



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Management.**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EMERGING GLOBAL MARKET PERSPECTIVE**

**KEY WORDS:** Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Global Market.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the increasing need for quality improvement measures in India's higher education system to keep pace with the dynamic global market. Playing a crucial role in shaping societies, transmitting cultural heritage, and empowering individuals to contribute positively to their communities, Education faces new challenges due to technological advancements, globalization, and complex societal issues in the 21st century. To address these challenges, it is felt that education needs to go beyond traditional subjects and foster competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Since India's independence, significant efforts have been made to enhance the quality of higher education. The establishment of prestigious institutions like the IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS has set high academic standards. Regulatory bodies like the UGC have been instrumental in maintaining educational quality through accreditation frameworks and funding schemes. Recent transformative initiatives such as RUSA, NIRF, NAAC, NBA, and The National Education Policy (NEP) implemented in 2020 have focused on improving infrastructure, faculty development, research, innovation, industry collaborations, and internationalization to meet the evolving needs of higher education. The study also focusses on Quality assurance mechanisms that are crucial to ensure that higher education institutions maintain high standards, promote excellence, and meet the needs of students, society, and the economy. These mechanisms assess and monitor the quality of education, foster accountability, and transparency, encourage innovation, and best practices, and facilitate international recognition. Quality assurance tools like Six Sigma, Kaizen, and TQM have demonstrated success in other fields and have the potential to drive excellence in higher education. Implementing these tools in healthcare and the manufacturing industry has resulted in significant improvements and operational excellence. By investing in quality in higher education, we invest in a brighter and more sustainable future for individuals and communities worldwide. This study attempts to explore the way forward for Higher Education in India.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Education is a broad and multifaceted concept that encompasses the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through various formal and informal means. It is not limited to classrooms or textbooks but extends to lifelong learning experiences that shape individuals' intellectual, social, and emotional development. Education involves the imparting of information, fostering critical thinking, nurturing creativity, and promoting personal growth. It equips individuals with the tools and abilities to understand the world, engage with diverse perspectives, and make informed decisions. Education also plays a crucial role in shaping societies, as it transmits cultural heritage, instills moral values, and promotes social progress. It empowers individuals to overcome challenges, pursue opportunities, and contribute positively to their communities. Ultimately, education is a transformative process that expands horizons, unlocks potential, and empowers individuals to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. This study is an attempt to understand the increasing need of quality improvement measures in India's higher education scenario to keep pace with the dynamic global market.

**2.0 Education in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In this era of technological advancements, globalization, and complex societal challenges, education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for success. Education is no longer limited to traditional subjects but encompasses a broader range of competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and adaptability. In an interconnected world, education fosters cultural understanding, global citizenship, and empathy towards diverse perspectives. Moreover, with the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, continuous learning has become essential for individuals to remain relevant in the workforce. Education promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity, enabling individuals to contribute to economic growth and societal development. Additionally, education empowers individuals to make informed decisions, engage in civic participation, and address pressing issues such as climate change, inequality, and social justice. In the 21st century, education is not merely a means to acquire knowledge but a transformative force that

empowers individuals, enriches societies, and paves the way for a brighter future.

**3.0 Higher Education Initiatives since Independence**

Since 1950, India has undertaken several initiatives to develop the quality of higher education, aiming to enhance access, excellence, and relevance. One of the notable efforts was the establishment of prestigious institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the early years. These institutions have become synonymous with academic excellence and have produced outstanding graduates who have excelled in various fields globally.

In subsequent decades, the University Grants Commission (UGC) was established to promote and maintain the quality of higher education institutions across the country. It introduced several regulatory measures, including accreditation frameworks and funding schemes, to ensure educational standards are upheld.

In recent years, the Government of India launched several transformative initiatives to further enhance the quality of higher education. The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) was introduced in 2013 to support the restructuring and strengthening of universities and colleges. It focuses on improving infrastructure, faculty development, research, and innovation, and fostering collaborations with industry and foreign institutions.

To promote research and innovation, the government launched initiatives like the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in 2015, which ranks higher education institutions based on various parameters, encouraging healthy competition and quality enhancement. Also, the introduction of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Board of Accreditation (NBA) are examples of steps in ensuring quality in this regard. These allow ranking and accreditation based on credible and verified data while capturing the major performance parameters. Participation in NIRF would help such institutions participate in world rankings with greater confidence.

(Annual Report, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2016).

Additionally, the establishment of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and Startup India campaign have fostered an ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education institutions.

Furthermore, initiatives like the Study in India program have been launched to attract international students, promoting global exposure and diversity in Indian higher education institutions.

