Since the last couple of years, there has been much hue and cry about quality in Indian higher education. Not only the students and the academicians but also media, politicians and the policy-makers have all expressed concern about the poor quality of education in higher education sector. The bills which are being considered by the government, almost all of them, talk about quality directly or indirectly. The approach paper to the 12th Five-Year Plan clearly argues that the focus should not only be on increased enrolment in higher education, but also on the improved quality of the expansion in higher education (Planning Commission 2011). Poor quality, arguably, is often exemplified by the fact that no Indian university figures in the top-100 list of popular global university rankings. Even in the national context, according to the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), 90 per cent Indian universities and 70 per cent colleges are of mediocre or poor quality (Agarwal 2009). Various studies have also indicated low degree of employability of Indian graduates, which is a matter of serious concern both for the planners as well as the industry. In this situation, improvement in quality is an imperative and quality assurance is the first step in this direction.

Rankings and accreditation are two different forms of quality assurance or measurement. They provide information to students, employers, policy-makers, educationalists, and concerned individuals, as information asymmetry poses hindrance in assessing quality. National accreditation agencies such as the NAAC and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) play an important role in monitoring quality in the Indian higher education sector, but this system presently suffers from various problems. Such issues are sought to be addressed in the pending National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010 (GoI 2010). University ranking is also gaining importance. Universities are ranked on the basis of comparable performance indicators and the league tables point to a university’s relative position vis-à-vis others. Thus, the measures of quality — accreditation and ranking — are also critical for developing a global market for higher education.

This paper seeks to understand the mechanism of accreditation and ranking done by specific parameters and distribution of their weights, and analyse the scope, significance and limitations of this system. In the face of ongoing reform in the Indian higher education sector and increasing participation of the private sector, this chapter examines the role and scope of national quality assurance agencies in the emerging global context.

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY IN EDUCATION

Assessing the quality of education is an extremely difficult and delicate exercise. Education is a service that is not a one-shot affair. Delivery of education is a process and lasts over a period of time. In terms of learning, education is a continuous process. Primarily, the level of motivation of the teachers along with the infrastructure, governance of the institutions and course curriculum determine the quality. Before embarking on policy issues, it is important to know how difficult it is to assess quality and what makes education different. By definition, quality should be the intrinsic feature of any education system. If education is the assimilation of gathered knowledge, then one has to think whether education devoid of quality can be called education at all (Kumar 2010). In case of goods and services, the general...
definitions of quality (Garvin 1988), as mentioned in NAAC reports (Mishra 2006), can be listed as follows:

(a) Product-based definition (objective and measurable).
(b) User-based definition (customer satisfaction oriented).
(c) Manufacturing-based definition (subject to fixed input requirements and specifications).
(d) Value-based definitions (in relation to cost).
(e) Transcendent definition (subjective, personal and beyond measurement).

In the case of education, the first four types of definitions cannot be applied at all. This is obvious, since education is not a ‘product’ that can be explained with a production function and fixed input–output relationship (Majumdar 1983; Winch 2010). In a market of commodities, consumers can buy any good if they can afford it, but in the education sector, its customers — i.e., students — cannot join any course or university even if they can afford the tuition fees unless they satisfy the merit-based selection process. Customer-based definition of quality is also problematic in this case as students’ satisfaction cannot shape the features of the higher education sector in a nation. For example, an institute may have a lenient grading system and students may be very happy with their high grades, but this practice should not be continued as it might lower the overall quality of higher education in the country. In a market of commodities, customers can very easily switch from one good to another if they are not satisfied with the quality, but in the education sector a student can spend his or her whole life to understand whether the education received in the university was worthwhile. Therefore, the only definition of quality that can be applied in the case of education is the transcendent definition which considers quality as an attribute that cannot be strictly measured but largely perceived.

