

# Maintaining Quality And Standards In Higher Education In India

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## Abstract

*Sustaining the demographic dividend is going to be a stupendous job for India. India's population has crossed 1.44 billion having surpassed mainland China to become the world's most populous country, according to UN estimates. Therefore, the costs of education, quality deliverables, the average Indian diaspora, and improving the GER (gross enrollment ratio) need to be delicately balanced. This disparity is quite obvious in certain highly demanding professional areas like medicine, and other fields of higher education. This calls for an overall re-examination and re-visit to all the rules and regulations that have been passed so far, if India is to be a beneficiary of the Demographic Dividend and also be rated amongst the top few countries. Efficient and transparent management systems need to be followed, right across all spectrums of higher education in this country, which calls for an urgent solution!*

*There is widespread consensus that the demographic dividend, and the changes in India, would prove well for the economic growth in India for the next two or three decades, as the age of the adult population in the age group 15 to 64 would be around 68% of the total Indian population far exceeding those of Japan, China and the US. This could throw open a large chunk of the educated crowd to fill up a large number of vacancies that could arise; subject to the fact that quality of education is delivered and the general employment is solved. Unless all the HEIs including the self-financing ones are able to generate innovations, and create sustained regular monitoring systems, these institutions would fail to capture world attention. As per statistics, India ranks third after United States and China in the higher education enrolment status, and in the number of schools and universities. However, there is an absolute and urgent need to improve the quality of higher education being offered in our several self-financing HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions).*

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## I. Sustainability Of The Demographic Dividend

Economic growth of a country is mostly based on its productivity against all odds. A developing country like India has to face many odds. According to the 2018 official census across India almost 19500 languages or dialects are being spoken as mother tongues. It has also been indicated that 96.71% of the population of the 140.76 Crores (2021) people had at that time one of the 22 scheduled languages as their mother tongue. Having a unified language for internal trade and commerce within, has to depend on two languages, Hindi and English! Just the population count alone cannot decide the advantages a country can reap from its demographic dividend, unless they have a competent labour force, and such a force could only be possible by having a good educational framework – an education dividend! To have this, matching of both the demographic and education dividends and sustaining it - the task before India is stupendous!

India is now faced with serious employment issues, basically due to heavy population growth coupled with lack of suitable academic programs. The government has now in the last few years formulated programs to promote education, improve labour through upskilling to utilize the demographic dividend. Our country should also be content with the aggravation of the population aging and the necessary decline in birth rates, or else the demographic dividend would start disappearing turning into a big population burden. Urgent task on hand should be to look for industrial upgradation, innovative technology, increase labour productivity, social stability and maintain economic growth. Research has shown that the demographic dividend is one of the important driving forces for economic development, leading to high-speed economic growth. Hence in India, with an all-pervasive, hierarchical society, with variants of caste, creed, political affiliations, and very striking socio-economic systems, it is necessary to upgrade and rationalize our HEIs.

## **II. Quality Of Education**

### ***Accreditations***

Most of the HEIs submit themselves for regular inspections of the statutory bodies like the AICTE, UGC, NAAC,

NBA, CoA, and NIRF; but it is obvious from various data presented by the HEIs that some are circumspect in that the data presented are much higher than those that are actual. This is a cause of concern. However, in certain cases discrepancies are observed and actions instituted against some of these HEIs. It has also been reported that only 5%-10% of the HEIs opt for accreditation. Of late, the accrediting bodies have suggested a single point of submission for all the attributes that are needed in the accreditation cycle. While this can help address information asymmetry to some extent, the question of a mismatch between reported and actual quality information about institutions may persist in the absence of a robust and transparent evaluation mechanism. "The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), which covers only 5% of all HEIs, does little to help a student in India in choosing the right institution. The accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has also faced criticism in the recent past for various reasons". Apart from the accreditation by statutory bodies, some of the HEIs also get accredited by international accrediting agencies, like the ABET, JCI, AACSB etc. to name a few. International ranking is also undertaken by other international agencies like Times Higher Education (THE), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) –higher education analysts and a for-profit services providers headquartered in London, with offices in Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Americas.

### ***Faculty in Higher Educational Institutions***

A matter of timely concern is the recruitment, training and assessment of teachers in HEIs. Even amongst those 'highly qualified personnel', employability remains a pressing concern, indicating the rather poor quality of education received. The quality of education delivery in HEIs (higher education institutions) seems to be always a major point of contention – some teachers of these HEIs are neither fluent in the delivery of subjects, or even rarely good in the language they express, be it Hindi, English or the vernacular! Most of the teachers in HEIs are fresh recruits, really new to the teaching profession or by default they become teachers. Gone are the days when there was a dedicated crowd bent on entering the teaching profession. Currently, the new entrants are basically those who could not find suitable assignments elsewhere, or get into temporary stop gap alternatives. This cannot be generalised, as there are definitely those who have a special interest towards becoming teachers in HEIs!

