

Submission of full Paper on the theme of the INQAAHE Conference 2005, to be delivered at the Wellington, New Zealand conference 29 March-1 April 2005.

Track 4: Effectiveness of quality assurance.

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Title: ‘Student Satisfaction Cycle’ in Accredited institutions of India.

‘Student Satisfaction Cycle’ in Accredited Institutions of India

The first cycle of institutional accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India has triggered several new initiatives among the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country. Institutional self-study as the backbone of the accreditation exercise – drawn on national/international experience – has brought in many tested concepts and initiatives in the Indian higher education system. Phenomenal rise in learning resources, innovations in pedagogy and increased focus on student satisfaction can be seen as clearly visible outcomes of the assessment and accreditation process by the NAAC. However, at the juncture of implementing the re-accreditation methodology, the sustenance of these initiatives has emerged as an important aspect to be analysed.

Sustenance of quality initiatives is given an emphasis in the re-accreditation methodology. This paper makes an attempt to analyse this ‘sustenance issue’ with respect to students. The paper is divided into four sub-sections namely I- The student feedback practices in India—a survey, II - Procedure for collecting student feedback & ensuring action, III -Sustenance of quality initiatives in a cycle of accreditation & IV - Sustenance of various quality initiatives during accreditation. While this analysis would document the sustenance level of impact of assessment and accreditation on student life in general, its focus is on ‘Satisfaction Cycle’ (Harvey, 2003) as sequel to student feedback.

I. THE STUDENT FEEDBACK PRACTICES IN INDIA–A SURVEY

The NAAC has suggested different formats to obtain students feedback namely:

1. Student feedback on courses.
2. Student feedback on teachers.
3. Overall rating of programme of study by students.
4. Exit questionnaire for graduating students.

Institutions are expected/advised to choose the relevant formats, modify them to suit the institutional context and use the data collected as an important feedback for quality enhancement initiatives. Even though these formats and also the exercise are only suggestive, many institutions have undertaken this exercise. This paper is focused on whether this feedback collection and analysis has resulted in to a continuous cycle of student satisfaction.

A questionnaire was administered to accredited HEIs. Sample was drawn consisting of recently accredited 100 institutions. The response was moderate.

Vague and inconsistent responses were not considered for analysis. 32 HEIs responded in detailed manner. About 10 institutes responded that they have recently started feedback system and it will take time to analyse the same. The present analysis is based on responses of these 32 accredited institutes.

It is observed that most of these institutes [75%] obtain regular feedback on teachers. Student feed back on courses is obtained by more than 60% HEIs. While Overall programme rating and Exit questionnaire for graduating students is in vogue in 50% of the accredited institutes. Even though combination of various formats are used, the most common and widely used format is evaluation of teacher by students. Feedback on courses is not popular in India mainly because of the affiliating system where colleges have no or very little say in curriculum design as it is responsibility of affiliating university.

Major suggestions reflected in feed back of respondent institutions are summarized below.

A. Student Feedback on Courses

1. Request for computer courses and reduced workload.
2. Demand for More job oriented courses [JOC] & other skill based short term courses.
3. To hold English fluency programmes and skill based job-oriented programmes.
4. Diploma in Banking & B.B.A.
5. i) Freedom in choice of optionals.
ii) Inter-disciplinary courses to be introduced.
6. To open PG course and to start courses in Bio-Technology & BBM.
7. Remedial courses.
8. Pedagogical Courses should be reduced and Courses on teaching subjects be strengthened.
9. Syllabus to be job oriented.
10. Students want weekly seminar/study tour.
11. Change of combination of subjects, round the clock library system.
12. Multiple choice of short questions should be introduced for up to-date knowledge.
13. Existing syllabus at P. G. Level should be modified.
14. Course should be made more relevant & course content should be more in depth.
15. Problem-oriented medical training to be emphasized and greater emphasis on blackboard teaching as compared with power point presentations, esp. for I MBBS course.
16. Course is tight but the duration should not be increased (Students 90% above are P. G. Holders) & Preparation of the too many number of teaching aids, charts etc. be reduced.