Krishna Kumar and Padma M. Sarangapani (Kumar 2010; Kumar and Sarangapani 2004; Sarangapani 2010) have made an attempt to deconstruct the notion of quality and identify the possible contributory factors with reference to school education. Imparting good quality education depends on several aspects including the teachers’ sense of commitment, compassion and care. These attributes are not necessarily measurable and the focus on ‘performativity’ would fail to do justice to the delivery of quality education. During the evolution of ideas of ‘total quality management’ theories by W. Edwards Deming (1986), ‘quality control’ and ‘assurance’ became common terms in an attempt to ensure maximum efficiency and standards in manufactured goods. In the same line, from 1960 onwards, these terms started becoming familiar in the field of education as well. Over time, quality assurance gained importance because assessment of quality was considered the first step for chalking out designs for future improvement. There lies an urgent need to monitor the performance of higher educational institutes as many of them are engaged in subversion of norms and duties. The risk with the transcendent definition is that it gives scope to do away with the accountability as there is no perfect standard of quality. In case of education, the problem is serious because unfair practices and poor quality in many educational institutions have the potential to not only ruin the career prospects of the students, but also adversely affect the families and the societies and dent productivity and competitiveness of a nation. In view of this, many countries have adopted external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education.

CONCEPTUALISING QUALITY ASSURANCE, ACCREDITATION AND RANKING

To avoid internal biases and stakeholders’ influences, generally an external agency, which is supposed to be independent and credible, is entrusted with the responsibility of assessing the quality of an educational institute. The term ‘External Quality Assurance’ refers to all forms of external quality monitoring, evaluation or review and may be defined as a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that the provision (input, processes and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to the minimum requirements (Martin and Stella 2007). Accreditation and ranking are different forms of quality assurance mechanisms that are expected to enable a higher education system to maintain its quality. Ranking, done by independent agencies, particularly helps in realising the position of an institution according to its performance in comparison to others, whereas accreditation assigns a particular grade to an institution if it qualifies for it. The main difference is that rankings rank a Higher Education Institution (HEI) with respect to others but accreditation agencies rate HEIs independent of others. The following section gives the three main purposes they claim to serve.

Providing ‘Information’ about Quality to Stakeholders

The important role of quality assurance agencies as the provider of information about quality of education has immense significance since the market for higher education is often characterised as one with information asymmetry and imperfect information (Arrow 1973). This is because of the following reasons:

(a) First, education is an ‘experience good’ and none, except the student, can judge the quality of education provided in a university.

(b) Second, the producers, or the authorities of universities may have an idea about the quality of education provided in their institutions, but not all of them would be interested in making the information public.
(c) Third, unlike in a market for normal goods, price here fails to reveal information about quality since the provision of education is largely subsidised. As the price of education is not market-determined, quality fails to be captured through price. It is in this context that quality assurance agencies play the key role of assessing the quality of an educational institution and making it accessible to the students, employers and the authorities.

Fostering Competition among HEIs

Another important objective that the global ranking mechanism ends up achieving is fostering competition among the universities across the nations for attracting the best minds, thereby ensuring quality. Students being rational consumers will choose the best possible institutions for themselves given their budget constraint, and only the best universities will draw good students. Not-so-good universities will try their level-best to achieve the ‘best’ stamp, and those who ultimately fail to perform well will automatically go out of business. Thus, in a competitive environment every university will try to improve their quality for their own benefit, which ultimately leads to an enhancement of the overall higher education sector.

Helping HEIs to Take Steps to Improve Quality

Before embarking on a path of improvement in quality, an institution must know where it stands and what its strengths and weaknesses are. Only when the problems are identified can a solution be found. Although an institution can undertake a self-assessment procedure to judge its functioning, an unbiased and well-informed external agency can serve the role of a ‘mirror’ to an institution (Goel and Goel 2010). Along with self-assessment, an external quality agency can help in undertaking a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of an institution and rate it on a pre-defined scale.

ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

In India, there is a wide variety in terms of quality across higher educational institutes. On the one hand, there are ‘Centres of Excellence’ such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and on the other are the institutes that have failed to maintain even a minimum standard of quality. Not only is there a wide gap between the world and Indian averages of quality, but there also exists a vast disparity between the institutions across India. The reasons for this low quality are multifaceted and interlinked — poor governance being the main reason. Resource constraints and poor infrastructure further worsen the situation. Many private institutes, especially in the field of professional education, provide low-quality education as they are mostly interested in cutting cost and making profits (Chattopadhyay 2009). A corrupt and ineffective regulatory system aggravates the problem as many educational institutes are engaged in subversion of duties and in maximising the benefits that accrue to the authorities without any effort to improve the quality of education. Also, there has been an age-long trade-off between excellence and inclusion (Velaskar 2010). Since the quality of education largely depends on that of the students and teachers, an institution may choose to be extremely selective and only offer seats to brainy people in order to maintain its quality. This selective competition may make HEIs more hierarchical and exclusive (Clotfelter 1996; Winston 1999). While we consider the fact that in India only 15 per cent in the age group of 18–23 years enter into a college, ‘excellence’ appears to be an ‘elite’ term. However, maintaining a minimum quality in all the HEIs is imperative. The problem is to appropriately define and quantify for effective monitoring and enforcement of minimum quality of education. This is critical because unfair practices and poor quality of education can ruin the entire life of students and affect their families, societies and the nation. Keeping this problem in mind, quality assurance mechanisms in higher education were adopted in India and at present the popular agencies are:

(a) National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) under the University Grants Commission (UGC);
(b) National Board of Accreditation (NBA) under the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE);
(c) Accreditation Board under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Among these, the two most popular accreditation agencies are the NAAC and the NBA.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

The Council was established in 1994 under the UGC following the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (1986). The NAAC generally deals with universities recognised by the UGC and its affiliated colleges and autonomous institutes that have a minimum experience of functioning. For accreditation and assessment, the NAAC follows a two-step process in which HEIs first have to get Institutional Eligibility for Quality Assessment (IEQA) status and then send a filled-up format to the council. Institutions that have already gained IEQA status can directly send a letter of intent to the NAAC. After receiving a self-study report from the HEIs, a team of NAAC members and experts visit them and a final decision is taken by the NAAC executive members. Based on indicators and assigned
measures, a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) is calculated for the institution and the implication of the grades are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of Institutional Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Performance Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.01–4.00</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Very Good (Accredited)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01–3.00</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good (Accredited)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.51–2.00</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory (Accredited)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the NAAC, the major role of an HEI is to promote the values inherent in education. These core values as specified for the Indian higher education system are:
(a) contributing to national development,
(b) fostering global competence among students,
(c) inculcating a value system among students,
(d) promoting use of technology, and
(e) quest for excellence. Table 15.2 gives the criteria, indicators and weights specified by the NAAC.

Although the NAAC had started doing the accreditation and assessment in 1998, it was only after 2002–03 that it gained momentum, and by October 2006 it had accredited 129 universities and 2,956 colleges (only 13 per cent of higher educational institutes). This was mainly because of the voluntary accreditation process that was recently made compulsory in India. Among the HEIs accredited by the NAAC, most are public- or government-run, and mainly public universities and public colleges. Private universities and private colleges perhaps showed less interest in getting accredited by the NAAC.