### ***Curriculum***

Normally it is the practice to revise the curriculum at periodic intervals so that the program remains relevant, caters to the timely requirements and in line with the developments being undergone in the respective fields. The processing of the curriculum depends on the academic institution and also the accrediting bodies. Mostly the curriculum is supposed to be revised based on the feedback and evaluation systems, of the various stakeholders- students, employers, industry, alumni, faculty members who suggest steps to improve the revision process - Industry trends, best practices, student learning outcomes and also the faculties research and expertise. Some universities may review their programs annually or once every two years, while others may have longer review cycles of five years or more. The frequency of curriculum revision is often determined by factors such as accreditation requirements, industry demands, institutional priorities, and resource availability.

By regularly reviewing and revising their programs, universities can ensure that their curriculum remains current, engaging, and effective in meeting the needs of stakeholders. This is one way that the standards are maintained, taking care of the basic and future demands of the university. The curriculum review is solely based on meeting requirements of the diaspora, besides taking into consideration advancements in the technological fields, global trends and societal needs. This becomes a part of the effort of the university to match the universal requirements preparing their students to cater to the requirements of the industry and society!

### ***Quality Circles***

As mandated by the UGC, an IQAC (Internal Quality Assurance Cell) functions in every HEI, necessarily to have a regular quarterly check on specified issues needed to maintain quality standards. 'Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is a generic term used to refer to the processes and procedures within institutions to review, evaluate, assess or otherwise check, examine or ensure the quality of the education provided and/or research undertaken' – To quote the UGC – "The IQAC is meant for planning, guiding and monitoring Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE) activities of the University. The IQAC may channelize and systematize the efforts and measures of an institution towards academic excellence".

All HEIs have an IQAC, and quarterly meetings are conducted to review and assess the quality processes pertaining to the planning, guiding and monitoring quality assurance and enhancement of the activities of the HEI. The University Grants Commission had also way back in 2020, circulated a detailed report on the necessity and procedures to operate internally QA cells to improve methods and systems. Though many universities have adopted the IQACs, in spirit, many have also taken it as a mundane activity. NAAC accredited universities are to submit Annual Quality Assurance Reports to NAAC.

#### ***Academic Integrity***

Under normal conditions, it is very difficult for HEIs to be sure that there are students who are not involved in any sort of malpractices. Students should often be reminded of the well-established norm of intellectual ethics, and that they should refrain from any sort of malpractices, often reported in examination centres and also on On-line systems. It would do well for HEIs to take sufficient steps in this direction; applying authentication techniques, pass- word protected voice recognition systems. It would also be advisable that adequate measures are in place, ensuring that quality and standards are in place, whenever changes are affected.

#### ***Sustainability of the Quality System***

Most of the HEIs do run and maintain quality standards; but sustainability and effectiveness of the systems in place are varied. However, it is very much needed to have a strategic oversight of quality compliance with mandated higher education standards in place at the highest levels of university governance. Clear and transparent plans, systems, policies and processes, along with internal and external involvement in support of quality and standards be encouraged. Feedbacks from stakeholders – alumni, students, graduates, employers and the general public should be regularly attended to. UN Global plan for sustainability developed as SDG4, advocates transforming education as one for dealing with emergencies and crisis, and financing education in the developing world, which could be achieved by advocacy and campaigning, growth of membership, collectively and jointly influence to sustain and be accountable to the world communities!

### **III. Conclusion**

As can be seen, all policies, regulations and procedures followed by the university should contribute wholly, or in part, to quality assurance, quality improvement or compliance with relevant external standards or requirements. Any HEI following stated standards could definitely do well; and gradually quality should and could be established. A major problem facing the developing countries like India is to promote upgrading of industrial systems, bring in innovative technologies, improve labour productivity with upskilling and maintain economic growth coupled with social stability.

In order to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, India need to reduce the population burden by increasing the younger population to be trained (educated and upskilled) to avoid the declining demographic dividend, which has raised concerns in the fields of demographic economics and macroeconomics at the moment. Quoting the example of China – “China implemented the family planning policy in the 1980s, which led to a demographic shift and a period of demographic dividend. An important reason for China’s higher economic growth during this period was the manufacturing cost advantage of a large labour force”.

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