The response of HEIs is mainly limited to forwarding the requests to university and sending the proposals wherever necessary.

B. Student Feedback on teachers

Following are the major suggestions noted on this widely used feedback form due to NAAC's prescription.

1. Motivate students to ask questions.
2. P. E. Teacher's Appointment & librarian appointment.
3. i. Guidance for personality development is needed.
ii. Friendly behaviour with the students be maintained.
4. i) Dictation of notes on time.

- ii) Revision with objective methods.
5. Some teachers should be more punctual and space out assignments.
 6. Some teachers who use lecture method in the class should give sometime before the end of their lecture for inviting queries from the students and Demonstrations lessons on different aspects of English language is arranged.
 7. Teachers to update their knowledge & teachers can go for higher education (Research).
 8. Subject matter needs simplification further. Teacher should be more sensitive towards their social problems.
 11. Students desired more discussion in the class room.
 12. More teachers are required in one-man-departments & more guest lectures should be arranged.
 13. Empowerment in presentation and use of teaching aids.
 14. Teachers should provide broader perspective of course & Design more co-curricular activities.
 15. A few teachers have the scope for greater interaction in the class & some teachers could be more objective in their dealings with students.
 16. More interactive and extra time & coaching for competitive exams.
 17. Teachers who were more interactive than diactic were rated higher and teachers who interacted more as facilitators than instructors were preferred.
 18. The training given to the prospective teachers are good and acceptable. This must be maintained & follow up also must be given to them.

There is widespread belief in HEIs that this practice gives better score in A & A by NAAC as teaching learning and evaluation is the major criteria of assessment carrying 40% weightage. Therefore actions taken in this aspect have also been reported prominently. There are some cases where institution prefers to maintain the teacher evaluation “Confidential”.

C. Overall Rating of programme of study by students

This format is not widely used in colleges. Especially both course feedback and overall rating of programme are seldom used by the institutions. Some frequently occurring suggestions/ observations are listed below.

1. Conducting more seminars, workshops and debates.
2. Commencement of programme to be punctuated & rating to be compared.
3. Request that there be more extra curricular activities, possibly inter-collegiate.
4. Practice teaching be strengthened and monthly/terminal test be introduced.

5. Job oriented courses.
6. Students satisfied with programme of study.
7. Expecting intensive class tests etc.
8. Programme should become more practical oriented.
9. Course urgently needed stress on and less expensive education.
10. The training given to the prospective teachers are good and acceptable this must be maintained & follow up also must be given to them [TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE].

D. Exit Questionnaire for Graduating Students

This feedback format is yet to gain wider acceptance as compared to evaluation of teachers by the students. Still many institutions, especially professional ones are using it for different purposes. Salient suggestions / observations are listed here

1. More of curriculum – linked activities and capacity building of the students through group dynamics.
2. Better sports facilities.
3. i) Book issue to be well managed.
ii) Special coaching for needful students.
4. Request for more extra-curricular activities and better equipped labs.
5. Need of an auditorium and improvement in hostel mess facilities.
6. Satisfied with the infrastructure facilities & Campus interview.
7. Demand for more social science course i.e. psychology, Geography, sociology.
8. Demand for employment cell and career guidance cell.
9. University should be approached for inclusion of practical applications of theory & PG syllabi should be reoriented.
10. Demand for more seats in Hostel and better library.
11. More emphasis on clinical rotation and more training on practical procedures.
12. One more librarian should be appointed & practice teaching skills more time and technology be provided.
13. Fitting of Lights & fans in lecture halls and cleanliness in boys and ladies common rooms.

This feedback lists a whole array of suggestions right from changing fans, lights to course contents. Keeping in mind the scepticism of teachers about their evaluation by students, this format can be appropriately used in place of Teacher evaluation. The

criticism of managed/ fabricated or controlled feedback exercise can be minimised by using this method.

II. PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTING STUDENT FEEDBACK & ENSURING ACTION

Attempt was also made to obtain information on procedures followed by various accredited institutions to collect the student's feedback, analyse it and inform the action taken. It is noticed that only 45% HEIs participated in survey put in place a proper mechanism for this purpose. Other HEIs obtaining feedback also take the necessary steps in a flexible manner. Procedures followed in some of the institutions are summarized below which gives an illustration of diversity of practices

- A. The college 'A' obtains student feedback through tutorial groups and the information is analysed through monthly interaction between students and teachers. Finally the implementation is ensured through quarterly interaction between the Principal and the students.
- B. The college 'B' collects student feedback through questionnaire and also from personal interaction with students, students' council and parents. The principal sorts data and codifies it, he also analyses it and makes notes for suggestions and again the data collected is re-examined in the presence of the teacher concerned. And the process of implementation includes conveying the suggestions of general nature in the staff meeting by the principal specially convened for the purpose in the month of March and June every year. Suggestions pertaining to individual teachers are conveyed personally. The IQAC Unit also monitors the whole process of quality enforcement. The IQAC unit in its bi-annual meeting takes stock of variations in quality benchmarks and suggests measures thereof.
- C. The college 'C' collects the feedback through various formats of student feedback which are distributed amongst the students. The committee concerned analyses them and places suggestions for improvement.
- D. The college 'D' has just 60 students in the B.Ed [Degree course in Teacher education] and there exists personal relationship at every level. Therefore, they discuss personally with the students and hence no formal student feedback mechanism.

E. The college 'E' distributes the feedback forms containing the questionnaire, related to teaching –learning process and basic and support services on campus, to the students of different programmes after the commencement of II term. Feedback forms, duly filled by the students, are collected. Then, the Screening Committee scrutinizes and analyzes the data. This follows the staff council meeting for ensuring the action to be taken. Involving the Staff concerned Sincere efforts are being made collectively and remedial measures are taken in respect of both, the teaching-learning process and various support services. Strict supervision is conducted punctually and even possible efforts are made so that fruitful results could reach the needful.

F. The college 'F' collects the feedback where the form contains 10 questions about punctuality, competence, communication skills, methodology, personal relationship etc of teachers. The entire students community responds the questionnaire on the basis of 1 – 10 points scale. The response sheet is compiled to arrive the average score on each quality. The rating of each teacher is calculated by taking the percentage. The principal meets every teacher personally and discusses the issues derived from the student response and corrective measures are initiated.

Only the final year students of the college are involved in this exercise. They answer a questionnaire containing questions about their satisfaction level, proposal for new courses and other suggestions. The feedback is discussed in the staff meeting and necessary decisions are taken by Consultancy Body and Governing Body of the college.

G. The college 'G' obtains the student feedback through distributing a separate questionnaire at the end of the academic year based on which the action, after careful analysis is taken by the institution.

H. The college 'H' collects the student feedback by choosing one third teachers for the feedback every year, random sample, of 50 students from all the classes taught, are taken. The management frames the questionnaire and the collected feedback from students are sealed by envelopes and are sent to the management. Further statistical analysis is done by the management. And the concerned teacher is personally called by the management, and the results are discussed with

him/her in the presence of the principal. Finally, the management, through principal monitors the progress.

- I. The college 'I' distributes the feedback forms to the students to be filled at home with the assurance that the contents of the feedback and identity of the student will not be disclosed. As such, students are not required to write their names. They may even get the forms filled by their relatives or friends so that the feedback may not be traced by their writing style. There is no question of any type of pressure by the teachers on students. The filled formats are folded and collected in a big envelop by the co-ordinator. The feedback is then analyzed by the committee members of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and the report is submitted to the Principal. The principal, in consultation with discipline maintenance committee and IQAC, takes proper action to solve the problems and students are informed of the action taken.
- J. The college 'J' collects the feedback of the students through a stratified random sample of about 22% (average of the students are taken for feedback. The members of the department of statistics analyze it. The management receives the feedback taking into consideration the points suggested and initiates necessary steps.
- K. The college 'K' has a system of evaluation of teachers' performance by students. The principal of the college meets the outgoing 3rd year students after the results of the selection test of Part II have been declared. The principal distributes a modified schedule II (NAAC Manual for Self-study) and asks honours students to complete the schedule for each teacher in their department in her presence. She collects the schedule and scores each answer on a pre-determined scale of 0-5 and evaluates the overall performance of each teacher. Thereafter she shows the evaluated schedules to the concerned teacher only, in total privacy, to make her aware of the effectiveness of her instruction and activities as well as her own strength and weakness, this motivates the teachers to modify and improve their performance.
- L. The college 'I' has prescribed proforma of "feedback" which is issued to the students to obtain the suggestions on important issues and programs of the college. After obtaining the feedback, the suggestions are analyzed and necessary actions are taken and are informed to the students.