**National Board of Accreditation**

The NBA (under the AICTE) offers accreditation to all institutions or programmes that are approved by the AICTE, provided at least two batches have passed out of the programme or institution. Under the provisions of the AICTE Act of 1987, all diploma, degree and postgraduate programmes coming under certain disciplines (Engineering and Technology, Management, Architecture, Pharmacy, Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Town and Country Planning, Applied Arts and Crafts) are covered under accreditation by the NBA. Institutions interested in being accredited by the NBA need to fill up a form with necessary details about their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Autonomous Colleges</th>
<th>Affiliated Colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Curricular Aspects</td>
<td>Curricular design and development, academic flexibility, feedback on curriculum, curriculum update, best practices in curricular aspects</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Teaching, Learning and Evaluation</td>
<td>Admission process and student profile, catering to diverse needs, teaching–learning process, teacher quality, evaluation process and reforms, best practices in teaching, learning and evaluation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Research, Consultancy and Evaluation</td>
<td>Promotion of research, research and publication output, consultancy, extension activities, collaborations, best practices in research, consultancy and extension</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Infrastructure and Learning Resources</td>
<td>Physical facilities, maintenance of infrastructure, library as a learning resource, ICT as learning resources, other facilities, best practices in the development of infrastructure and learning resources</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Student Support and Progression</td>
<td>Student progression, student support, student activities, best practices in student support and progression</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Governance and Leadership</td>
<td>Institutional vision and leadership, organisational arrangements, strategy development and deployment, human resource management, financial management and resource mobilisation, best practices in governance and leadership</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Innovative Practices</td>
<td>Internal quality assurance system, inclusive practices, stakeholder relationships</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 100 100 100

Source: NAAC (2007).
institution or programmes. A team comprising the chairperson and programme experts is then constituted which visits the institution and verifies the facts. The team carries out physical authentication of infrastructure facilities, records, interviews faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry, and any other activity deemed necessary, and ensures transparency. The parameters on which accreditation is done and their respective weights are shown in Table 15.3. These eight criteria carry a sum total of 1,000 points, with a minimum of 600 points required to qualify for accreditation. The accreditation is ‘yes’ or ‘no’ type. Any institution scoring a sum total greater than 600 points but less than 750 gets a provisional accreditation valid only for two years. If the institution or the programme gets 750 or more and meets all qualifying criteria mentioned in the table, then it gets an accreditation for five years from NBA.

The NBA accreditation is voluntary for institutions, and in May 2009 only 3,274 out of 6,040 eligible undergraduate engineering programmes got accredited.

Issues of Concern for the Indian Accreditation System

Recently the UGC has made it compulsory for all institutes to go for NAAC accreditation and have at least a ‘B’ grade to get the benefit of additional funding. Such a move can be expected to generate a ‘quality culture’ among universities and colleges which would help in improving the quality of the sector. However, there are other concerns with the present accreditation system for HEIs in India:

(a) Lack of functional autonomy and co-ordination between different government regulatory bodies is a concern. Multiple entities, such as central and state governments, regulatory bodies, and government quality assuring agencies, are involved in accreditation of the HEIs.

(b) There is scope of subversion of norms and the objectivity of the peer-team report is not beyond doubts and questions (Stella 2002).

(c) Criteria of assessment are subjective and impressionistic.

Further, with rise in global competition for attracting international students, Indian HEIs will try to gain international recognition. There are some international agencies such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) or the Washington Accord, which accredit many institutes across nations. If Indian quality assurance agencies join these international agencies or if Indian HEIs begin to be accredited by them, the institutions will get global reputation. But at the same time the applicability of uniform norms and standards across a diverse world is also questionable. In December 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) jointly issued non-binding guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (OECD and UNESCO 2005). If Indian quality assurance agencies follow these, then the country may emerge as a favoured global knowledge destination for international students. But the accreditation agency must not neglect the local value judgements and needs of the specific society before evaluating performance of an HEI. Norms and standards should not be rigid but flexible, depending upon the need of the hour and that of the society. Further, India is at the threshold of opening the doors to foreign education providers if the Foreign Education Bill is approved. Since the concept of quality education can vary across countries, the implications of globalisation of higher education system can be contentious and debatable depending on the type of courses, reputation of the foreign providers, nature of collaboration with foreign institutes, etc. (Chattopadhyay 2012).

Some of the concerns with quality assurance mechanism in Indian higher education have been addressed in The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Weights for Undergraduate College (per cent)</th>
<th>Weights for Diploma (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation and Governance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Resources, Allocation and Utilisation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Resources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources including Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource of Students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching-Learning Process</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary Processes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, Development and International Efforts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010

The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010 seeks to make provisions for assessment of academic quality of higher educational institutions, programmes conducted therein and their infrastructure through mandatory accreditation by independent accreditation agencies and to establish a statutory Authority for the said purpose (GoI 2010: 1).

