



Research Paper

## Challenges and opportunities before higher education in India and the role of NAAC: An overview

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**Abstract:** It is believed that India had a functioning system of higher education as early as 1000 B.C. Although the modern Indian education system found its roots in the colonial legacy as the British Government used the university system as a tool of cultural colonization, yet, the present day higher education system of India has volumes to speak about. India has the third largest education system in the world, next to the United States of America and China. According to the 2011 Census, about 8.15% (68 million) of Indians are graduates. It is a matter of great pride that our higher education system has expanded at a tremendous pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students during 2001 to 2011. As per the latest data available, India has 799 universities, with a break up of 49 central universities, 402 state universities, 124 deemed universities, 334 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 75 Institutes of National Importance which include IIMs, AIIMS, IITs, IEST and NITs among others. Apart from it, there are 39,071 Government Degree Colleges and Private Degree Colleges, including 1800 exclusive women's colleges. With this tremendous growth have come a number of opportunities as well as a lot of challenges. The need of the hour is more transparency and accountability in the higher education system of the country. Not only this, a grass root level transformation and redesigning of the fundamentals required. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council are working towards the improvisation of various facets of higher education. The present study aims at highlighting the role of NAAC in meeting out the challenges being faced by higher education and its initiatives for its betterment.

**Keywords:** Higher education, universities, colleges, challenges, opportunities, NAAC.

Received 25 Jan., 2023; Revised 07 Feb., 2023; Accepted 09 Feb., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.

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### I. Introduction:

It is believed that India had a functioning system of higher education as early as 1000 B.C. Although the modern Indian education system found its roots in the colonial legacy as the British Government used the university system as a tool of cultural colonization, yet, the present day higher education system of India has volumes to speak about. India has the third largest education system in the world, next to the United States of America and China. According to the 2011 Census, about 8.15% (68 million) of Indians are graduates. It is a matter of great pride that our higher education system has expanded at a tremendous pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students during 2001 to 2011. As per the latest data available, India has 799 universities, with a break up of 49 central universities, 402 state universities, 124 deemed universities, 334 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 75 Institutes of National Importance which include IIMs, AIIMS, IITs, IEST and NITs among others. Apart from it, there are 39,071 Government Degree Colleges and Private Degree Colleges, including 1800 exclusive women's colleges. With this tremendous growth have come a number of opportunities as well as a lot of challenges. The need of the hour is more transparency and accountability in the higher education system of the country. Not only this, a grass root level transformation and redesigning of the fundamentals required. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council are working towards the improvisation of various facets of higher education. The present study aims at highlighting the role of NAAC in meeting out the challenges being faced by higher education and its initiatives for its betterment.

**Higher Education in India: Challenges and Opportunities:** India's higher education system is the third largest in the world. The University Grants Commission is its main governing body and

also oversees accreditation for higher learning. There has been a phenomenal growth of Higher education since Independence of India. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges in India at that time. These numbers have increased up to 799 in case of universities and 39, 071 in case of colleges. Similarly, there has been a tremendous growth in the enrolment also. As per the latest report of Ministry of Human Resource and Development, the student enrolment in terms of percentage at various levels has been observed as UG (86.33%), PG (9.71%), Research (0.77%), Diploma/Certificate courses (2.63%) and integrated courses (0.56%). Despite the growth there are many challenges before the Higher Education sector. It's a matter of great concern that only seven Indian universities were ranked in the top 400 universities by the well-regarded QS World University Rankings for 2019. And predictably, six of these seven are Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The only non-IIT Indian institution in the top 400 is the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru. It must be mentioned here that QS rankings are based on academic reputation (40%), employer reputation (10%), faculty-student ratio (20%), citations per faculty (20%) and international faculty/international students (10%). Although the UGC has been continuously working and focusing up on the quality education in higher education sector. Still we are facing lot of problems and challenges in our education system as mentioned below:

(a) **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER):** The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of India in higher education is only 15% which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries. With the increase of enrolments at school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.

(b) **The issue of quality:** The issue of quality is again a big issue as the quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional concept. There are instances where quality teachers are suffering owing to the lack of quality students and also there are instances where quality students are not getting good teachers to teach them. A large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the UGC and our universities are not in a position to mark its place among the top universities of the world.

(c) **Infrastructure:** It would not be fair if the issue of infrastructure is not taken into account here. The poor infrastructure is a great challenge to the higher education system in India. Especially the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure.