- M. i) The college 'M' has two methods which are used to collect student feedback – a formal, structured, questionnaire-based feedback (a mix of open-ended questions, questions with forced choices and ordinal scale-based answer system) and an informal system where students are free to write any feedback on a blank paper, without revealing their identity, during a specified time, on any random day.
- ii) Feedback is analyzed by staff groups (faculty and administrators) through group meetings, presentations, brainstorming sessions and prioritization of quality issues. Modifications planned are discussed with the students and faculty to arrive at informed choices/alternatives.
- iii) The decisions thus made are communicated to all concerned for implementation over a specified period of time. The same is monitored by Dean Office; regular feedback is taken and mid-course corrections, if any, carried out. Outcomes are analyzed and feedback given to students and faculty by Dean Office.
- N. The college 'N' evaluates format for each item mentioned in the questionnaire and are administered in proper time, which are scored and analyzed. The suggestions given are discussed in the staff meeting and decisions are taken like
- a) To appoint an assistant librarian.
 - b) To purchase more computer systems'
 - c) To invest more money for library to purchase more reference books, foreign journals.
 - d) To purchase video camera.

These illustrations lead to some salient trends observed in accredited HEIs in India in terms of Student Satisfaction Cycle.

1. Major focus on evaluation of teachers by students.
2. Feedback on courses are considered less meaningful or useful for colleges due to affiliating system.
3. Principal as the nodal person in obtaining feedback and initiating necessary steps.
4. Separate agency or in-house mechanism like Internal Quality Assurance. Cells are yet to be widely used for student satisfaction surveys.
5. Lack of formal structure or body to ensure feedback-action-information loop in majority of HEIs.

6. Evidence of secrecy and skepticism about teacher evaluation by the students.
7. Sustenance or continuation of regular student feedback mechanism is matter of concern.
8. Proper reporting of feedback outcome and action taken to be strengthened.
9. Some of the institutions, especially autonomous ones are experimenting variety of feedback methods to enrich campus experience of students.
10. Exit questionnaires are gaining popularity in professional course providers.
11. Immediately before and after NAAC accreditation feedback mechanism gained momentum.

III. SUSTENANCE OF QUALITY INITIATIVES TILL NEXT CYCLE OF ACCREDITATION

The data available with the NAAC in the reports submitted by the first batch of HEIs that underwent Assessment and Accreditation 5 years ago is a good resource for comparative analysis of reported quality sustenance and improvement over the period of 5-6 years. The first batch of HEIs – 19 Colleges and 1 University – that were assessed during the academic year 1998 – 99, having completed 5 years of accredited period, have submitted themselves for re-accreditation. Most of these institutions have also submitted their Re-accreditation Reports (RARs) that provides a wealth of information on the impact of first assessment, sustenance of quality initiatives triggered during the first assessment and quality enhancement in key aspects of functioning. Following are some of the highlights of comparison between self-study reports of the HEIs submitted to NAAC for first and second cycle of accreditation i.e. with interval of about 5 years.

Teacher student ratio:

During the first accreditation the student teacher ratio varied from 20:1 to 38:1. However during the reaccreditation the student teacher ratio deteriorated in range of 40:1 to 55:1. The number of students increased substantially but the teacher population remained more or less same in most of the HEIs.

