

EDITORIAL

QUALITY CONCERNS IN EDUCATION

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Quality of education plays pivotal role in the process of development of nations. Hence, quality concerns in education are national priorities for all nations. Quality is multiple perspectives and is not a unitary concept (Newton 2007, p.14). The dimensions of quality in education include achieving pre-determined targets and objectives. Concerns for ensuring quality level has arisen out of factors such as decline in percentage of grants from the government sources due to sharp rise in number of institutions, students and teachers, dilution in quality of PG courses that produce higher education teachers, dilution in intake standards in PG courses, as talented ones join professional courses, low standard of members of teaching profession as non-teaching jobs fetch more income, The details of expectations from quality education differ from one situation to another. A Report of the Higher Education Academy of UK states that “among the general public and media commentators there does not appear to be a common understanding of what the terms ‘academic standards’ or ‘academic quality’ mean” (HEA 2009, p.4). The Communiqué of the World Conference on Higher Education 2009 states that “Quality criteria must reflect the overall objectives of higher education, notably the aim of cultivating in students critical and independent thought and the capacity of learning throughout life. They should encourage innovation and diversity” (UNESCO 2009, p.4). Quality of an institution or a programme is generally considered on the basis of placement of its products. It is ascertained from quality of material and human resources. Various factors that affect quality are: finance, sincerity of faculty and students and management, skills of management, skills of teaching of faculty members, and quality of brain of students. Finance is a serious concern. Rapid growth rate of higher education has created problems in acquiring appropriate infrastructure. UIS (2009, p. 15) states that

“The number of students pursuing tertiary education has skyrocketed over the past 37 years, growing five-fold from 28.6 million in 1970 to 152.5 million in 2007. This translates into an average annual increase of 4.6%, with the average number of tertiary students doubling every 15 years. But a closer look at the data reveals that the expansion has been particularly intense since 2000, with 51.7 million new tertiary students enrolled around the world in just seven years.

Although national governments fail to provide adequate amount of funds, private initiatives have made education a huge industry. Profit from educational institutions in certain cases is much higher than one can expect from a small scale industry. Concern for making quality education available to their children has made parents go for private and high fee charging institutions, expected to be of high quality. The next level students go to next level institutions on the basis of their capacity to pay. Some of them also go abroad. Search for quality in higher education has upshot the concept of world class universities. Salmi (2009b,pp.3-4) states that

“In the past decade, the term “world-class university” has become a catch phrase, not simply for improving the quality of learning and research in tertiary education but also, more important, for developing the capacity to compete in the global tertiary education market place through the acquisition, adaptation, and creation of advanced knowledge.”

Not only developed nation, but also developing nations have started making attempt to create world class universities. “No longer are countries comfortable with developing their tertiary education systems to serve their local or national communities. Instead, global comparison

indicators have gained significance in local development of universities” (Lin 2009, p.x). At the national level, appropriate bodies take care of quality.

A large element of private and voluntary enterprise is a healthy element in the provision, of education. It is necessary for variety, life and progress as State control of generality and a high standard of efficiency (Sri Aurobindo 2003, p.686). The Communiqué of the World Conference on Higher Education 2009 states that

“Expanding access poses challenges to the quality of higher education. Quality assurance is a vital function in contemporary higher education and must involve all stakeholders. Quality requires both establishing quality assurance systems and patterns of evaluation as well as promoting a quality culture within institutions. Regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms that promote access and create conditions for the completion of studies should be put in place for the entire higher education sector.” (UNESCO 2009, P. 4)

