

Understanding the Nuances of Revised NAAC Framework in the Light of National Education Policy (NEP)

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Abstract:-

Over the last two decades of 21st century, India has remarkably transformed its higher education landscape and has become one of the largest Higher Education systems in the world. This has created widespread access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all levels. With well-planned expansion, a student-centric learning-driven and an outcome-based model of education, India has not only bettered its enrolment numbers but has drastically enhanced its learning outcomes since the inception of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 as an extension of UGC's quality assessment wing. NAAC plays a very important and crucial role in the enhancement of Quality initiatives and creation of a quality culture of the HEIs. Furthermore, recent introduction of National Education Policy in 2020 is really a giant step towards improving the benchmarks of our overall educational scenario. Under NEP various parameters have been promulgated to change the present Education system for the overall development of our country in the present 4.0 Industry or Smart Industrial Revolution and move towards 4.0 Education. Present area of deliberation focuses on understanding the nuances of NAAC's Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) in the light of the implementation of the recommendations of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Keywords:-

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Education Policy (NEP), 4.0 Industry, Smart Industrial Revolution, UGC (University Grants Commission).

I. INTRODUCTION

Keeping in view to create a robust educational eco system in India for gearing up the progressive Gen-Next to face global as well as local challenges efficiently and effectively, a comprehensive education policy has been envisaged and introduced in the form of National Education Policy 2020 by systematizing and coordinating the various educational bodies to work in tandem. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bengaluru is one such body, which has been a chief player in the quality assessment and enhancement of HEIs in India since its inception in 1994. The main aim of introducing this new National Education Policy 2020 is to ensure and enhance quality education in India from *Balvatika* to Higher Education for a span of 20 years starting from 2020 to 2040.

Various drastic and futuristic changes have been suggested to bring in a complete rejuvenation of education system in general and Higher Education in particular in India for which a complete assessment of the present scenario has been conducted keeping in mind the focal areas and problem areas to be addressed for result-oriented and far-reaching impactful solutions.

Challenges to counter by NEP: This National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education while building upon India's traditions and value systems. The NEP proposes an education policy, which seeks to address the challenges of: (i) Access, (ii) Equity, (iii) Quality, (iv) Affordability, and (v) Accountability faced by the current education system. It also seeks to set up a National Education Commission, increase public investment in education, strengthen the use of technology and increase focus on vocational and adult education. And regarding quality accreditation in higher education Institutions it says:

The most salient marker for these categories of institutions will be the focus of their goals and work. The Accreditation System will develop and use appropriately different and relevant norms across this range of HEIs. However, the expectations of high quality of education, and of teaching-learning, across all HEIs will be the same. (p 35)

Aims of NEP: One of the goals of education that Prakash Javadekar, the then HRD Minister envisages in his message apart from Educate, Encourage and Enlighten is, “to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry” (p 1). The aim of the NEP in the words of the chairman, Dr. Kasturirangan, is to attempt “to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st Century education, while remaining consistent with India’s traditions and value systems” (p 24). According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India has increased from 20.8% in 2011-12 to 25.8% in 2017-18 and 26.3% in 2018-19. It aims to increase GER to 50% by 2035 from the current level of about 26.3%. The following statement reflects the essence of the NEP: “all children will be a part of an inclusive and equitable society when they grow up, which in turn will raise the peace, harmony, and productivity of the nation” (p 138).

The National Education Policy is divided into four parts. 1. School Education (pages 7-30), 2. Higher Education (pages 33-49) 3. Other Key Areas to Focus (pages 50-58) 4. Make it to happen (pages 60-63). In the Part II: Higher Education it includes a) Quality Universities and Colleges: A New and Forward-looking Vision for India’s Higher Education System, b) Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation, c) Towards a More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education, d) Teacher Education, e) Re-imagining Vocational Education, f) Catalyzing Quality Academic Research in all Fields through a New National Research Foundation, g) Transforming the Regulatory System of Higher Education and h) Effective Governance and Leadership for Higher Education Institutions.

The quality assurance efforts of the Indian higher education system gained momentum by the late 1980s. Guided by the thrust given to quality higher education by the National Policy on Education (1986), the UGC constituted the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council in 1986 and towards the end of July 1994, it constituted an empowered committee under the chairpersonship of Prof. G. Ram Reddy, the then Chairperson, UGC to finalize the rules and regulation of the accreditation board and this committee brought the NAAC into existence for quality assessment and quality control of higher education. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) under UGC has been playing a pivotal role in the quality improvement of HEIs all over India.

Internal Quality Assurance Framework: The very first thing to systematize the quality initiatives and sustenance measures envisaged by NAAC is the concept of Internal Quality Assurance System or framework and to make it compulsory for the HEIs undergoing NAAC’s procedure for subsequent cycles. NAAC has devised the concept of IQAS (Internal Quality Assurance System) and IQAC (Internal Quality Assurance Cell) to continue and enhance the quality initiatives.

The Paradigm Shift in Assessment and Accreditation: NAAC is constantly updating and upgrading its revised framework to ensure that its processes are in tune with local, regional and global changes and challenges in higher education scenario. The main focus of the revision process has been to make them more robust, objective, transparent and scalable and ICT enabled. It has also simplified and reduced the duration of accreditation process. Recently NAAC has updated its Framework on 25th Nov 2020 after some changes in April 2020 keeping in view of present COVID 19 Pandemic lockdown situations. The manual and self-study report revised to differentiate some items and to enhance the accountability of the accrediting agency as well as the institutions applying for it. Students’ participation in all areas of assessment and Outcome based process are new focal areas.