Temporal plan of the institution:

During the time of first accreditation, about 40% of the institutions were following semester system, 40% annual system and 20% both annual and semester system. During the course five years till reaccreditation the pattern of temporal plan of the institutions has been changed. 70% follow semester system, 15% annual system and 15% have both annual as well as semester system in place.

Support services:

During the course of time support services have been increased - Computer center, Internet facility, Gymnasium, rest room, medical facility, student counseling center etc. have been added to the support services in most of the HEIs in last five years.

Credit system for completion of course:

Credit based choice system was not much followed by most of the institutions at the time of accreditation. During the time of reaccreditation the percentage of HEIs following the credit system has been increased by 5 to 8%.

Working hours of the library;

The working hours of the library continues to be averaged between 6 to 8 hours per day. During the examination time the number of hours would increase by 1 to 3 hours more for reference purpose and research.

Computers in the Library:

At the time of first accreditation 30 to 40% of the colleges were using computers in the College library. During the course of time it has been increased to almost 95%. Most of the libraries have been computerized and have internet browsing facility.

Health care facilities offered to students, faculty staff:

Most of the institutions are having health care facilities for the students, faculty and staff. Around 60% of the college have medical center with doctors for regular medical checkup.

Collection of Feedback from students:

At the time of accreditation 40 to 50% institutions were collecting feedback from the students. During the course of time it has been gradually increased. Almost 90% HEIs in first batch of re-accreditation are collecting feedback from the students.

Employment cell& placement office:

About 70% Accredited institutions have placement cell. The number of students benefiting from the cell ranges from 50 to 100 students per annum.

Alumni association

The Self Study Reports indicate that 90% accredited institutions opted for re-accreditation have formed registered alumni associations.

Criteria for admission, rules and regulations:

The 95% institutions have been communicating admission related details through prospectus and notice boards at the time of first accreditation. During the time of reaccreditation, in addition to prospectus and notice boards, institutions are advertising through media, website and other modes of communication.

Recreational/leisure time facilities:

There is marked increase in the facilities to the students for recreation in leisure time. The students make use of recreational/leisure time by playing indoor games and make use of college facilities to improve their mental and physical capabilities.

The data with special reference to student support services taken from these sets of reports throws light on areas that need to be strengthened further in the Student Satisfaction Cycle. Comparison on most of the issues pertaining to student support and progression indicates that level of sustenance of quality initiatives needs to be further improved.

IV. SUSTENANCE OF VARIOUS QUALITY INITIATIVES REGARDING STUDENT SUPPORT DURING ACCREDITATION – A SURVEY

The NAAC advocates formation of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQAC) to strengthen the internal quality assurance in the accredited institutions and the institutions have to submit the Annual Quality Assurance Reports (AQARs) to the NAAC. The information sought through AQAR consists of forty different areas which includes students' assessment of teachers and courses and the action taken on student feedback, besides information on various student related activities like placement services, guidance and counselling unit, alumni association, infrastructure facilities etc. This paper also includes analysis of the information provided in the AQARs on these areas, which is supplemented by a brief survey. Information submitted about 32 institutions is considered for the analysis in this paper. This analysis has thrown light on sustenance of various quality initiatives and also the extent to which student feedback and its analysis is taken up by the institutions to complete the feedback – action loop

Alumni Association: -

The survey indicates that 65.62% accredited higher education institutions have formed Registered Alumni Associations. Many of the colleges are engaged in collection of funds from the alumni. Most of the colleges register an average of 20 to 30 alumni per year.

Placement Cell: -

The survey indicates that 53.12% accredited higher education institutions have formed Placement Cells.

Career Guidance Cell: -

The survey indicates that 87.5% accredited higher education institutions have formed Career Guidance Cells. The number of students benefiting from the cell ranges from 200 to 500 Per annum.

Personal counselling Cell: -

The survey indicates that 78.12% accredited higher education institutions have formed personal counseling Cells.

Mentor/Tutor System: -

The survey indicates that 62.5 % accredited higher education institutions have the Tutor system. Almost all students are benefited under the tutor system, where it is in place.

