

NEED OF EMPOWERMENT OF IQAC FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN COLLEGES IN RURAL AREA

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Abstract - NAAC intends that the HEIs should promote and sustain quality through various innovative and student-centric initiatives. It has devised IQAC as a specific mechanism to be established in all the institutions. The IQAC has become the centre of all the activities as it introduces, monitors, and evaluates every academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular activity in the higher education institutions. NAAC has accepted and authorised IQAC to work as the internal and integral catalyst to ensure change towards quality in colleges. However, the quality of the students poses many serious challenges when we think of developing quality in our institutions. Even the attitude and behaviour of many of the teachers in many colleges situated in remote areas do not show enthusiastic approach towards NAAC. Among all these adverse circumstances it becomes a herculean task for the IQACs to develop quality in the institutions. Still, there is an immense scope in almost all the seven criteria for IQAC to cultivate quality and sustain it as regular practice. IQAC, through its systematic function, can change the negative attitude of all those stakeholders who do not wish to work spontaneously and enthusiastically for the noble cause of quality enhancement in the higher education institution. We need some good teachers as IQAC coordinators and members of IQACs to work as harbingers of the expected change.

Keywords: Quality culture, quality cultivation, rural institutions, IQAC, stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

The University Grants Commission established National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 as an autonomous body. The main objectives of NAAC as mentioned in the Memorandum of Association (MOA) are:

1. To grade institutions of higher education and their programmes.
2. To stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching and research in their institutions.
3. To help institutions realize their academic objectives.
4. To promote necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institutions working for the above purpose.
5. To encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education.

Since its inception in 1994, NAAC has been constantly encouraging higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure, maintain and sustain quality in education. 25 years' experience proves that NAAC is sincerely and successfully functioning to achieve its goals. The vision statement of NAAC reads as **'To make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives'**. It wishes to make quality a defining element of HEIs in India. This is to be done firstly by self-evaluation. This suggests that quality is specifically an internal issue, and continuous process, inclusively for the overall up gradation of any higher education institution. NAAC intends that the HEIs should promote and sustain quality through various innovative and student-centric initiatives. It has suggested a specific mechanism to be established in all the institutions. Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) has become the centre of all the activities as it introduces, monitors, and evaluates every academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular activity in the higher education institutions. NAAC has accepted and authorised IQAC to work as the internal and

integral catalyst to ensure quality in colleges. In short, all the intentions of NAAC have, to some extent, proved to be successful.

IQACs

NAAC made recommendation to every accredited institution to establish Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to “set up, organize and continuously develop process of internalization of quality by building capabilities and using them fully for educating students and for developing a system of education” (Takwale 133).

The colleges which have functioning Internal Quality Assurance Cells perform better than those which don't have active IQACs in all sectors. IQAC performs to promote quality culture in the institution. There are number of ways to initiate the process of quality enhancement in various sectors of the functioning of an institution. IQAC, with all its might, tries to inculcate the seeds of quality among all the stakeholders. Of course, it needs active participation of all the teachers to establish quality in the performance of the institution. It also needs full support from the management, and proper guidance from the principal without which IQAC is helpless. In a way, quality must be everybody's routine business.

IQACs are trying their best to enhance the quality by introducing new things in their institutions. However, there are so many obstacles in the way of IQAC, particularly in the colleges situated in rural areas. They lack infrastructure, technology, preparedness, willingness, healthy academic environment, moral and financial support, holistic active and creative involvement of teachers, and technologically advanced non-teaching staff. Furthermore, there are other challenges before the higher education institutions in rural areas that do not allow the IQACs function effectively to fulfil the expectations of NAAC. These need to be discussed here, though briefly.

Reality in Colleges in Rural Areas

Higher education has become nationally and internationally more competitive today. This competition is global as well as local. With the rapid expansion of higher education in India in the new millennium, this competition became tougher than ever for the institutions situated not only in urban areas but also in rural areas. Until recently, it used to be the usual topic of discussion among teachers in higher education institutions to talk about high school teachers going door to door to get new admissions by presenting various attractive schemes and various types of promises to the parents of the students. This, with some policy decisions by the government, was supposed to be one of the most prominent reasons of deterioration of quality in school education. They promised and guaranteed to pass the students, irrespective of the academic intelligence of the students. Many of us could not surmise then that one day we would fall prey to the same situation. Surprisingly, the circumstances developed in such a way that today there is a cut throat competition among higher education institutions to get more and more students to fill up the vacant seats. Many of us find themselves at the door steps of aspiring students just after the declaration of Higher Secondary examinations. This is done due to various reasons, may it be because of the pressure from the management or for the survival of our fraternity. Nowadays, we find our teachers assuring the aspiring students the same inducement to get their transfer certificates. Admissions are given on first come first basis; and there is no need of displaying merit lists in majority of the colleges having traditional courses in rural areas. This seems very strange, but it is a fact, and many of us are going through this phase. Everyone is aware of the academic quality of the students, particularly in rural areas, coming to our colleges.

