better understanding to the HEI about its place in the hierarchy of quality in higher education in India. A&A takes the holistic approach; hence it is beneficial for all the stakeholders and ultimately the nation.

Why Accreditation?

To a general question which very often comes in the minds of so many learned people i. e. Why NAAC? NAAC, itself gives a very concise answer as follows: "Education plays a vital role in the development of any nation. Therefore, there is a premium on both quantity (increased access) and quality (relevance and excellence of academic programmes offered) of higher education. The NAAC has been set up to facilitate the volunteering institutions to assess their performance vis-a-vis set parameters through introspection and a process that provides space for participation of the institution" (NAAC, Assessment & Accreditation, 2018).

Appearing for any cycle of NAAC is volunteer act of the institution for the qualitative change. Apart from this general statement NAAC itself also gives some benefits of A&A and they are as follows:

Benefits of Accreditation

- "Institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities through an informed review process.
- Identification of internal areas of planning and resource allocation
- Collegiality on the campus.
- Funding agencies look for objective data for performance funding.
- Institutions to initiate innovative and modern methods of pedagogy.
- New sense of direction and identity for institutions.
- The society look for reliable information on quality education offered.
- Employers look for reliable information on the quality of education offered to the prospective recruits.
- Intra and inter-institutional interactions" (NAAC, Assessment & Accreditation, 2018).

Changes in A&A Process

Here it is important to note that, as it is mentioned in the Value Framework of NAAC Brochure 31/080/2016, "while formulating its Core Values for Accreditation Framework, NAAC is in cognizance of the swift changes and consequent metamorphosis in values pertaining to the Indian Higher Education." It makes one point very clear that there will be constant changes in the accreditation process. The changes are must, for only change is permanent; and it is must in a continental country like India— a nation with much diversity in its all spheres.

The seeds of the changes which NAAC is making in its assessment and accreditation process are seen in its Value Framework as mentioned above and in its Main Objectives too. The Main Objectives 2, 3, 4 and 9 of NAAC are as follows:

- "(2) Stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching...
- (3) Generate awareness of quality in education.
- (4) To share information on successful quality strategies.
- (9) Promote necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institution for excellence." (NAAC, Brochure, 2018)

The core part of NAAC is its philosophy. One can understand its aim and broad vision. Here it is worth to note the 'Philosophy of NAAC', as mentioned in its Brochure: "is ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judgmental, so that all constituencies of the institutions of higher learning are empowered to maximize their resources, opportunities and capabilities" (NAAC, Brochure, 2018).

But it is observed that most of the times the institutions appearing for any cycle of NAAC remain under heavy pressure with an obvious fear of NAAC being judgmental i.e. "which grade?" Once the institutions convinced that appearing for any cycle of NAAC is beneficial to them; and it is ultimately in the interest of the nation; and not for making NAAC judgmental about their quality. Then they will be in full sun.

Benefits of Appearing for any Cycle of NAAC

The colleges have to think that NAAC is their 'senior friend' who is sharing its experiences in a well planned and neatly designed format. The HEI has to accept A&A as something essential for its qualitative change and not as a forcefully added burden. It is true that appearing for any cycle of NAAC do not make 100%

either qualitative or quantitative change in any HEI but no one can deny the scalable change both in quality and quantity which NAAC has been bringing in the HEIs. A number of colleges both in rural and urban areas of India witnessed a lot of infrastructural change and upgrades in faculties and in teaching and learning process and in ICT and research. Earlier, before the existence of NAAC, extension activities means NSS or NCC was the formula, but after the establishment of NAAC, they became a well defined things making aware the HEI's about their social responsibilities as a part of the society.

NAAC, in its Brochure published on 31/08/2016, gives the 9 benefits of appearing for any cycle of NAAC. They are:

- “(1) Institutions know their strengths, weakness and opportunities through informed review process.
- (2) Institutions to initiate innovative and modern methods of pedagogy.
- (3) Enabling the society to look for reliable information on the quality of the institutions for making informed choice.” (NAAC, Brochure, 2018)

If it is so, then the changes which NAAC is making in its A&A process are apt and in the interest of the institution and not to disturb or give any kind of pain to the institutions.

Why NAAC is going to make Student Satisfaction Survey through third agency is also explained in the NAAC Brochure. Under the heading Collaboration, NAAC says, “In an area where partnerships are extremely important, NAAC collaborates with national and international agencies in order to be relevant and contemporary.” (NAAC, Brochure, 2018)

Conclusion

Assessment and Accreditations of the HEI is must for the qualitative change in higher education. It is a twofold process, one is Self Assessment and the other is A&A by some external agency. In fact the aim of NAAC is not be judgmental, and it is also true that self-assessment has certain limitations and fear of subjectivity. To bring objectivity, to see the unseen by the self, to suggest areas of improvement, assessment by some external agency becomes necessary thing. And NAAC has been playing a very vital role in it.

Findings

The findings of the study are as follows:

1. NAAC is on a mission of bringing qualitative change in higher education in India. Every college has to

participate in this national educational mission of qualitative change.

2. In fact, NAAC is not something to be scared off, but it is a welcoming thing, for quality and survival in long run future of any HEI.
3. Most of the faculties never read any Manual of NAAC or any other literature of NAAC.
4. Fear, anxiety, doubts about NAAC has two causes one, ignorance about NAAC or two, pride and laziness. To remove them NAAC Erudition Programmes are to be organized.

Limitations

The study is restricted to only vision, mission of NAAC; hence only NAAC Manual for universities, autonomous colleges and affiliated colleges, NAAC Brochure 31/08/2016 and other relevant information from the Home Page of NAAC website is taken in to consideration. The study does not deal with many other things of NAAC such as A&A process which is the core part of NAAC.

Future Scope

As the study deals only with the vision and mission of NAAC, the aspired researchers can continue their research by taking holistic approach of NAAC. By considering its all dimensions one can make a comparative study of NAAC and of some other bodies like NAAC in other countries.

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