The Bill mentions that the purview of academic quality includes teaching, learning and research and their contribution to enhancement of knowledge. The assessment would include physical infrastructure, human resources (including faculty), administration, course curricula, admission and assessment procedures, governance structures including infrastructure and governance structures of the institution (ibid.: 20–21).

The salient features of the Bill include the following:

(a) Accreditation is mandatory for an HEI of more than 12 years of age.
(b) Independent quality assurance agencies (non-profit professional bodies) will certify quality assurance and the agencies would be regulated, audited and monitored by the National Accreditation Authority (NAA).
(c) Criteria will be determined by the UGC or its successor body. Such criteria will include teaching, learning, research, governance, administration, admission, course curricula, infrastructure (physical and human), placement.
(d) The NAA will also monitor a code of ethics, conflicts of interest, disclosure of information, and ensure transparency.
(e) The National Educational Tribunal would adjudicate disputes between HEIs and accreditation agencies. The accreditation agency shall be liable to pay compensation to an HEI in case of any wilful wrong accreditation.
(f) The Bill also argues that HEIs should help in student and teacher mobility across national and global institutions. Collaborations across the border will be encouraged and the national accreditation system should be a part of the global one.

The Bill allows independent private assurance agencies under the purview of the NAA to assess quality of HEIs in India. Independent registered accreditation agencies are supposed to carry out the task of quality assurance in a credible, fair and transparent manner. The Bill also proposes following the global system of quality assurance, and is expected to facilitate informed choice-making by the stakeholders, particularly by students to foster mobility across the institutions, both within the national boundary as well as at the global level. In addition, teacher mobility and global level cooperations would be encouraged. However, in view of the rapid globalisation of higher education, ensuring conformity among quality assurance agencies across nations is a pre-requisite so that comparison among HEIs across nations is meaningful and globally accepted. The Bill thus also seeks to set the stage for making the Indian higher education system internationally acceptable and considered comparable to those in other countries.

Global University Rankings

Over time, the ranking of global universities has become so popular all over the world that it has started influencing national policy-making in the case of education. In the case of India, experts, academicians and policy-makers have often expressed serious concern that no Indian university figures in the top list of these rankings. After preparing the draft Bill on quality assurance, discussed earlier, the need is felt to tune the national accreditation system so as to figure in the scheme of global ranking. The most popular global university rankings are Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) or Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) ranking, Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) World University Ranking and QS World University Ranking.

(a) SJTU or ARWU Ranking: The SJTU or ARWU ranking is the most popular in the case of universities that are mainly engaged in research. In four broad categories — Quality of Education, Quality of Faculty, Research Output, and Per Capita Performance — several indicators are chosen and definite weights are assigned to each of them. The SJTU ranking is mainly considered as pertinent for a research university as it assigns 40 per cent weight to research output.

(b) The THES Ranking: The Times ranking of world universities assigns equal weights to teaching and research — 30 per cent each. Citations carry another 30 per cent while international outlook of a university and industry income have 7.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent weight respectively (Times Higher Education n.d.).

(c) QS World University Ranking: The QS World University Ranking currently considers over 2,000 universities and evaluates over 700 universities in the world, focusing on ranking for the top 400. This ranking is mainly reputation-based as academic reputation from global survey has 40 per cent weight and employer reputation 10 per cent. Half of the total points are thus based on the reputation of the universities and the rest are distributed among citations (20 per cent), faculty–student
Quality, Accreditation and Global University Ranking

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ratio (20 per cent), and proportion of international students and staff (10 per cent). The comparative Table 15.4 illustrates the basis for popular ranking.

These ranking agencies do a good job in providing information about educational quality in worldwide HEIs. The parameters, weights and process of assessment are made public through their respective websites, which can be accessible to anyone easily. Rankings indeed give us some idea about the performance of the universities across the world. But this information needs to be used with great care and caution as the system has some inherent bias and preferences. Some of these issues are discussed in the next section.