Efforts to improve quality have resulted in establishment of agencies at national, regional and global level for assuring quality. Concern for high quality in higher education programmes has given rise to new bodies. International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education established in 1991 with 8 members, has 200 members in 2009. In 2000, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established as the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In 2004, it was transformed into an association. In 2005, the European Ministers adopted Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. In UK, in 1997, Qualification Assurance Agency for Higher Education was established to take care of quality and standards in higher education. In 2001, it brought out a national framework for higher education qualifications. Its Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education Institutions has 10 sections, which are: 1. Postgraduate research programmes (2004), 2. Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) (2004), 3. Students with disabilities (1999), 4. External examining (2004), 5. Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters (2007), 6. Assessment of students (2006), 7. Programme design, approval, monitoring and review (2006), 8: Career education, information and guidance (2001), 9: Work-based and placement learning (2007), and 10: Admissions to higher education (2006). There have been attempts to rank higher education institutions. World rankings made by the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) of Shanghai Jia Tong University of China (since 2003) and World University Rankings (THE-QS) of Times Higher Education- Quacquarely Simonds (since 2004) have wider acceptance. Both the rankings made in 2009 had Harvard University of USA as No. 1. THE-QS ranked Stanford University as 16, whereas ARWU ranked Stanford University as 2. Most of the top 20 universities were from USA. THE-QS ranked University of Oxford as 4, whereas ARWU did not include it in top 20. There was none from India. The ranking indicators of ARWU are: 1. Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals (Alumni) - 10%, 2. Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals (Award) - 20%, 3. Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories (HiCi) - 20%, 4. Papers published in Nature and Science* (N&S) - 20%, 5. Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index (PUB) - 20% and 6. Per capita academic performance of an institution (PCP) 10%. *In case of institutions specialised in humanities and social sciences such as London School of Economics, N&S is not considered, and the weight of N&S is relocated to other indicators. In case of THE-QS, the ranking indicators are: 1. Academic Peer Review score- 40%, 2. Employer Review score - 10%, 3. International Faculty score -5%, 4. International Students score – 5%, 5. Faculty / Student score -20% and 6. Citations/Faculty score-20%.

There have been international assessments of student performance that gives indicators of quality of school education in countries included in the assessment. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

surveys key competencies of 15-year-old students in OECD member countries and a group of partner countries. These surveys are administered every three years. In case of PISA 2006, on the science scale, Finland ranked No. 1, followed by Hong Kong-China, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Estonia and Japan. USA ranked 18. Since 1995, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an international organisation of national research institutions and governmental research agencies has been bringing out The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). It assesses the mathematics and science knowledge and skills of Fourth and Eighth-graders of the participating countries. TIMSS 2007 covered 58 countries. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2008) stated that “Across both disciplines, Asian countries had the highest percentages of students reaching the advanced International Benchmark, representing fluency on items involving the most complex topics and reasoning skills.” Highlighting position of USA, the Institute of Educational Sciences (2009, p. iii) stated that “At eighth grade, the average U.S. science score was higher than the average scores of students in 35 of the 47 other countries, lower than those in 9 countries (all located in Asia or Europe), and not measurably different from those in the other 3 countries.” Such types of international assessments have facilitated efforts for innovation in school education.

In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (1994) of the University Grants Commission accredits institutions in general higher education. National Board of Accreditation (1994) of the AICTE accredits programmes related to Applied Arts & Crafts, Architecture, Hotel Management & Catering Technology (HMCT), Engineering & Technology, Master in Business Administration (MBA), Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM), Pharmacy, Master in Computer Application (MCA). There are a number of Government controlled / created organisations for taking care of quality in education. National level organisations are: Indian Council for Agricultural Research (1929), Medical Council of India (1933), All India Council of Technical Education (1945), Dental Council of India (1948), Pharmacy Council of India (1948), Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (1949), University Grants Commission (1956), Institute of Costs and Works Accountants of India (1959), Bar Council of India (1961), Central Council of Indian Medicine (1970), Council of Architecture (1972), Central Council of Homoeopathy (1973), Institute of Company Secretaries of India (1981), Veterinary Council of India (1984), Distance Education Council (1992), Rehabilitation Council of India (1992), and National Council for Teacher Education (1995). Government departments also control quality in education. The Directorate General of Shipping takes care of merchant navy courses. Department of Electronics takes care of computer related courses. At the State level, there are State Government Departments which take care of quality. State Councils of Higher Education cover higher education and State Councils for Educational Research and Training cover education of school teachers. Sarva Shiksha Axiyan scheme takes care of quality of school education.

