



E- GOVERNANCE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Indian higher education system is passing through a phase of unprecedented expansion in the last few decades, marked by a huge increase in the volume of students, an exponential increase in the number of institutions and a quantum jump in the level of public funding. On one hand, this growth promises to produce more skilled and competent graduates to fulfill needs of ever growing Indian economy and on the other hand it poses a huge challenge for the governing bodies like UGC, AICTE and others to maintain or improve the quality of education. Global market demands skilled and talented workforce which can only be created through quality education. To achieve a world class standard in education it is imperative to have an improved and innovated means of access to information all over the world which is possible only by the introduction of information and communications technology based e-governance in educational institutions. For achieving the goals of efficient administration and to meet the challenges of globalization, international competition and modern science and technology development, it is necessary to implement fast and reaction based e- governance into education sector.

If the quality of our higher education system has to be improved to make these institutes really world class, then there is no alternative to the introduction of e-governance in this sphere at the fastest possible pace. The implementation of e governance in education has potential to enable universities to expand their current geographical reach, to interact to prospective students all

around the world and to establish themselves as global education providers. E-Governance in higher education system will enable various stakeholders to control the improved operational efficiency in various key processes like grants, utilization certificates, approval processes, feedback mechanism etc. This paper examines the role of e governance in quality assurance in higher education institutions.

Keywords: e-governance, Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Stakeholder ,Innovative teaching tools.

Introduction

Over the last decade, higher education has been on a steep growth trajectory. India now has the largest higher education system in the world in terms of the number of institutions, and the second largest in terms of the number of students. However, despite impressive growth, India's higher education gross enrolment ratio (GER) at 18% is currently well below the global average of 27%. This difference is even more stark when compared to China and Brazil at 26% and 36% respectively (2010 figures). The government plans to increase GER in higher education to 30% by 2020. The Indian higher education system is currently facing an unprecedented transformation. As India currently has 26 million students enrolled in tertiary education, by illustration, it would need another 800 universities and over 40,000 colleges in the next eight years to provide the planned additional 14 million places (40 million places by 2020). This transformation is being driven by economic and demographic change: by 2020, India will be the world's third largest economy, with a correspondingly rapid growth in the size of its middle classes. Currently, over 50% of India's population is under 25 years old; by 2020 India will outpace China as the country with the largest tertiary-age population. Despite significant progress over the last ten years, Indian higher education is faced with following broad challenges:

- ***The supply-demand gap***: India has a low rate of enrolment in higher education, at only 18%, compared with 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. There is enormous unmet demand for higher education. By 2020, the Indian government aims to achieve 30% gross enrolment, which will mean providing 40 million university places, an increase of 14 million in six years.

• ***The low quality of teaching and learning:*** The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions: a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching.

• ***Constraints on research capacity and innovation:*** With a very low level of PhD enrolment, India does not have enough high quality researchers; there are few opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary working, lack of early stage research experience; a weak ecosystem for innovation, and low levels of industry engagement.

• ***Duplication of procedures:*** According to a survey conducted by FICCI, most of the promoters of institutions/universities feel that multiplicity of regulating agencies like University Grant Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India, Central Council of Indian Medicine, etc. leads to duplication of procedures causing immense loss of time and resources.

Ideally, a single window should exist for approval process. The university/institute should be asked to submit all the documents at once online for approvals. Various regulating agencies should then internally coordinate to fetch the documents/details from that common pool. This would greatly reduce the unnecessary duplication of work for University.

• ***Fraudulent Practices:*** Despite a great control of governing bodies in Higher Education, there are many colleges and students who get involved in fraudulent activities. This is a cause of concern various recruiters/other universities. It also is a negative indicator of Indian Higher Education System for various MNCs, present in the country, who take this news back to their countries.

The verification of any college or student's qualification should be possible from a single source. This would help large Universities/Corporate keep a check on students trying to seek admission/job with forged certificates.

• ***Lack of Skill Development:*** Pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and rote learning; students have little opportunity to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working.