(d) **Political interference:** Political interference is again a big challenge to the higher education in India. Majority of the educational institutions are owned by political leaders, who are playing key role in governing bodies of the universities. They use the innocent students for their own selfish means. The students organize campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

(e) **Lack of faculty:** The shortage of well qualified faculty has been posing challenges to quality education for many years. A large numbers of well qualified candidates are unemployed even when there are a lot of vacancies in higher education. These deserving candidates then apply in other departments which are the biggest blow to the higher education system.

(f) **Lack of due accreditation:** The Lack of due accreditation is also a great challenge in this regard as not even 40% of the total higher education institutions in the country are duly accredited.

(g) **Lack of research and innovation:** The higher education scenario is also marred by lack of proper research and innovation. It's sad that there are very nominal scholars in our country whose writings are cited by famous western authors. There is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes. Not only this, there are insufficient resources and facilities as well.

(h) **Structural challenges:** The higher education system is also facing structural challenges. The issues such as over centralization, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism add fuel to the fire.

**Opportunities in Higher Education:** If we talk about opportunities in the higher education sector, the sheer size of the market offers huge opportunities for development of the higher education sector in India. As we know that India is a large country, with an estimated population of young people aged between 18 to 23 years to be around 150 millions. The country has witnessed a remarkable growth in higher education during the last six decades. Therefore, higher Education sector has now been identified as one of the promising areas for private and foreign investments. It offers immense investment opportunities in both non-regulated and regulated segments. The Indian higher education system is growing very fast irrespective of various challenges but there is

no reason that these challenges cannot be overcome. With the help of new-age learning tools, it is easy for country like India to overcome these problems and bring a paradigm shift in the country's higher education sector. With such a vibrant country with huge population properly educated, the possibilities are endless. If knowledge is imparted using advanced digital teaching and learning tools, and society is made aware of where we are currently lagging behind, our country can easily emerge as one of the most developed nations in the world.

**The role of NAAC:** The prime agenda of The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning. Its main objective is of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. NAAC is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education comprising of over 120 different national agencies engaged in Assessment, Accreditation and Academic Audit.

NAAC has identified a set of seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures. NAAC has categorized the Higher Educational Institutions into three major types (University, Autonomous College, and Affiliated/Constituent College) and assigned different weightages to these criteria under different key aspects based on the functioning and organizational focus of the three types of HEIs. The following is the criteria for assessment:

- (1) Curricular Aspects
- (2) Teaching learning and Evaluation
- (3) Research consultancy and Extension.
- (4) Infrastructure and learning Resources.
- (5) Student support and progression.
- (6) Organization and management.
- (7) Healthy Practices

NAAC is at present processing the assessment and accreditation of a large number of colleges and other institutes of higher education from all over the country on the basis of these criteria. NAAC has taken up some new initiatives in this regard as well:

1. Quality sustenance and promotion by sensitizing institutions to concepts such as credit transfer, student mobility, mutual recognition.
2. Networking among accredited institutions in order to promote exchange of best practices.
3. Formation of Quality circles for follow-up of a accreditation outcomes.
4. State-wise analysis of accreditation results for policy initiatives.
5. Promoting the concept of lead colleges and cluster of colleges for quality initiatives.
6. Project grants for accredited institutions for quality innovations.
7. Financial support to accredited institution for conducting seminars/conferences/workshops on quality issues in Higher Education.
8. Developing international linkages for mutual recognitions.
9. Collaborating with other national professional bodies for accreditation of specialized subjects.
10. NAAC Distance Education Council joint venture for accreditation of open Universities and Correspondence courses.
11. State-level coordination Committees for Accreditation.
12. National Consultative Committees on Accreditation in different disciplines.
13. Interaction with other agencies to develop a National Qualifications framework.
14. Development of Data-base expertise and Infrastructure.
15. Training programmes for quality promotion and excellence in Higher Education.
16. NAAC-NCTE joint activity for self-appraisal and Accreditation of Teacher Education Institutions.
17. Post-Accreditation Review and Quality Sustenance in Accredited Institutions.
18. Accreditation and TQM in Collegiate Education: MOU with government of Karnataka.
19. CII-NAAC Higher Education Summits.

## **II. Conclusion:**

NAAC, in short, helps the institutions to know strengths, weaknesses, opportunities through an informed review. It identifies internal areas of planning and resource allocations and enhances collegiality on the campus. The outcome of the process provides the funding agencies with objectives and systematic database for performance funding. NAAC has initiated institutions into innovative and modern methods of pedagogy and has given them a new sense of direction and identity.

Not only this, NAAC provides the society with reliable information on the quality of education offered by the institution. Thus in short it can be stated that among all the challenges and opportunities associated with the higher education in India, NAAC is working incessantly for creating a better tomorrow.

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