Looking towards the future, India's National Education Policy (NEP) implemented in 2020 envisions comprehensive reforms to address the evolving needs of higher education. It emphasizes multidisciplinary education, flexibility, research, and promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

These initiatives, spanning from 1950 to 2023, collectively reflect India's commitment to developing the quality of higher education, fostering academic excellence, and preparing students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The higher education system in India, while keeping intact its commitment to maintaining the value system in the society, needs an upheaval to align with the needs of the globalised market. In addition to the primary objective of teaching, there is a need to focus resources by higher education institutions on development of research and extension. Teaching and research have to be inseparable, because the task of the University is not only to impart knowledge to young people but also to give them opportunities to create their own knowledge. (Yashpal Committee Report, 2009)

#### 4.0 Quality Assurance Mechanisms

In its efforts to add value for the benefits of its stakeholders, every organisation strives to adopt a management system to determine their needs, to convert these needs into internal requirements, to provide resources to meet them and to monitor performances. There is an increased focus on identifying non-value activities and on ways to eliminate them (Selvan, 2015).

Quality assurance mechanisms in higher education are essential in India to ensure that institutions maintain high standards of education, promote excellence, and meet the evolving needs of students, society, and the economy. These mechanisms serve several crucial purposes. Firstly, they provide a framework for assessing and monitoring the quality of education provided by higher education institutions, thereby safeguarding the interests of students, and maintaining their trust in the system. Quality assurance mechanisms also help identify areas of improvement, encouraging institutions to continuously enhance their teaching-learning processes, infrastructure, and support services. Kumar (2017) in his work relating to Quality teaching, has identified effective management of critical activities as one of the vital parameters of Quality Assurance. He opines that there is a need to critically review the activities of Higher Educational Institutions and to phase out obsolete activities. The same sentiment is being reflected in Buvanewari's (2012) work.

Secondly, quality assurance mechanisms facilitate accountability and transparency in higher education. By setting benchmarks and standards, they hold institutions accountable for the quality of education they deliver. This ensures that educational institutions are accountable to their stakeholders, including students, parents, employers, and society at large.

Moreover, quality assurance mechanisms help in promoting innovation and best practices in higher education. They encourage institutions to adopt innovative teaching methods,

incorporate new technologies, and develop relevant curricula that align with industry needs. By promoting research and encouraging collaborations, quality assurance mechanisms foster a culture of academic excellence and contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

Furthermore, quality assurance mechanisms play a vital role in facilitating international recognition and mobility of Indian higher education. Accreditation and ranking systems enable institutions to benchmark themselves against global standards, enhancing their credibility and attractiveness to students and scholars from around the world. This, in turn, promotes international collaborations, research partnerships, and cross-cultural exchanges, enriching the learning experience and expanding the global outlook of Indian higher education.

Overall, the need for quality assurance mechanisms in higher education in India is crucial for maintaining and enhancing educational standards, fostering accountability and transparency, promoting innovation and best practices, and facilitating international recognition. By ensuring quality, these mechanisms contribute to the holistic development of students, empower them for the challenges of the future, and drive the overall growth and competitiveness of India's higher education sector.

#### 5.0 Use of Quality Assurance Tools in Various Fields

Quality assurance mechanisms such as Six Sigma, Kaizen, and Total Quality Management (TQM) have played crucial roles in various fields, including health and the manufacturing industry, bringing significant improvements, and driving excellence. Studies in this regard reveal how continuous quality improvement practices have been successfully adopted by Indian organisations, from the beginning of the 21st century (Kaur, 2014).

In the healthcare sector, these mechanisms have been instrumental in enhancing patient safety, improving clinical outcomes, and optimizing healthcare delivery processes. For instance, Six Sigma has been applied to reduce medical errors, minimize waiting times, and improve the efficiency of healthcare systems. Improving health care quality and operational efficiency by embracing various process improvement methods such as Lean, Six Sigma has become a reality. In a real-life example, the Virginia Mason Medical Center in the United States implemented Six Sigma methodologies to streamline patient care processes, resulting in reduced medication errors, improved patient satisfaction, and enhanced overall quality of care. Heher, Y. K. et al, (2017) has remarkably argued that digesting complex workflow information, understanding status quo, and identifying opportunities for improvement is made simpler by process mapping.

In the manufacturing industry, quality assurance mechanisms have revolutionized operational processes, increased productivity, and ensured product quality. TQM and Kaizen have been widely adopted to optimize manufacturing processes, reduce defects, and enhance customer satisfaction. Toyota's "Toyota Production System" is a notable example of implementing TQM and Kaizen principles in manufacturing. By continuously improving production processes and involving employees in quality initiatives, Toyota achieved significant improvements in productivity, cost reduction, and customer loyalty.

Furthermore, quality assurance mechanisms have found applications in various sectors, including banking, software development, and service industries. In the banking sector, TQM has been used to streamline processes, improve customer service, and enhance data security. Kaizen has been applied in software development to drive continuous improvement, increase efficiency, and deliver high-quality

software products. Dronamraju (2018) through his study on Public Sector Organisations has also agreed on the fact that Quality Management methodologies like Six Sigma and Lean are very much adoptable in an organisation, but subject to customisations according to the environment in which they are implemented.

Management philosophies like Total Quality Management, Six Sigma, and Kaizen etc. have revolutionised the way products and services are manufactured and delivered to the customers today. These philosophies demand that organisations move away from 'Management by Control' to 'Management by Commitment'. (Kailas, 2018). These real-life examples stated above demonstrate how quality assurance mechanisms have played vital roles in different fields, enabling organizations to achieve operational excellence, deliver superior products or services, and meet customer expectations. By embracing these mechanisms, organizations have been able to foster a culture of continuous improvement, maximize efficiency, and ensure sustained success in their respective industries.