•**Outdated Curriculum:** A major issue in Higher Education today is obsolete and irrelevant course curriculum. Today, the demand of industry is far from the learning that a student has gone through. In fast growing economy the preference will always be given to a person who understands the industry practices. Based on this criterion of little practical knowledge, many graduates are losing out on possible job opportunities for various MNCs inside and outside the country.

The need today is to analyze the trend being followed by Institutions of Excellence. Also, by seeing how the students are selecting their courses a trend can be obtained about the movement of preferences among students. This kind of analysis can help governing bodies determine the academic plan and course curriculum for the lesser performing universities.

• **Students' Unemployment:** India has some of the great Institutes and Universities but the number of employable students is very less. According to NASSCOM, of 3 million graduates and post-graduates added to the workforce in India every year only 25% of technical and 10-15% of non-technical graduates are employable by growing IT and ITES sector.

An ineffective quality assurance system and a complete lack of accountability by institutions to the state and central government, students and other stakeholders has resulted in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education across south Asia, and an insufficient basis for movement to higher levels of study and research. Today, a key concern for India is the creation of an employable workforce to harness its demographic dividend to the maximum extent. To achieve this, the country needs an education system that can deliver quality in terms of a skilled and industry-ready workforce, without diluting focus on world-class research and innovation.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

In an environment of global competitiveness it is important that Indian products of the higher education institutions are as competent as graduates of any other country, not only in their scholastic attainments, but also in terms of the value system and richness of their personality. Unless the quality and standard of Indian higher education institutions is enhanced zealously and sustained at a high level through innovation, creativity and regular monitoring, it seems to be difficult for the Indian academics/professionals to compete in the World scene. This calls for suitable assessment and accreditation mechanisms to be available in the country to ensure the

quality and standard of the academic/training programmes at higher educational institutions. The assessment has to be continuous and the process has to be transparent to gain the acceptance of the society at large.

Quality dimensions seem to have two implications, i.e., functionality of the output and meeting the basic standards. Hence, the quality of a higher education system may be seen from the point of view of norms and standards, which may evolve depending on the need of the hour. In the 21st century, it is crucial to identify the relative norms for different components of a higher education system. The alternative dynamics for teacher preparation and the sustaining quality in teacher input, like: Curriculum design and development; Curricular practices vis-à-vis emerging principles of pedagogy; Evaluation of learners performance and progress vis-à-vis curriculum evaluation; and, Quality management practices become crucial. The quality of these components may also differ from institution to institution. Therefore, sharing of the experiences among institutions on quality issues may generate ideas for evolving norms and strategies for their quality assurance of management processes, curricular inputs and practices and the evaluation system as well.. Of late, various developments have been witnessed relating to quality assurance mainly through the intervention of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, like networking of the open learning system with traditional Universities, interdisciplinary interactions at intra-institutional and inter-institutional levels, networking of institutions globally, data based management of higher education, changing the orientation of institutions by incorporating self financing in their financial management, assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and creation of different statutory and regulatory bodies at the national level.

Need of E-Governance

E-Governance is becoming a global phenomenon that is increasingly attracting the attention of community citizens including politicians, economists, decision and policy makers amongst others (Naheed et al., 2009) [8]. E-Governance is not doing all the activities on-line or other sort of computerization but it is actually the way to rethink and re-engineer the existing structure of the system of higher education in India with its functions, processes, etc. The fundamental difference between the computerization and e-governance is that the former seeks to replace existing processes by their electronic counterparts. The latter looks at the needs of citizens and introduces systems that can precisely meet those needs. It is the difference between citizen

centric and computer centric.[10]. E-Governance facilitates a speedy, transparent and effective process for performing administrative activities. According to Dev Report (2002) [5] an effective e-governance satisfies these following needs:

- Providing greater access to government information;
- Promoting civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials;
- Making government more accountable by making its operations more transparent and thus reducing the opportunities for corruption; and
- Providing development opportunities, especially benefiting rural and traditionally underserved communities

Higher education is generally understood to cover teaching, research and extension. Higher education is a source of feeder system in all walks of life and therefore supplies the much needed human resource in management, planning, design, teaching and research. There are different types of decision-makers, like students, parents, employers, legislators, planners and administrators, who are continuously engaged in the process of educational planning and management. It is important for each one of them to have reliable and relevant information they require for decision-making vis-à-vis education. But more importantly, it seems necessary that each group may be well aware about the information that others may possess. It is their mutual inter-action that makes the decision-making actually effective.