It poses many serious challenges when we think of developing quality in our institutions. We have hundreds of students in the class on roll, but very few in the classroom. The students have their problems to justify their absence in the class; majority of parents are not at all serious about the education of their wards. Those who come in the class are having a poor academic background to the extent that many of them are not in a position to spell their names correctly.

Even the attitude and behaviour of many of the teachers in many colleges situated in remote areas do not show enthusiastic approach towards NAAC. They feel it as an extra responsibility thrown to them by

IQAC. Particularly, in Marathi medium colleges of arts, commerce and Science, the teachers have no interest in the functioning of IQAC. Many of them try to escape the responsibility by saying that they don't understand English, and hence are not comfortable with it. In such circumstances, it becomes very difficult for IQAC to involve all the faculty members in the execution of policies designed by it for the promotion of quality in these colleges.

Same is the case with non-teaching staff of these colleges. They take interest in their routine work. Experience proves that IQAC coordinators and other members working with IQAC have to wait for many days to get information related to the administrative office. The clerks and peons take IQAC very casually. They don't respond to it seriously and as quickly as they are expected to.

The management authorities are not that much positive for assessment of the overall functioning of the colleges by NAAC. It is because accreditation by NAAC does not help getting any extra grant for the development of infrastructure in the institution. Rather, it costs a lot while going through the process of assessment and accreditation. They feel that any autonomous body coming to assess the college should recommend some monetary benefit to the institution after successful accreditation. The established policy of RUSA to assist the colleges getting more than 2.50 scores does not do justice to the small colleges in rural areas. Actually, these colleges are in need of such developmental grants but are neglected. Hence, we can justify the stand of the management.

Among all these adverse circumstances it becomes a herculean task for the IQACs to develop quality in our institutions. This does not mean that the IQAC coordinators have lost hope. Many of them are trying hard to create quality learning environment in their institutions. Of course, IQACs need to be strengthened to create quality and promote it in the colleges situated in rural areas.

Role of IQAC in Promoting Quality Culture

IQAC came into existence out of the need to create, maintain and sustain quality in the higher education institutions as a post accreditation quality sustenance measure. IQAC covers variety of functions but the main function of IQAC is to develop and determine the quality benchmarks for the academic and administrative activities conducted by higher education institutions. IQAC should function as a catalyst of change to promote quality of education in higher education institutions. We must remember that quality is not something which can be obtained and established overnight; it is established through an extensive process of contribution of all the related stakeholders. It is a continuous, comprehensive and never ending process. Surprisingly, there is no fixed formula to measure it as it may change from time to time and place to place and with the changing needs and situations of stakeholders in different institutions. What we can do is the enhancement and sustenance of quality through conscious and consistent efforts through IQAC.

The new NAAC manual for affiliated colleges avails lot of opportunities for the IQAC to promote quality culture in the institution. There is an immense scope in almost all the seven criteria for IQAC to cultivate quality and sustain it as regular practice. IQAC, through its systematic function, can change the negative attitude of all those stakeholders who do not wish to work spontaneously and enthusiastically for the noble cause of quality enhancement in the higher education institution. To involve all the faculty members in the process IQAC must include a few dedicated teachers who are ready to work with devotion and can set examples through their own hard work. Once the others come to understand this devotion of few, they are bound to involve in the process.

Teachers are the backbone of institutional quality. They can do miracles if they wish by heart to devote extra efforts for their institution. This voluntary practice would also enhance their own caliber and status by creating esteemed image of them among students, parents and the management. For this IQAC should organize some institutional level workshops for teachers on quality sustenance. It should then go on planning and framing schemes and strategies for different activities to be organized by various departments, and ask all the concerned teachers to implement them strictly. These activities should be incorporated in the regular teaching-learning process during college hours. Once, teachers become habitual of working on the plans and find some positive changes among the students and their own daily

routines, they are bound to cooperate and support IQAC in the process of quality enhancement in the institution.

CONCLUSION

Although the scenario at present in rural areas, in particular, is not much promising, we still can hope for the better change. We need some good teachers as IQAC coordinators and members of IQACs to work as harbingers of the expected change. Promoting quality culture in the institution is not an individual's job; it is the outcome of a devoted teamwork. We should look at NAAC as a source of encouragement for quality enhancement in our institutions. It provides us an opportunity to evaluate our own position in the sphere of quality and go ahead. IQAC works as the internal agent of this quality process at institutional level. It can create healthy academic environment in the higher education institution by systematic planning, strict execution, and proper documentation.

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