

Relevance of Global Best Practices in Accreditation for Higher Education in India: A New Perspective

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ABSTRACT

A study of global best practices reveals that architects of Indian accrediting entities have indeed carefully cherry-picked some of the best-in-class accreditation processes and practices. However, the paper points at a number of areas which are yet to be addressed adequately to make the system decidedly more relevant in the Indian context, and at the same time ensuring that the time-tested global best practices of accreditations are not ignored.

This paper brings out with ample clarity the peculiarities of the Indian education environment and why institutes need a review of the current accreditation benchmarks set by the accrediting bodies, based on global best practices. The paper brings to focus the real pain areas of institutes particularly the private institutes in not able to adequately measure up to the global best practices.

The paper recommends a greater autonomy for the affiliated institutes. It recommends non-government bodies to undertake accreditation of institutes and suggests all-new role for the Accrediting bodies and Councils. It supports global practices to remove mandatory clause for accreditation and further advocates a longer period of accreditation. The paper paves the way for further research on the topic by providing due focus to the research problem.

Keywords: Washington Accord, Higher Education Institutes, National Board of Accreditation (NBA).

INTRODUCTION

Since India is now a signatory to the Washington Accord¹, it puts an additional responsibility on the Accrediting bodies to remain braced up to the latest developments in the field, and continuously evolve and refine the systems and processes of accreditation, in line with the global best practices. Whereas, there is a surge in Indian institutes picking up ranking positions in the wishful list of top institutes of the world in the past couple of years, a lot of ground is yet to be covered. It is therefore essential to evaluate what makes institutes secure top rankings and improve our academic systems and processes in accreditation so as to set before our institutes, a higher and yet realistically achievable target.

Objective

The touchstone objective of the study is to pick up some of the best global best practices in accreditation which have not yet found a place in our system, evaluate them for their relevance in the

Indian accreditation system and thereby adopt some of the most empowering and time-tested practices with suitable modifications to ultimately deliver on Indian accreditation bodies' objectives.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Peculiarities of Indian Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) requiring specific accreditation solutions

Chapter 2: Global best practices and recommendations for adoption by Accreditation in India.

Peculiarities of Indian Higher Education Institutes Requiring Specific Accreditation Solutions

- A sudden spurt in institutes around the year 1995-96, followed by unstoppable proliferation has led to mushrooming of private institutes least caring for the quality. This has created a situation of a peculiar kind, not often seen in the developed world. This hits the academic quality at its very roots. Private institutes, in particular, don't plough-back, earnings into classrooms, in building intellectual capital, supporting infrastructure, pursuing research and building blocks of academic quality. Unlike good institutes abroad, there is unfortunately little or no concern by the promoters to give a lion's share back to the institute.
- Alumni connectivity in most HEIs is almost missing. The alumni funding² and academic support to students is negligible, contrary to the eminent institutes, all over the world.
- Supporting Foundations³ and role of civil society and industry is virtually non-existent. Industry in particular, fails to support medium and small sized institutes by establishing labs, workshops and funding research projects. This is a big drag to building research and consultancy competence.
- The governance and academic leadership in most institutes is not led by the men of wisdom, scholars, academics⁴, researchers and quality conscious men and women. Institutes perish due to missing academic leadership who fail to deliver on quality and excellence. The institutes on their part do not have funds to hire and build superior intellectual capital.
- The state of Research and Development is indeed abysmal disappointing. As per latest available figures, India is spending less than 1% on research and development compared to 1.9% in China and 2.75% in US. Scientific papers published by Indians numbered about 90,000 in 2013 compared to 4,50,000 by Americans and 3,25,000 by Chinese. Citations too were below the world average. Indians filed just 17 patents per million population compared to 541 in China and 4,451 in South Korea. The quality of research has not shown any improvement according to eminent scientist and Bharat Ratna Awardee CNR Rao.⁵
- The reliance on teaching-learning through theory and not by practice, continues to bedevil institutes. The freedom to innovate and invent is nearly missing. Faculty and students are not abreast with the latest advances in technology and science in their domain fields. The students' quality coming out of institutes is largely unskilled and disjointed with the industry needs.