Following are the main services that can be provided by implementing e- governance system in higher education [1]:

- E-Governance is one such concept that can empower the government to plan the development of education system in whole country.
- With the help of e-governance, the process of allocation of fund can be made automated or time bound. All details needed for the approval of funds can be fetched by centralized system.
- Centralized database of students will provide better opportunities to the bright students.
- The governing bodies can very easily develop a mechanism to analyze which course is in heavy demand in a particular area or region.
- The information obtained can help the government in analyzing employment versus passing graduates ratio. Government can plan the generation of employment according to the passing graduates in the country.

- E-Governance interface can be used to get the feedback from the students related to course and performance of university. This will help to keep an eye on the institute in remote areas and help them in their full development.
- E-governance will remove the need of Transfer certificates or Migration and reduce unnecessary administrative work and paper work.
- Interlinking of universities will enable regular updating of curriculum. Common curriculum can also be improvised.

E-Governance for Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

There are number of aspects related to the quality education like progression of course, quality of faculty members, research facilities given to teachers and students, number of students, examination system and administration. For any Government, it is very important to keep an eye on the above factors prevailed in any university. Although there are number of regulating agencies like UGC, AICTE, MCI, Pharmaceutical Council of India, BCI etc. which monitors the performance of the university on an overall basis. The quality factors are also assessed before giving NOC to the universities or also before renewing the recognition/affiliation. On these metrics, the universities and colleges are asked to explain the reason for good or bad performance. Presently, the current procedure compels universities to submit the documents to UGC, MHRD, and AICTE etc. separately for various reasons like approvals/renewal of recognition, resulting in wastage of time and lot of stationary. Ideally, a single window should exist for approval process of performance measurement. The need is to deliver services at the doorstep making it hassle free transparent and to facilitate decision makers to get all analysis and decide. As a result of such type of governance, there may be perceptible changes in both administrative and academic output of the department. Minimization of human intervention and discretion exhibits a fair, transparent accountable and responsive system. The benefits of e-governance in an educational sector are improved efficiency, increase in transparency and accountability of educational administrative activities convenient and faster access to services, and lower costs for administrative services. The multi-faceted benefits of e-governance in quality assurance can be described as under these points:

1. **Stakeholder Participation:** E-Governance in higher education system will enable various stakeholders to control the improved operational efficiency in various key processes like grants, utilization certificates, approval processes, feedback mechanism etc[5]. With deeper visibility and increased operational efficiency the higher education institutions would be strengthened not only to satisfy the needs of students by making them more employable but also combat possible competition from foreign universities
2. **Improved Education System:** E-governance in education sectors allows use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving education, improve information, service delivery, encourage student participation in the decision making process, making administration transparent and effective and give universities a new channel of educational unemployment. Also, the system can obtain feedback from industry and students to modify course curriculum if deemed appropriate by the authorities. This will allow all the lesser performing colleges to reduce the gap with better performing institutes. It will be help in the betterment of the higher education in the country and increase the number of employable students.
3. **Innovative Teaching Tools [5, 4]:** There has been rapid development in learning technologies so as to turn them to advantage in learning. A student who is learning in a way that uses information and communication technologies (ICTs) is using e-learning. With the introduction of new technological initiatives the structure of higher educational institutions has changed over the past decade. Scott (2000) supports this opinion that eLearning is now facilitating a more flexible learning approach. The impact of eLearning initiatives has direct effects on the future structure of universities on both strategic and tactical levels. The changing role of lecturers, the changeable learning environment and the design of e-Learning facilities all contribute to a potentially more flexible organizational structure. The future delivery of education will be based through eLearning technology providing lecturers with superior teaching tools. The online methods enable more effective education and offer significant advantages over traditional teaching methods. This has been possible by technological implementation based environments such as bulletin boards, virtual lectures and e Libraries. In an eLearning environment lecturers can offer constant educational support, as students are able to communicate with classmates and lecturers, visit web sites and view course material regard-less of their time and location.