In order to accelerate qualitative improvement in higher education, National Knowledge Commission (2009, p. 166) recommended establishment of 30 new Central universities, 16 in States where they do not exist and 14 as World class universities (all India admissions, course credits, regular syllabi revision, incentives for faculty, strong linkage with industry and research institutions, no affiliated colleges, outsource nonteaching functions (P.166). The Central Government has started the process of establishment of central Universities. NKC also recommended increase in number of high quality institutions. It suggested establishment of new Indian Institutes of Technology - 8, Indian Institutes of Management - 7, National Institutes of Technology - 10, Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research - 3, Indian Institutes of Information Technology -20, and Schools of Planning Architecture - 2. As part of attempt to provide school education of high quality to rural talented children, the Central Government had established one Navodaya Vidyalaya in each district. National Knowledge Commission (2009)

recommended establishment of 6,000 model schools, one in each block, It also recommended ICT based pedagogy and learning aids and broadband connectivity to all the Government and Government aided secondary schools.

Existing quality assurance agencies assess teachers on the basis of their achievements in terms of qualifications and publications. It does not assess their teaching skills. Existing assessment indirectly gives credit to teachers for performance of their students, whereas, paid private tutoring might have contributed more to student performance. Quality of higher education teachers is promoted by making teachers participate in orientation and refresher courses. Such courses are offered by not only Academic staff Colleges, but also by many Departments of universities. However, the nation needs to improve quality of such courses.

Any attempt to develop a new curriculum or improve existing curriculum requires a strong research base. High quality curriculum development process carries out comparative studies of different aspects of curricula in India with those of developed countries. Comparative study of the efficiency of the products of various education programmes and case studies of high quality institutions and their programmes are of great help. Examining bodies generally do not give stress on contact hours in an academic session. In an autonomous college, it was observed that the Ist year PG students had to go for hunger strike, when the principal decided to have their annual examination only after 5 working months. Neither the examining bodies nor the State Governments enforce the UGC circular for minimum number of 180 teaching days in an academic session. For effective transaction of curriculum, the quality of teaching is more important than the level of publication and research capabilities of teachers. The quality assurance agencies need to give stress on evaluation of teaching skills. Quality of teaching also depends on certain physical resources such as provision for power point presentation, separate cubicle or room for each teacher and facility for internet browsing, taking print out, Xeroxing therein. Availability of such facilities motivates the teachers to become more effective that upgrades the level of curriculum transaction.

School education employs a large number of para teachers, who have neither qualification nor experience. In case of a large number of private schools, teachers are low paid – a meagre amount of one thousand rupees per month. Hence, quality is far of from such institutions. There are government schools, which have such categories of teachers on a monthly remuneration of Rs. 2, 000/- only. Such types of situation portray lack of concern for quality. In 2006, the Government of India set up National Testing Service-India at the Centre for Testing and Evaluation of the Central Institute of Indian Language at Mysore, Karnataka. Its objectives include creation of a variety of measurement frames (aptitude, achievement, and proficiency) for assessing learner growth at every level of education for the courses of study / programmes of education (in terms of content inputs and consequential effects) etc.

Human resources include managers, heads of the institutions, students and teachers. Teachers play paramount role in national development. Teacher quality is an overall concept that comprises not only knowledge and skills, but also personal qualities (respect, care, courage, empathy, etc.) and personal values, attitudes, identity, beliefs, etc. (Association for Teacher Education in Europe 2006, p. 7). The efforts to have high quality teachers have made many developed nations formulate standards for teachers of specific subjects and specific classes and also standards for institutions. USA has many non governmental organisations such as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1954), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1987), Teacher Education Accreditation Council (1998), etc. In order to improve quality of teacher education, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Teacher Education huge amount of funds are being spent for improving human and material resource. A few existing Departments of Education in universities and teacher training colleges have been designated as Institutes of