Issues of Concern for Global University Rankings

(a) Reputational Ranking: Most of these rankings are based on popular perception of reputation. Thus, the survey tends to have an inherent bias for universities that have already gained academic reputation and have an influential position in the global market (Altbach 2006).

(b) Teaching versus Research: Not all the global university rankings provide a holistic assessment of a university. The ranking methods vary in terms of weights assigned as select parameters are given more importance as compared to others. Due to this, any ranking process would fail to capture the overall measure of quality which in turn may result in incomplete, misleading or bad decision-making by the stakeholders and those concerned (Marginson 2006). For example, the SJTU ranking is basically a research university ranking and a national university meant for teaching would not figure anywhere in this ranking.

(c) Bias in Favour of Science Streams and English-Speaking Nations: These rankings have an automatic bias in favour of researchers who write in English because most research work is published in that language (Marginson 2007a). Excessive emphasis on research in English may discourage research in native languages. Since English is the dominant language in the academic sphere, the citations that good quality researches get are unevenly spread across the world with a bias in favour of countries where English is the predominant medium of education. In social sciences there are different paradigms of research mainly due to ideological differences, which not only infuses favouritism in the selection of papers for publication in some of the reputed journals but also in the grant of awards like the Nobel Prize (Patnaik 2011).

(d) International Outlook: These rankings often assign a large weight to the proportion of international students and staff. But this proportion would depend on the vision, mission and goal of a university and may unduly penalise universities with a more social mission of being inclusive.

(e) Threat of Losing Diversity in World Education System: Rankings emphasise vertical differences between institutions and between nations, differences of power and authority and obscure horizontal differences, and those of purpose and type (Marginson 2006, 2007b). Every university in this world was established with a certain goal, mission, vision, and objective that are supposed to shape the nature of activities they are involved in. Rankings undermine these characteristics. As universities are not universal in nature — rather they are very much ‘organic’ — the quality of education they provide cannot be homogeneous and measurable through universal yardsticks (Patnaik 2007).

Although no Indian university (except for some such as the IITs and the Indian Institutes of Science) has so

| Table 15.4: Basic Parameters and their Weights used in Global University Rankings (in per cent) |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Times Ranking        | QS Ranking           | Shanghai Jiao Tong   |
| Teaching: 30         | Academic Reputation from Global Survey: 40 | Alumni of an Institution Winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals: 10 |
| Research: 30         | Employers’ Reputation from Global Survey: 10 | Staff of an Institution Winning Nobel Prizes and Field Medals: 2 |
| Citation: 30         | Citations per Faculty: 20 | Highly-Cited Researchers in 21 Broad Subject Categories: 20 |
| Industry Income: 2.5 | Faculty–Student Ratio: 20 | Papers published in Nature and Science: 20 |
| International Outlook: 7.5 | Proportion of International Students: 5 | Papers Indexed in Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index: 20 |
|                       | Proportion of International Faculty: 5 | Per Capita Academic Performance of an Institution: 10 |

Source: Compiled from ARWU (n.d.-a); Times Higher Education (n.d.).
far figured at the top of the lists of university rankings, yet the significance and impact of these rankings cannot be neglected in the globalised era. The draft bill on the national accreditation regulatory mechanism, as discussed previously, also mentions following the global practice of quality assurance. In this context, it is important to examine the ranking system more carefully and to be aware of its strengths, weaknesses and threats before addressing the reforms measures in the Indian quality assurance system.

**Quality Assurance and Governance Reform: Implications for National Policy-Making**

In an increasingly globalised world, institutions now cater to diverse clientele and so greater diversity in the institutions is appreciated. At the same time, as generation and dissemination of knowledge have assumed greater importance in facilitating growth and overcoming spatial inequalities, the expectations from higher education institutions have also gone up. As the global higher education market is evolving, there is a tendency towards vertical stratification rather than a horizontal one (Wende 2008), as the high ranking institutions get differentiated from the low ranking ones in the ranking list, which is inimical to equalise access to good quality education and accrual of equal benefits arising out of education to the society as a whole. This is undesirable from the public good character of education. Both accreditation and ranking follow a pre-determined set of criteria. There would always be a tendency for the HEIs to satisfy these pre-determined requirements for the purpose of being awarded high ranking. In the process, there remains the possibility of compromising with autonomy and dilution of the mission of the HEIs.