4. **Reduced Duplication:** In order to remove the copying of procedures, there should be consolidated information about each university and college to track their performance. The tools of e-governance may enable the universities or colleges to submit the documents online for approval. All agencies should internally co-ordinate to carry the details from common pool. This would greatly reduce the unnecessary duplication of work in the university.
5. **Enhanced Student Support Services:** With the help of e-governance, it is possible to design a system that is student centric and can provide a variety of services—informative, interactive, and transactional and integrated system across the entire spectrum of the education sector. The implementation e-governance will improve the delivery of services to students by providing services like enrollment, examination, result, feedback, requests for documents, requests for certificates, issuing admit cards and ID cards, , result verification, employment etc.. The system provide timely alert to colleges through SMS /Emails. E-governance in education provides new ways of communicating to the students, imparting education and organizing & delivering information and services, increase participation in education affairs, Job opportunities, Social connectivity for collaboration, access to virtual lectures & Seminars etc.
6. **Centralized Information:** E-Governance has provided electronic information infra-structure to simplify service delivery, reduce duplication, and improve the level and speed of service at a lower cost. It allows for creating, managing, and sharing information electronically among the various university/collage departments and the different courses offered by them. That is, information captured once can then be shared and re-used by all authorized users. This avoids manual transcription and re-entering of the same information repeatedly whenever a student goes to a new university/collage department for some services.
7. **Integrated Services [3]:** Different types of services offered by different departments like collecting fees, granting admission, administering regulations, paying salaries and benefits, can be availed at one place. This greatly facilitates the students by allowing them to perceive the administration as a single body to interact with instead of a number of unrelated entities, operating at different locations in different university/collage buildings.
8. **Anywhere, Anytime Information [3]:** Delivery of public-domain information to students can be done without any official and student interaction. Students can obtain information related to university processes and procedures through an on-line system without interacting

with any university official. In fact, e-Governance allows the average student quick, interactive access to a vast array of information, through computers at home or work or through kiosks in convenient public locations, because this access to information can be available at many different locations and at all hours, there is no pressure on individuals to physically visit a university Office.

- 9. *Increased Employability:*** The implementation of the e- governance has been able to provide the management of the educational institution information about the areas of concern so that adequate action can be taken. An integrated e governance system can enable the authorities to analyze the performance of one of the best performing institute in related field and compare it with other colleges to identify the gap areas. This will allow all the lesser performing colleges to reduce the gap with better performing institutes. It will be help in the betterment of the higher education in the country and increase the number of employable students.
- 10. *Saving of hidden operational cost:*** E-governance saves institution's time and money. Putting services on the Internet gets rid of the wasted time that is spent on get-ting the services that otherwise would have been available only in the university. University/college Web sites are managed through a content management tool. This tool makes it easier to make changes on university Web pages. This, in turn, reduces the time and energy required to keep university Web pages up-to-date. The E-Governance also provides hardware and software needed to create and update state Web sites. This results in reduction of licensing fees and increases the ability of the state to maintain its Web sites.
- 11. *Better Security and Protection of Information:*** The centralized information approach of e-Governance keeps all information at one place in electronic form. This approach of making information secure prevents it against any theft or leakage. Proper backup mechanisms valuable information helps in protecting the information from getting lost due to due to natural calamities such as fires, earthquakes, and floods.

Conclusion

Higher education is the backbone of development of any nation. It needs to be of global standard in order to prove its utility and value. Ensuring quality education is the need of the hour. For guaranteeing quality higher education, good governance ought to be in place in HEIs. If the

quality of our higher education system has to be improved, then there is no alternative to the introduction of e-governance in this sphere at the fastest possible pace. The implementation of e-governance in education has potential to enable universities to expand their current geographical reach, to interact to prospective students all around the world and to establish themselves as global education providers. E-Governance in higher education system will help in quality assurance through stakeholder participation, improved education system, innovative teaching tools, enhanced student support services, centralized anywhere, anytime information, increased employability and better security of information.

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