Advanced Study in Education that could offer doctoral research and other types of programmes. A few other training colleges have been designated as Colleges of Teacher Education. One elementary teacher training institution in every revenue district has been designated as District Institute of Education and Training. The Government of India takes burden for a few years, after which the concerned State government takes over. In most of the cases, the scheme reflects a huge wastage of material as well as human resources. While some of these institutions do not function with heads and faculty members having at least B. Ed. qualification, a few function without adequate work load, as the concerned State governments do not give funds for conducting in-service programmes for school teachers. The scheme also gives support to State Councils of Educational Research and Training that even has Directors without a B. Ed. qualification or school teaching experience. The dismal status of teacher education in India has been stated in the National Knowledge Commission's final report which states that "The training of teachers is a major area of concern at present, since both pre-service and in-service training of school teachers is extremely inadequate and also poorly managed in most states" (NKC 2009, pp. 44-45). Hence, it is imperative that appropriate agencies take immediate steps to improve initial teacher training curricula. Recently, in one AIAER Workshop on Developing Skills for Writing Scholarly Articles and Research Papers, which had more than 40 Lecturers and Readers in Education, it was found that no participant was aware of 86th amendment of the constitution that made elementary education a fundamental right. Hence, the Central as well as State governments need to take steps for continuous updating of knowledge and skills of teachers. They may follow the pattern of ERIC in USA. There may be State level agencies for quality assurance in education which may develop and operationalise resource centers for continuous updating of knowledge and skills of teachers.

Open and Distance Learning is the modern tool for accentuating self-initiated lifelong learning efforts. A new policy on distance learning in higher education sector of the Government of India focuses on encouragement to Open University and distance education systems in the educational pattern of the country, coordination and determination of the standards in such systems and promises to set up a Standing Committee on Open and Distance Education as part of the proposed National Commission for Higher Education and Research, to undertake the job of coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of education through the distance mode.

In many nations, including India, pupils receive fee-free education in government and government aided schools and then supplementary tutoring in the same subjects on a fee-paying basis. Private supplementary tutoring has raised problems of equity (Bray 2009). No doubt, this has created a supplementary school system and employment opportunities. In India, this practice has affected government run and government aided schools and colleges including professional institutions. Teachers in these institutions are found giving coaching in morning and evening hours and getting fainted in classrooms during day hours for which they are officially paid. Unscrupulous teachers do not teach in their regular classes, so that the students have to attend their private coaching on payment basis. Government funded coaching classes for students from disadvantaged population benefit students from the said group, who have learning problems. In the days of privatisation and self-financed programmes in government run and government managed institutions, the availability of quality education for the poor is a serious issue, not only in India but also in rich nations. "In USA, the probability of attaining access to an Ivy League university is 8.3% for the lowest quintile and 50 per cent for the richest"(Salmi 2009a, p.82). Hence, expansion of education has to take care of equity problem.

Out of various factors that obstruct quality in education, funding and management pattern are crucial. One Central University was found conducting a PG course without having any regular

faculty. Guest teachers came from far away places for the purpose. A few years ago, neither concerned quality control agencies of the Central Government nor the State government could stop one private university have nearly two thousand students in an academic session for a PG course run by its Department of Education. The Regional Colleges of Education of the National Council of Educational Research and Training have been running their courses with the help of contract teachers who are paid on hourly basis. This is not a case of paucity of fund, but a case of ineffective management.

Growth in literacy coupled with rise in economic level, has led to growth in percentage of students and corresponding increase in number of institutions. The nation has to take immediate steps for improving quality of educational programmes, so that it can contain rush of rich Indian parents to foreign countries to provide quality education to their children. Assessing quality is an important task of the national as well as State governments. Although, indicators of quality can be ascertained from recruitment tests and entrance tests conducted by various agencies, there is a necessity for national level tests. It is expected that the new Tests can be developed by CIIL within a short period. There may be subject specific tests at various levels at intervals. This may accelerate the process of improving quality of programmes and management of institutions. Ensuring qualitative improvement is not only the responsibility of the Government; it is also the responsibility of the teachers, especially teachers of higher education. The document presents a plethora of papers highlighting various issues concerning quality in education.

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