In this context, the linkage between quality management and the reform in governance in HEIs should be analysed more carefully. In view of globalisation of higher education, the international comparative measures of performance have become a global aspect of corporate type governance (New Public Management). It is necessary for embracing the global economy and participation in global market for higher education and research. The new governance emphasises on performance, reconceptualises education policy in economic terms, and production of human capital as necessary for global competitiveness. These numbers are new forms of assessing mutual accountability. The performative policy is closely aligned to ‘audit culture’ with emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness (value for money). This cultural shift in evaluative practices is also a reflection of the tilting of balance in favour of the market and away from the state (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Promotion of corporate type governance and audit culture in education will see an institution as a corporate entity, a student as a customer and a teacher as a worker, which can be harmful in case of an educational institute, unless regulated, as it generates externalities for the society.

It cannot be denied that assessment of quality is extremely important for designing the future trajectory of improvement for any HEI. Quality assurance can play a very important role in pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of any institution. It is an important step towards achieving an improved higher education sector. It raises awareness, popularises quality concerns and helps in developing an internal quality assessment mechanism. However, a single frame of reference may interfere with the autonomy of...
the institutions. While it helps to compare across the HEIs, diversity and autonomy need to be promoted. Also a quality assurance agency should understand the basic reasons for poor quality in HEIs and unless it does so, meagre statistics or numbers would not help in improving quality in education.

The root of the problems in private and government-funded institutions is commercialisation and poor governance respectively (Chattopadhyay 2010). While the problems need to be tackled differently, a single standardised solution may not ensure improvement in quality across HEIs (Altbach and Chitnis 1993).

Any quality assurance mechanism should not ignore the fact that education generates externalities. The true quality of education should be assessed by its ability to foster citizenship and social cohesiveness, and inculcate moral and ethical values. But this very aspect of quality education goes beyond the contour of the course curriculum and the actual teaching–learning process that takes place inside the classroom. The quality of a university depends on that of the students and faculty. It has been observed in the US that in order to rank higher up the ladder, the universities compromised with the student selection policy and preferred merit-based aid over need-based. Accreditation and ranking is critical for ensuring quality, but overemphasising on quality may compromise the broader mission of the university. Further, higher education transforms an individual into a responsible human being with social, moral and ethical values embedded in him or her (Patnaik 2007) apart from making them more productive (Schultz 1961). Thus, the assurance and accreditation mechanism should acknowledge the transformative role of education in a broader sense and facilitate in widening the horizons of Indian higher education system.

The discussion in the chapter can be summarised as follows:

(a) Quality assurance agencies should understand that quality in education is different from that of other goods and services and is an intrinsic feature of education, without which, it has no meaning at all.

(b) Despite adopting some rigid and strict universal parameters to assess quality, it may be noted that the assurance system measures quality in a holistic manner because some crucial determinants of quality education like teachers’ motivation cannot be measured and hence get ignored in the process.

(c) Quality assurance agencies should not treat quality as a homogeneous substance across nations, as it is also associated with societal and cultural value systems. They should maintain diversity in global education systems.

(d) In the name of improving ‘efficiency’ in HEIs, the quality assurance system should be cautious while advocating corporate-type management in education so as not to undermine the transformative role of higher education.

(e) An effective quality assurance mechanism should understand the varied reasons of poor quality, judge the performance of an HEI in accordance with the objectives, missions, visions, and goals with which it was established.