Peculiarities Demand Scaling Down Expectations in Accreditation Benchmarks

- Whereas, on the one hand there is a compelling need to build research parks and centres of excellences, considering the state of affairs in which the institutes are seething at present, the expectation by accrediting agencies need to be scaled-down to achievable level, or else the system is likely to be compromised by unethical practices by the institutes to falsify records with a view to exhibit their potential to the inspecting teams. It is hard for unfunded private small institutes to score minimum threshold of 60%⁶ in various criterion including research and consultancy credentials specified by National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in the first six or seven years of its existence. These competencies are time-taking pursuits, requiring funds (inclusive and funding agencies), support from the government, research bodies, industry and alumni, whereas, the accrediting bodies expect institutes to apply for accreditation within six to seven years of its establishment as a mandatory condition. The Gazette of India notifications⁷ lay down the mandatory provisions. The resulting situation lends itself to a breeding ground for unethical and corrupt practices.
- The institutes are expected to maintain faculty to student ratio of 1:15⁸ for undergraduate programs, 1:12 for postgraduate programs and cadre ratio of 1:2:6. This is based on approved intake of students. Though NBA's new SARs have shown some flexibility in accepting slightly lower ratio, at the cost of securing low marks in attainment of the related criterion, the AICTE continues to insist on institutes signing a yearly undertaking for meeting the above specified ratio. The stringent condition leads to unethical and malpractices by various institutes in fudging records and devising unethical means to make up the ratio before the peer committee.
- Often an argument, that let only about 10% institutes attain the top grade or full accreditation and remaining undeserving be consigned to the fate of lower grade till they measure up to the benchmarked standards, is perhaps not a fair solution to build quality in institutes. Let there be an equity and fair play even for the private institutes. In India, private institutes have a definite role to play. The demand for the higher education has already outstripped the qualitative supply.
- Institutes find themselves at odd with themselves, failing to forge any worthwhile alliances, linkages with the foreign credible institutes for obvious reasons - a low academic standing and infrastructure⁹. The demand on institutes as laid down in the accreditation benchmarks needs to be scaled down to realistic objectives.
- Industry consultancy and industry supported research¹⁰ is not available to over 90% institutes both for reasons of lack of competence in institutes as also the neglect by the industry in India which is perhaps apprehensive of any positive outcome from such initiatives. The expectations of accrediting bodies from institutes on this criterion need to come down to a reasonable level.

Global Best Practices and Recommendations for Adoption by Accreditation System in India

- **Non-Government bodies to Accredite Insitutes.** The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)¹¹ in USA, Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)¹² Florida, European Quality Improvement System (EUIS)¹³ in Brussels and the Association of MBAs (AMBA)¹⁴, London are

all non-government agencies recognized by their respective governments. The accrediting bodies have experts in the field who are fully conversant with the criteria and accreditation best practices and hold impeccable record of honesty. NBA, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and other accrediting bodies may consider adopting a similar model limiting their role to effective monitoring. It may be argued by some academics that leaving accreditation to private operators would be like playing with the fire. Considering private models have worked well in developed countries, we have no reason to distrust people in India. The reliance shall have to be shifted to local credible bodies sooner or later.

- In the present accreditation arrangement, most faculty drawn from the institutes to form an inspection team to visit an institute are inadequately prepared to accredit. Besides, it is causing a drain on the institutes who find it difficult to spare them for the purpose. According to one estimate over 90% faculty are not aware of NBA's 'outcome-based education' system as at present, particularly the assessment and evaluation system and require an orientation capsule before they set out for the accreditation inspection of other institutes. There is a need for experts who continually upgrade themselves to global best practices in accreditation.
- **No mandatory Accreditation.** Global best practices followed by developed countries provide institutes, a much needed freedom to go or not to go for accreditation based on their individual competencies. Their controlling bodies/councils rely on the fact that the aspiration of institutes for a credible brand equity and sustaining prevailing competition, are enough reasons to drive institutes to self-seek accreditation to stay relevant, draw merited students and pursue their research and academic endeavors.
- **Allow institutes set their own research and consultancy objectives and assess them accordingly.** NAAC, NBA and other accrediting agencies may assess institutes on the lines of AACSB where research and consultancy credentials are verified, based on the objectives set by the institute, and not by its own laid down benchmarks and standards. Similarly, research credentials for affiliated institutes need further cutting down on funded research.
- **Doing away with 2 years Accreditation.** Institutes may not be accredited provisionally for 2 years. There is no global practice for a 'provisional' accreditation for 2 years. The accreditation may be for 5 years and 3 years. This would save a lot of time and effort on the part of institutes, accrediting bodies and councils.
- **NAAC, NBA and other Accrediting Agencies to assume a larger empowering role.** Much as CHEA, USA, Accreditation bodies may consider building academic excellence and advancing research, as a primary role which in turn deliver on developing capacity for global best practices in accreditation. Let the inspections and according accreditations to institutes be handled by Non-Government bodies duly scrutinized and selected with due care and suitable checks/balances.
- **Affiliation Status a big drag on aspirations.** There is a substantial reliance on individual institutes in the developed countries. The institutes hold a status of either constituents colleges or autonomous. They have the freedom to set their own mission, objectives, design their own curriculum, program and course objectives and conduct assessment and evaluation keeping in mind the objectives needed to be met. Contrary to this, the affiliated institutes in India, though expected to set their own mission, objectives, program and course outcomes, yet the curriculum and evaluation is controlled only by the university to which affiliated. This

possibly cannot meet the individual aspirations of a large number of affiliated institutes. The gap¹⁵ in curriculum cannot possibly be filled through the NBA suggested system of internal evaluation and assessment which has a very low assessment weightage. Let there be a freedom provided to affiliated colleges to design their own curriculum and establish their assessment and evaluation system. A limited control can be exercised by the University to which affiliated.

CONCLUSION

India is not yet the United States of America in the resource capacity needed for its higher education institutes, particularly, the private institutes. However, as part of the world's leading accreditation umbrella organization of Washington Accord, India is required to continuously improve its accreditation best practices, measure by measure and ensure their implementation by making it relevant to Indian education system. We must however, be reasonable in our expectations in certain areas of academic and research endeavors and not only support government institutes but also support and empower private small institutes to achieve the desired competencies and capacities to squarely meet the global best practices in accreditation.

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