International Journal of Scientific Research & Engineering Trends
Volume 5 Issue 6, Nov-Dec-2019, ISSN (Online): 2395-566X

Quality of Higher Education in India: Issues, Challenges and Prospects - A Critical Review

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Abstract- The growing number of colleges and universities in India has opened chances for people to move up socially to get ready for jobs and to grow knowledge. Simply adding more institutions does not make education better. the sector faced problems: schools had uneven resources, teaching and learning varied in quality teachers felt pressure many colleges had little research capacity and the way exams were graded sometimes cared more about paperwork than the real learning experience of students. This paper looks closely at what quality means in higher education and looks at selected problems in the policies and institutions that existed until now. It uses data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018–19, from University Grants Commission rules and from higher-education policy papers. The paper says that quality is not about buildings, rankings or accreditation. Quality is about how a school can help students learn meaningfully think independently act ethically and use knowledge in practice. The paper ends by saying that improvement needs planning that fits the context continuous training for teachers, stronger research habits, fairer access to learning tools and a deeper way to check quality.

Keywords: Higher Education; Educational Quality; Teaching-Learning; Accreditation; Research; Equity; India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a role in the social and intellectual growth of a nation. Universities and colleges are expected not to ready young people for jobs but also to build independent judgment, scientific curiosity, social responsibility and the skill to respond thoughtfully to change. In India the rise of education has brought many different learners into universities, colleges and professional schools. This rise is a success but it has also made the question of quality more urgent.

The main problem is not just whether more schools have opened or more students have joined. The main problem is whether students in all kinds of schools get chances to learn ask questions try experiments and use knowledge in ways. A college might have buildings, laboratories and a library. Those facilities do not automatically mean learning works well. Likewise a good curriculum may have effect if teaching stays mainly one-way or if students have few chances to link classroom ideas with real life.

The year 2019 gives a point for looking at these problems. The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2018–19 counted 993 universities, 39,931 colleges and 10,725 stand-alone institutions on the AISHE portal. The size of this network shows how higher education reaches but it also shows the challenge of keeping fair academic standards across schools that differ a lot in size, place, resources and history (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD] 2019).

1. Conceptualising Quality In Higher Education

Quality in education has many parts. Quality covers how relevant and connected curricula are, how skilled and committed teachers are, how learning resources are available and used well how fair assessment is, how strong academic leadership is, how active research is and how much support students get. These parts rely on each other. A problem in one part can lower the benefit of progress in another part. A clear difference can be made between having resources and using those resources for learning. A laboratory is a resource; the chance to do experiments is a learning process. A library is a resource; students' regular use of books, journals and other learning material is a learning practice. Accreditation is a way to check quality; better student learning is one result that accreditation should help schools reach.

The UGC Recognition and Monitoring of Assessment and Accreditation Agencies Regulations 2018 describes quality in wide terms. It covers teaching, learning, research, buildings, people, curricula, assessment methods and

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governance. This wide view matters because it shows that academic quality cannot be measured by one thing (University Grants Commission [UGC] 2018).

2. Objectives Of The Study

- To examine the meaning and main parts of quality in higher education.
- To identify institutional and academic problems that affect quality up
- To analyse the role of teachers, curriculum, research and assessment in improving quality.
- To review the contribution and limitations of quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms.
- To suggest measures for strengthening quality in diverse higher education institutions.

3. Research Methodology

The study is descriptive and analytical. Follows a review-based approach.

The study is based on sources available up to 2019 including the AISHE 2018–19 report UGC regulations, government documents on higher education and selected academic literature. The material has been examined thematically with attention to access, institutional capacity, teaching-learning processes, faculty development, research and quality assurance. No primary survey, experiment or original statistical analysis has been conducted. the paper presents an interpretation of published material rather than empirical findings from a newly collected sample.

II. MAJOR CHALLENGES TO QUALITY IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Expansion And Uneven Institutional Capacity

The expansion of education has widened participation but institutions do not operate under identical conditions. Differences in funding, location, infrastructure, faculty availability and access to networks influence the opportunities available to students. A well-resourced university in a city may have access to laboratories, digital databases and research collaborations that are difficult for a small college in a remote or semi-urban area to secure.

The policy challenge is therefore twofold: institutions must be encouraged to improve. Institutions must also receive support that reflects institutions actual circumstances.

Applying expectations without addressing differences in institutional capacity can turn quality assurance into a compliance exercise rather than a developmental process.

2. Teaching-Learning Practices And Student Engagement

The quality of education is experienced most directly through teaching and learning. In settings the lecture remains a practical and necessary method, especially where class sizes are large. However when lecture becomes the regular method students may have limited opportunities to discuss, question, investigate or apply ideas. A engaging academic environment can be developed through seminars, group discussions, field-based assignments, case studies, laboratory work, presentations and project-based learning.

These methods do not require the abandonment of lectures, instead they broaden the ways in which students encounter and use knowledge. The choice of method should be guided by subject learning objectives and available resources.

3. Faculty Availability And Professional Development

Teachers are central to the quality of an institution. Teacher contribution depends on more than formal qualifications. Effective teaching requires knowledge, preparation, communication, fair assessment, sensitivity to student diversity and the ability to relate concepts to wider developments. Teachers also need time and institutional encouragement for reading, research and professional learning. Where teachers carry teaching, administrative and documentation responsibilities sustained academic development may become difficult.