Student Feedback Mechanism

The survey indicates that 62.5% accredited higher education institutions have the student feedback mechanism. Most colleges have the mechanism for collection of data from no. of students varying from 500 to 1000.

Reprographic Facilities: -

The survey indicates that 68.75% accredited higher education institutions have Reprographic facilities.

Internet Facilities: -

The survey indicates that 71.87% accredited higher education institutions have Internet facilities. Most of the colleges have been providing free internet facilities except in case of some, where Rs. 5/- to Rs.20/- per hour is charged.

Grievance Redressal Cell: -

The survey indicates that 59.37% accredited higher education institutions have formed Grievance Redressal Cells. An average of about 10 cases per year are being solved.

Open access in Library: -

The survey indicates that 25% accredited higher education institutions have open access in Library. Very few colleges are providing open access in Library for the students.

Awards to meritorious students: -

The survey indicates that 71.87% accredited higher education institutions give awards to meritorious students. No of awards given varies from 1 to 20.

Remedial courses: -

The survey indicates that 68.75% accredited higher education institutions have Remedial courses. No of students availing benefit of remedial courses varies from 40 to 500.

Special training for advanced learners: -

The survey indicates that 56.25% accredited higher education institutions have the special training for advanced learners. The number of beneficiaries varies from 40 to 100.

The various findings listed above also point out that several quality initiatives in respect of student support and progression are triggered due to accreditation process of NAAC.

But a proper mechanism and/ or voluntary drive to sustain these initiatives is yet to consolidate.

Following are the some suggestions that can be explored if much talked about student centric learning experience is to gain ground in accredited institutions of India.

1. Low key return of questionnaires on student feed back status indicates that many HEIs have lost track of these initiatives after first accreditation is over. Efforts need to be made so that student feed back mechanism gets integrated as inbuilt part of governance of HEIs.
2. The variation in reporting about student support initiatives at the time of first accreditation, a year or two after accreditation and at the time of reaccreditations indicates that there is need of consistency in information seeking formats from HEIs during various stages of accreditation as well as post accreditation period.
3. To check the tendency of discontinuity of initiatives, the system of annual quality assurance reports (AQARs) need to be fine tuned and streamlined so that the data captured over the period of five years can be used as the basis of reaccreditation.
4. The sustenance of initiatives as reflected through annual reports of accredited HEIs needs to be given proper weightage and the same should be made known to all stakeholders.
5. The student satisfaction surveys may be conducted by independent agencies and the outcome may be shared with management of HEIs as well as accrediting agency i.e. NAAC. The possibility of nation wide student satisfaction surveys along with national skill tests by agency like NAAC may be explored.
6. If the analysis of student feed back is to form part of assessment and accreditation process of HEI then such feed back should be obtained and analysed independently by accreditation agency i.e. NAAC.
7. When the purpose of student feedback is to serve management information and internal reforms, the work may be entrusted to Internal Quality Assurance Cells for which the NAAC gives guidelines from time to time.
8. 'Student feedback on courses' and 'Overall rating of programmes' surveys may be primarily designed and conducted by affiliating

universities as they are responsible for curriculum design and reforms, in affiliating system prevalent in India.

9. The reports of scepticism and fabrication of ‘teachers evaluation by students’ in view of accreditation by NAAC need to be taken seriously. It needs to be made clear that existence of proper mechanism to obtain student feed back is important and not the outcome of the analysis. (It is observed that in most of the HEIs, most of the teachers are rated above eight or nine on ten point scale.)
10. Exit questionnaire for graduating students can be extensively used and the same may also carry the element of teacher appraisal.
11. Possibility of linking student satisfaction surveys with various forms of funding like special assistance, development grants, maintenance grants and student subsidies may be explored as the Government continues to be the major provider of higher education funding in India.
12. Extensive use of ICT mode to maintain, transfer and process data on student feedback as well as other quality initiatives may be encouraged.

The advocacy by NAAC for dissemination of best practices, adoption of the Student Charter and formation of Internal Quality Assurance Cell [IQAC] are the right steps in this direction.

However much remains to be done, given the size, complexities and diverse contexts of operating of Indian higher education system.

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