**Concluding Remarks**

Accreditation and ranking help in assuring quality of an education system and they serve two main purposes. In view of the fact that when students make informed choices about courses and institutions they suffer from what the economists would like to describe as ‘information asymmetry’ — with education being in the nature of an ‘experience good’, it is difficult for the students to assess quality fully before they take admission — what accreditation does is to assure the clients that quality of education being imparted by an institution conforms to the well-defined standards set by the regulatory authority. Ranking also provides information about the performance of HEIs within a competitive set up. Further, the quality assurance mechanism helps the students choose courses and institutions on the basis of grades or ranks they have obtained. Since education is an ‘experience good’ and its true quality can only be meaningfully assessed over time, the students use the accreditation to gather requisite information for making informed choices about the courses and the institutions. From the perspective of the institutions, in the absence of any measurement of output, it is important that the higher education institutions are intimated how they fare and help them in identifying gaps in their delivery mechanism. It encourages the HEIs to put in an extra effort and improve their ranking. On the down side, the output-centric quality assurance mechanism based on certain criteria may compromise a broader mission of the institution. It, therefore, has the potential to interfere with the specific objectives of the higher education institutions for which they were set up. However, as Richard Lewis (2009) argues, the trend is towards greater intervention by the government towards maintenance of quality with a move towards the inspectorate model. The government has to reconcile its pursuit for enhancement of quality with ‘massification’ of the higher education system in India. Since good-quality education depends on good-quality inputs in the form of students and teachers, it will take years for a newly-set up IIT and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) to reproduce the quality that IITs and IIMs stand for.

However, from a methodological point of view, both national accreditation agencies and global university rankings have been subject to some valid criticisms. Assessing the quality of a university based on some predetermined indicators would never be an easy job given the multiple
products a university produces, which are often not measurable. Quality assurance, in case of higher education, will only be meaningful if it understands that education is very different from other marketable products, as it does not have a production function, fixed input–output relationship and quantifiable characteristics. It should recognise that education imparts value to the society (Tilak 2004) and therefore quality assurance should appropriately reflect the same. Since quality is not homogeneous across institutions and nations, the mechanism should consider the different societal contexts and the diverse missions, visions, goals, and objectives of different universities in assessing the quality of education.

Notes

1. Some of the recent Bills are the National Commission of Higher Education and Research Bill, 2010 (NCHER); the Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations, Maintenance of Quality and Prevention of Commercialisation) Bill, 2010; the Unfair Practices in Technical, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010; and the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010.
2. Performance of Indian universities is really poor in rankings done by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Times Higher Education Supplement and the QS group (ARWU n.d.-a; Times Higher Education n.d.).
3. According to the widely quoted report by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) and McKinsey in 2005, only 25 per cent of the engineering education graduates are employable by a multinational company (NASSCOM 2005: 16).
4. The practice of measuring teachers’ ‘performativity’ in terms of a points-system has been adopted in our country also. The system assigns points to teachers based on the number of hours spent in the classroom, the number of research papers published, the number of doctoral candidates trained under him/her, etc. Though it claims to help in avoiding the arbitrariness associated with teachers’ performance, it actually fails in assessing ‘quality’ as none of the indicators can indicate the true ‘quality’ of teaching or research.
5. Even the students may not assess the true quality as benchmarking would be difficult in view of lack of exposure of curriculum and pedagogy of other reputed quality institutions.
6. In the private sector, to an extent, the cost of education imposed on the students may reflect the cost of its provision but not quality of education, truly speaking. Quality is co-produced in the classroom as the students are also required to put in effort with a high level of motivation to help produce and experience quality education.
7. Until recently, the NAAC accreditation process was voluntary for HEIs in India. A college or university had to first apply for accreditation, and then subject to some basic qualifying criteria the NAAC would initiate its accreditation process.
8. For example, suppose Institution A and Institution B, both do not have a library and lose points on this ground. Now, if Institution A is run by the government and Institution B by a private institution, the causes of not having a library will be different. For A, it might be the resource constraints faced by the government, while for B, it might be the profit motive that has led them to cut costs in this head and increase profits. On the basis of this analysis, suggestions have to be made by the agency and consequently, the regulatory mechanism has to be re-designed.

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