Professional development programmes are most useful when programmes respond to classroom needs and provide opportunities to reflect on teachers practice rather than being treated as formal requirements.

The UGC Regulations, 2018 provide a framework for qualifications and service conditions of teachers and other academic staff; implementation of these regulations needs to be accompanied by supportive institutional conditions (UGC, 2018).

4. Curriculum Relevance And The Theory-Practice Relationship

A curriculum should provide a conceptual foundation while helping students understand how knowledge operates beyond the classroom. In some programmes the connection between content and practical situations remains weak. Students may become familiar with definitions. Established explanations but receive insufficient opportunities to investigate local problems undertake fieldwork or apply disciplinary knowledge. The solution is not to reduce learning. Strong conceptual understanding is essential.

The need is to create a relationship between theory and practice through projects, internships where appropriate laboratory exercises, community engagement and

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assignments based on authentic problems. Such activities can make learning more meaningful. Help students recognise the relevance of their disciplines.

5. Research Culture And Academic Integrity

Research contributes to the renewal of knowledge the development of inquiry and the solution of social and technical problems. However research capacity is unevenly distributed across institutions. Some colleges have limited access to research funding, specialised equipment, scholarly databases and experienced research guidance. Teachers in settings may find it difficult to sustain research, alongside teachers regular academic responsibilities.

A further concern is that many people judge research performance by how many publications a person has. Counting numbers is simple. This count does not always show originality, careful methods or social value. A robust research culture should prize questions, honest methods, ethical behaviour, responsible publishing and thoughtful use of evidence. The UGC's 2018 regulations that promote integrity and prevent plagiarism offer a useful institutional guide for this goal (UGC, 2018).

6. Assessment Practices And Meaningful Learning

Assessment shapes what students think is important. When success relies mostly on repeating facts in a written test students naturally concentrate on memorising. Written tests are still helpful for checking some types of knowledge. They alone cannot measure speaking working together hands-on skills, creativity or the skill to solve new problems.

A balanced assessment framework can mix exams with assignments, presentations, hands-on work, projects and ongoing feedback. Clear assessment criteria are also essential. Students need to know what the expectations are. Should get feedback that helps them grow, not just a number that marks their performance.

7. Quality Assurance And Accreditation: Contribution And Cautions

Quality assurance tools can prompt institutions to look at their practices, spot gaps and plan better ways forward. Accreditation also makes information about an institution for students, parents, teachers and other interested parties. The UGC Recognition and Monitoring of Assessment and Accreditation Agencies Regulations 2018 define assessment and accreditation as tools for measuring quality and ensuring it.

Nevertheless accreditation must not be mistaken for quality itself. A rating or status is a judgement that follows set criteria; it cannot record every classroom moment or assure that every student enjoys the same learning experience. Institutions may also spend a lot of effort preparing paperwork and proof for assessment. Record keeping is needed for responsibility. It can become harmful if it pushes away focus from teaching, learning and student help.The better way is to treat accreditation results as a launch pad for improvement. Internal quality assurance teams must push self-review pull teachers and students into the process look at learning results and check whether the planned changes have made real progress.

8. Measures For Strengthening Quality

Adopt quality improvement plans that fit the context and recognise the differences among universities, city colleges, rural colleges and special schools. Boost classroom work by mixing lectures, discussion, hands-on tasks, projects and real-world learning. Offer teacher training that ties into new subject knowledge, teaching methods, assessment, research techniques and educational technology.

Open up libraries, electronic resources, labs and reliable digital tools. Make sure students actually use them. Support research through mentoring, joint projects, partner schools and clear rules for research ethics. Use clear assessment ways that check understanding, use, speaking and hands-on skill. View accreditation as a chance to think and grow not as a goal; cut unnecessary paperwork when possible. Build ways for students to give comments on teaching, academic help and campus facilities.

III. DISCUSSION

The review shows that the main problem for higher education in 2019 was not just a lack of schools or missing quality rules. It was how hard it was to turn growth, rules and resources into learning that really mattered for all students. The same policy or assessment system can give different outcomes in schools that have different numbers of staff, money, leaders and teaching cultures. This insight shows a gap between quality and lived quality. Visible quality shows up in walls, labs, written rules, reports and accreditation results.

Lived quality shows up in whether students can use those places whether teachers have time and help to teach whether assessment supports learning and whether research questions are welcomed. Both sides matter. The lived side is the real test of the visible side.

Quality improvement must go beyond a focus, on checking rules. Schools need data and records but they also need a culture where teachers and students spot problems talk about them openly and take real actions to fix them. This way is more likely to last than treating quality as a task done before a outside review.

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IV. CONCLUSION

Indian higher education grew a lot by 2019 giving chances to more and different students. The size of this growth made it harder to keep quality high. Things like school strengths, uneven access to learning tools limits on teacher training gaps between theory and practice restrictions on research and tests that focus only on exams all hurt the quality of learning.

The review says that quality cannot be set by buildings, rules or certificates. Those are tools but their worth depends on how well they help teaching, learning and research. A quality-focused school is one where students think on their own teachers get support as professionals research follows honesty and learning materials are used for real learning.

The path forward is to link school responsibility with goal. Quality checks must help schools see their limits and fix them over time. In the end success of education should be measured not just by the degrees a school gives, but also by the knowledge, judgement, skill and social duty that its students grow.

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