



BENCHMARKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is a powerful tool to build modern, value-based, knowledge based, culture based, peaceful society which can lead the country towards becoming super power in the world. It is also considered one of the important and strong tools for the development of any country. Benchmarking is commonly used to enhance quality, and it has been applied increasingly in a variety of sectors. The concept of benchmarking refers to the process of comparing processes, businesses, and performance metrics with the best practices of others. This paper discusses needs, enhancement, quality assurance and benchmarking in Higher Education.

KEYWORDS: *Benchmarking, Assurance, Quality Enhancement, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

There is a common saying which says “The King’s respect is limited to his own Kingdom whereas a learned man is respected everywhere.” That is why in our country from ancient times, education was considered to be the ‘third eye’ of man, which not only gave him insight but also mental strength and equilibrium of material and spiritual life. Various religious scriptures and number of philosophical thought in India too have highlighted the importance of education and claimed that salvation is attained through obtaining the true knowledge.

India’s service (tertiary) sector has been growing very fast since the 1990s, owing to liberalization, privatization and globalization. One importance subsector that is contributing to the trend is education. Education plays predominant role in changing the socio-economic status of the people of society. Higher Education is a powerful tool to build modern value-based knowledge-based, culture-based and right-based peaceful society which can lead the country towards becoming super power in the world. It is also considered one of the important and strong tools for the development of any country. While primary education is necessary for creating base, higher education is extremely important for providing cutting-edge technologies, ever sharp skills and quality in work and asset creation. Higher educational institutions contribute to the growth of a nation by providing specialized knowledge and skilled manpower. (Singh 202)

With higher education becoming an international service, there is growing concern the world over about quality,

standards and recognition. Consequent upon this trend, the debate on how benchmarks have to be evolved for ascertaining and assuring quality at different levels of higher education is significant. Benchmarking is a term that is now widely used within the quality arena. Benchmarking involves comparing a set of products or services against the best that can be found within the relevant industry sector.

Meaning of Quality in Education

The University, Education Commission (1948-49) used the term ‘Standard’ and not ‘quality’. The term ‘standard’ usually means a basis for measurement or a ‘yardstick’ to describe a required characteristics or a parameter and this would vary from country to country, from time to time and even from institution to institution over a period of time. However, it is also true that once the standards are set, the institutions and individuals can try to achieve quality so as to attain excellence. (Singh 2012)

Assurance of Quality in Education

Quality assurance is one of the central issues in higher education debates today. The serious problems include assuring the quality of adverse academics of teaching, admission and infrastructure. Quality assurance in the private sector is especially important. Many countries are moving towards instituting more careful quality assurance and regulations of degree offerings. Although national mechanisms are necessarily at the heart of a system of ensuring quality higher education, relevant international assurance is also a must. Higher education institutions are promoted with the objectives of developing ideal citizens who are clear about

their roles and responsibilities in the society and in spreading awareness about the importance of being educated. In this sense, these institutes have a role to play in promoting universalization of education. (Prasad, Gautham 2012)

NEED FOR QUALITY IN EDUCATION

India needs multi-dimensional and broad-based quality education to maintain its leadership in the 21st Century. Therefore, India should show the concern over the quality in education as the education in India is not competitive in terms of the quantity and quality with other countries. India needs to emphasize on quality education.

Quality in higher education traditionally has been measured by inputs such as the marks obtained by the students, degrees held by faculty and referred publications generated, library holdings and processes such as programmes offered, curricular requirements and student support services.

ENROLMENT GROWTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Enrolments in higher education increased on an average by 11.2% per annum during the period from 2001-02 to 2016-17. (Column 5 of table) Despite the double digit growth of enrolment, only 24.5% in the eligible age group were enrolled by 2014-15. The gross enrolment ratio of the country is comparatively less to China and Asia's average. But it has shown a phenomenal improvement from 8% GER in 2001-02 to 24.5% by 2014-15. Yet another dimension in the table 1 (column 4) is the growth of GER at school education from 33% in 2001-02 to 60% by 2013-14. Among those who appeared for the Higher Secondary Board Examination, the share of passed out students has been increasing over the years from 60% in 2001-02 to 79 percent by 2014-15. (Geetha 2017)

Table - 1 Enrolment Ratio and Enrolment in Higher Secondary and Higher Education in India.