### 6.0 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 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 (nearly 40 per cent of the Indian population is aged 13 to 35 years). 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.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 26.3%, which is calculated for age group of 18-23 years. GER for male population is 26.3% and for females, it is 26.4%. For Scheduled Castes, it is 23% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 17.2% as compared to the national GER of 26.3%. (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2018). To take advantage of the demographic dividend as stated by ILO, efforts must begin to bridge the gap between desired skill levels of workers and increase their employability. In this regard, Higher Education must play a critical role by making the future workforce ready with respect to knowledge, skills and other attributes demanded by a knowledge driven society. In the quest to achieve this, Higher Education must become socially inclusive. As such, there is a growing need to develop tools and methodologies to enable the Education system of the country to produce knowledge workers.

In the domain of Higher Education in India, there have been appreciable attempts by many researchers regarding its Quality Assurance and Improvement. Godbole (2009) is of the opinion that for Quality Assurance to be integrated into a regular system, each institution needs to nurture its own Quality Assurance culture. This can be ensured gradually to allow the Higher Education institutions to gradually tune to the Quality Assurance requirements. On the same lines, Roy (2021) has identified seven parameters, viz. Faculty Credentials, Course Delivery, Campus Facilities, Congenial Learning Environment, Feedback and Improvement, Top Management Commitment, and Cost of Education from the perspective of both students and faculty, to examine the impact these parameters have on both stakeholders. He has opined that maintaining quality with respect to these parameters will help the Higher Education Institutions to contribute to increased satisfaction of the students as well as the faculties. In this context, the management of these institutions should thrive and create a culture where quality is maintained with respect to these parameters on a continuous basis.

Quality Assurance is increasingly becoming an important aspect of Higher Educational Institutions in developing countries as expressed in the development of relevant

policies, structures, and systems at national and institutional levels. (Kaur, 2013) The latest of the three education policies launched by the Ministry of Education, India till date, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 attempts to transform the education system to meet the evolving needs of learners in the 21st century. With a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education, it promotes the integration of arts, sciences, vocational skills, and sports. Promotion of technology-enabled learning and digital resources, which facilitate access to quality education and enhance the learning experience, has been stressed upon. The NEP 2020 also underscores the need for flexible and multidimensional assessments, moving away from rote memorization and promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. The policy advocates for the establishment of a National Research Foundation to nurture a culture of research and innovation. (National Education Policy, 2020)

Shruthi (2018) has stressed upon the fact that the quality of education depends on many internal and external variables. The management of Higher Education Institutions should concentrate on those variables, which they can control and maintain quality infrastructure within the available resources. The periodic NAAC assessment of universities across the country has resulted in a renewed focus on delivering quality. As highlighted in the latest NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) Manual for Universities in India, emphasis has been laid on the importance of aligning educational practices with global standards and benchmarks. To meet the evolving demands of the global market, the need for universities to engage in self-assessment, internal quality assurance processes, and external accreditation to ensure that their programs and services are aligned with international best practices, has been stressed upon. It has also emphasized upon the importance of outcome-based education, industry-academia collaborations, and research-oriented approaches to enhance the employability and global competitiveness of graduates. To respond to the dynamic requirements of the global market, ensuring that higher education institutions in India produce competent knowledge workers who can thrive in a globally competitive environment, has gained utmost importance. (NAAC Institutional Accreditation Manual for Self-Study Report Universities, 2019)

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has played a crucial role in establishing a robust quality assurance mechanism for Indian universities, focusing on evaluating higher education institutions based on various parameters, including teaching, research, industry engagement, and student outcomes. NIRF rankings provide universities with a clear benchmark to measure their performance and identify areas for improvement. The NIRF framework encourages universities to adopt good practices, such as promoting research and innovation, fostering collaborations with industries, and emphasizing student-centric approaches. By recognizing and rewarding institutions for their achievements, NIRF has incentivized universities to continually improve their overall quality and strive for global competitiveness. The NIRF framework has significantly contributed to facilitating growth and advancement of universities in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education (A Methodology for Ranking of Universities and Colleges in India – NIRF). Barua (2021) has attempted to devise a model of evaluation based on critical parameters essential for a higher learning institution, considering NIRF as a benchmark. His study has adopted the standard architecture of NIRF methodology and found that a critical thinking approach is essential for universities to focus on enhancing quality on a regular basis.

In conclusion, improving the quality of higher education is vital to meet the demands of the changing world. It equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes

necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, tackle global challenges, adapt to new job requirements, and contribute meaningfully to society. By investing in quality in higher education, we invest in a brighter and more sustainable future for individuals and communities worldwide. Although there have been numerous attempts to delve into how Higher Education in India can meet up with the demands of the global market, the need of the hour is to constantly try and foster a culture of continuous improvement and make India ready for the demands of the global market.

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