1. Shift...to increase Objectivity and Transparency: NAAC has clearly defined its two pronged Metrics: Qualitative metrics (for 30% WP) and Quantitative Metrics (for 70% WP), in addition to that there are some Optional Metrics wherein the HEIs can choose to opt out the parameters that don’t apply to them. But there are Essential Metrics also which cannot be opted out. Another thing is the third party evaluation by multiple agencies in assessment for DVV (Data Validation and Verification) to assess and examine Quantitative Metrics, Bibliometrics by Infilbnet and SGS (System Generated Score) by a third party, and SSS (Students Satisfaction Survey) is conducted simultaneously with DVV process. To ensure the transparency in the process of Assessment and Accreditation, it is necessary for the Higher Educational Institution’s (HEI’s) to upload the SSR along with other relevant documents on Institutional website after clearance from the DVV process. Institutions are given 15 days’ time to complete the DVV process, and are supposed to respond within stipulated time during DVV clarification stage. Peer Team visit of the institution should not exceed three months after clearance of Pre-qualifier stage. NAAC will disclose the details of the Peer Team members only three days before the scheduled PTV dates. HEIs will not be responsible for Logistics for the Visiting Teams.

2. Shift...Towards Scalability and Robustness: Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* says, “The great growling engine of change is technology.” The extensive use of ICT (online process) has made the process scalable as well as robust. Moreover, appropriate differences in the Metrics, Weightages and different benchmarks to universities, autonomous colleges and affiliated/constituent UG and PG colleges as separate manuals are slated for all four types of HEIs.

3. Shift...Simplification of the Process: Drastic reduction in the number of questions in SSR (from more than 200 to 115/93 questions), reduced size of SSR (online) and reduced NAAC Peer Team visit days (2 or 3 days only) are the few steps to simplify the whole accreditation process. Criterion III was earlier 'Research, Consultancy and Extension', now 'Consultancy' has been replaced by 'Innovations', 'Research, Innovations and Extension' keeping in mind the Undergraduate Colleges. Moreover, the key indicators namely 1. Promotion of Research and Facilities and 2. Consultancy do not apply to UG/PG colleges and 'Innovation Ecosystem' is not applicable to UG colleges but it has 10 weightage points for PG colleges. Criterion VII is also changed from 'Healthy Practices', to 'Innovations and Best Practices', and now to 'Institutional Values and Best Practices'.

4. Shift...Boosting benchmarking: Benchmark is important as quality improvement tool keeping pace with globalization and international standards. Benchmarks means examples of good performance that serves as a standard for comparison of one's own performance. It is a technique in which an institution measures its performance against that of the best of others.

5. Shift... Students' participation in all areas of assessment: Enhanced participation of students in most of the college committees like IQAC, CDC for policy making and Grievance Redressal Cell, Purchase Committee etc. for active participation in administration are important changes in the Revised Framework. It is not only the present students but the alumni are also involved in the assessment process, Introduction of SSS (Student Satisfaction Survey), with 60/50 (UG/PG) weightage points is another important procedure where students are directly involved in the assessment process.

6. Shift...Pre-qualifier for Peer Team Visit: A pre-qualifier test is a condition for peer team visit and is based on Institutional system generated score (SGS) after undergoing DVV process. As a Pre-qualifier, the institution should score at least 25% in Quantitative Metrics (QnM) as per the final score after the DVV Process. If the HEI does not clear the Pre-qualifier stage, they will have to apply afresh by submitting the IIQA and its fees. As we know the Quantitative Metrics (QnM) of SSR will be sent for Data Validation and Verification (DVV) Process. After DVV process, a DVV deviation report is generated. If the HEI does not clear the Pre-qualifier stage then they will have to apply afresh by submitting the IIQA and its fees.

Shift...Optional and Essential Metrics: a) Maximum weightage of metrics that can be opted out shouldn't exceed 30 weightage (up to 3%). b) Metrics with maximum of total 10 weightage per criteria can be opted out. c) Criteria 1, 2 & 7 are essential that means no metrics can be opted out from these criteria. d) Qualitative metrics also cannot be opted out. e) Metrics identified as essential cannot be opted out. Earlier the list of essential metrics were given but now a list of institution wise Optional Metrics is given with the manual of all four types of HEIs.

Shift...Different parameters for different HEIs' NAAC Manuals: Earlier a single Manual was applicable to all types of institutions i.e. Universities, Autonomous institutes, Affiliated/Constituent UG Colleges, and Affiliated/Constituent PG Colleges. Now there are separate Manuals for all four types of institutions. Apart from the Manuals now we are required to download 1. The Revised Extended Profile Templates, 2. Revised Data Templates and SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for DVV (Data Validation and Verification) separately. Moreover, Guidelines for the Creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) that is recently revised in April 2020 as Version 1.0 and then in July 2020 has to be followed meticulously.

II. CONCLUSION

Finally, efforts are being made at all levels to keep the wings of Higher education soaring upwards by introducing the National Education Policy 2020 with a more serious role to play by NAAC in transforming India into an educational superpower in the next 20 years. There is a need to settle into the NEW NORMAL for the foreseeable future. Different approaches will be needed in different situational contexts with constant kinetic changes. All the stakeholders at various levels of the education system will have different roles to play and overcome the challenges. This will be a vast exercise, but effective and constant engagement with students keeping in mind 'Better Education for all' will certainly work.

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