Year	Enrolment in Higher Education (000s)	GER - Higher Education	GER - Second Education (2014-18)	Board Results in Higher Secondary (in %)
1	2	3	4	5
2001 - 02	8821.1	9.07	33.26	59.60
2004 - 05	11777.3	9.97	39.91	71.00
2006 - 07	15552.5	12.39	41.13	72.71
2008 - 09	15212.5	13.70	47.40	73.04
2009 - 10	17295.1	15.00	49.40	76.24
2010 - 11	27499.7	19.40	52.20	76.20
2011 - 12	28562.7	20.40	56.80	75.31
2012 - 13	29629.0	21.10	54.45	78.54
2013 - 14	32336.2	23.00	59.86	78.48
2015 - 16	34584.8	24.50	N.A.	N.A.
2016 - 17	11.2	30.00	75.00	N.A.

Source:

- ★ Statistics on School Education; Selected Educational Statistics; GER Targets in the 12th Five Year Plan and Growth Rates; Results of Higher Secondary School Examination.
- ★ Dropout rates estimated for the period from 2012-13 to 2015-16; Estimated from SEMIS; All India Higher Education Surveys, Various Issues.

Note: NA - Not Available.

DISTINGUISHING AMONG QUALITY PROCESSES

In the literature related to quality in higher education three terms commonly appear: benchmarking, quality assurance and quality improvement. These terms refer to distinct yet closely related functions. Judgements about quality are comparative and what distinguish among these three functions are the types of comparisons that are made.

The Origins of Benchmarking in Higher Education

Benchmarking originated in the private sector in 1979. In a context of severe financial difficulties, Xerox Corporation started using benchmarking to try to understand why competitors were performing better. This process led to major changes to improve internal processes and enabled the company to regain a strong market position. Since then,

benchmarking has been widely used in industry, manufacturing, transport, logistics, retail and services.

In the public sector, with the development of new public management, benchmarking has been increasingly used in the health sector, the public transport sector in local and regional administrations and the like.

TYPES OF BENCHMARKING

Experts have identified different types of benchmarkings. These are internal, functional, competitive and generic benchmarking. Inter benchmarking is done within an organization and typically between closely related units, using common or shared performance parameters as a basis for comparison. Functional benchmarking is a comparison of performance and organizations. Competitive benchmarking generally focuses on direct competitions and with specific comparable operations. Generic benchmarking is undertaken with, external institutions which represent the 6 best-in-class,

for particular aspects of the selected operations. (Prasad, 2006) Benchmarking is becoming a more and more commonly used method for quality assurance, and enhancement in higher education today. (Prasad, 2006)

BENCHMARKING FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

A increasingly popular approach for establishing performance standards, processes measurements and objectives is 'benchmarking'. A benchmark is a standard of performance. Benchmarking helps organizations to identify standards of performance and adopt them successfully, which assists them to target problem areas set levels of performance and identify solutions to improve results. Best practices adding commendable value to an institute and its stakeholders are considered as a standards of equality. NAAC has been using benchmarking as quality enhancement technique in the form of criterion statement to assess the level of performance in higher education. Benchmarking offers the following benefits:

- ★ Allows organizations to see beyond the barriers to embrace change, to think 'outside the box' and
- ★ Provides organizations with a methodology and a game plan for accelerating, implementing, and managing change.

Benchmarking measures performance against that of best in class organizations, determines how the best in class achieve those performance levels, and uses the information and the basis for adaptive creativity and breakthrough performance.

In 1996, the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Services (CHEMS) a sub-system of Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) launched an international "University Management Benchmarking Club (UMBC) for Universities from the Commonwealth. This approach goes beyond the comparison of data-based scores and conventional performance indicators, it looks at the processes by setting appropriate objectives should lead to:

- ★ Continuous improvement of the organizational processes and outputs which must be equal or superior to the competition.
- ★ Continual value addition to products and services.
- ★ Continuous and relentless thrust for improvement of processes and services; and
- ★ Creation of an organization work culture. Whereby everyone is involved in the process of customer satisfaction and value creation. (Kumar, 2008)

CONCLUSION

Quality and quantity of the proposals are the need of the hour which might put forth by the past growing changes and development of the major countries in the world including ours. Our beloved Prime Minister taking keen interest in the overall development of the higher education by providing financial assistance to the needy students in their respective field of education.

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