



PERSPECTIVES AND DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION- WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON INDIA

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Indicators of the quality of higher education can be more open to debate than those of performance, as the former are more subjective and the latter more measurable. On assessing quality, on the one extreme, we may recall Plato's poser: "What is good and what is not good, Phaedrus, need we ask others to tell us this?" On the other is the recent European perspective that over-emphasis on quantification of quality may constrain our ability to improve it when it cannot be measured (Redesigning Management Development in the New Europe, 1997). However, some measurable indicators can facilitate assessment of quality and performance relative to agreed-upon bench-marks, and decisions related to public and private choice and resource allocation, among others.

This paper attempts to elicit some perspectives and dimensions of quality and performance indicators in the higher education sector in India. Because of its large over-all size and the wide and complex variety of public and private institutional stakeholders and participants, the sector poses several major challenges in quality and performance assessment. These spread across the sector's combined and disparate capabilities to contribute to the realisation of expectations of social and private benefits and costs in a variety of perspectives. The paper outlines indicative dimensions of quality and performance in conceptual, policy, planning, regulatory and market perspectives in Section II. This is followed by a glimpse at the quantitative and structural dimensions of the higher education sector in India in Section III. Some experienced based dimensions of the practice of performance assessment in Indian universities are discussed in Section IV. The paper ends with brief concluding observations in Section V.

II. PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

I never let my schooling interfere with my education.

Mark Twain

Universities are there not to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men.

Drew Gilpin Faust
President, Harvard

Universities create, impart and disseminate knowledge.

National Knowledge Commission of India

What kind of men and women can the universities be expected to produce by the society? Is it possible to suggest indicators of quality of the men and women and of higher education which can facilitate a broad-based performance assessment? This section attempts to outline four broad perspectives to suggest answers to these and related questions.

II.1. Public-Merit Good and Private Good Perspective:

One approach is to assess the quality of higher education as possessing a combination of public good, merit good and private good characteristics. These goods broadly differ in terms of their relative contributions to social and private benefits, and their corresponding private and social costs. These differences arise because public and merit goods may have positive (beneficial) or negative (harmful) third party effects, or externalities, which may affect their social benefits and costs.

For example, management and professional education may generate higher private (and privatisable) benefits than social benefits, and the reverse may be true for humanities or social science education. Such differences between professional and humanities-social sciences education may exist at least in terms of relative awareness, sensitivity and capability of the students and institutions to respond to broader social and human concerns. The relative private and social costs of education may differ, at the minimum, in terms of the element of subsidy and public provision involved. It is difficult in this paper to go beyond such relative judgement. This is particularly because private benefits and costs of higher education are more easily quantifiable - and therefore “visible” – than their social values. Further, whether social benefits and costs have been quantitatively or even qualitatively assessed (or are assessable) for different streams of higher education needs more research.

Generally, it is assumed that education in general and higher education in particular are both socially and privately beneficial, even if in varying degrees. But in principle, the relative distribution of private and social benefits and costs would influence the relative quality and character of higher education as a public good, merit good and private good. It would also influence the choice between the range of public and private-market provision of higher education in general and its various streams in particular.

II.2. Schooling and Education Perspective:

The second approach can be to assess the quality by the extent to which higher education succeeds in producing “schooled carpenters” and “educated men”. Often, especially in an era of increasing market orientation, more narrowly understood schooling (skill development) appears to take precedence over more broad-based education (character development), as a panacea for ameliorating underdevelopment of economy as well as of society and culture.

Such preference especially in higher education can be associated with increasing social, peer group and parental pressures on the youngsters for skill-based

qualifications which have greater and more lucrative employability prospects. But, one may ask: If most of a person's character has been psychologically and socially molded by the time she/he reaches a university/ college, how can institutions of higher education contribute in its further development? Briefly, it may be said that the educational content, system, culture and ambience in a university can provide opportunities to develop not only the intellectual but also the personal, social and ethical character of students. For example, it is generally assumed that the more reputable universities provide better opportunities for such multi-dimensional development.

What constitutes "character", good or bad, is clearly beyond the scope of discussion in this paper. In the frame-work discussed earlier, we could consider whether the "goodness" of character depends on the extent to which it manifests higher levels of social (third-party) benefits and lower levels of social costs. Toward this end, awareness, sensitivity and response capability for social and human concerns can be enhanced by intellectual as well as by inter-personal, behavioural, organisational and ethical content and culture in institutions of higher education. In other words, universities and colleges could strive to be centres imparting higher skills and knowledge as well as broader human and social understanding and wisdom.

II.3. National Social Vision and Policy Perspective:

While the above perspectives may appear overly theoretical and idealistic, our third perspective is based on a review of how some of India's constitutional provisions and policy pronouncements on education consider the role of education across public/merit good-private good, education-schooling and character-skills development dimensions. Article 31 of the Constitution of India (education.nic.in/articles) enjoins the state to secure and promote a "social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all institutions of national life". Article 51A lists promotion of "harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood", preservation of the "rich heritage of our composite culture", and development of "scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform", among several fundamental duties of citizens. Leaving aside the role of the family and the community in character-building, the Indian public and private educational system is constitutionally enjoined to foster the development of such national and individual character.

India's National Policy on Education states that " education is essentially for all... has an acculturating role... refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national coherence, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit, thus furthering goals of all-round development, socialism, secularism and democracy....(it also) develops manpower for different levels of economy" (National Policy on Education, 1998, p.4). Furthermore, higher education "provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral, and spiritual issues facing humanity and contributes to national development through dissemination of specialised knowledge and skills" (ibid.p.18).

It may reasonably be inferred from above that at least the writers of the Constitution and the National Policy on Education appear to place greater emphasis on public and merit good and character-building components of broad-based education in general and higher education in particular, than on contribution to knowledge and skill development.

In this national context it is pertinent to recall Mohandas K Gandhi's vision of three of the seven "social sins": knowledge without character, science without humanity, and commerce without morality - the other four being wealth without work, politics without principles, worship without sacrifice, and pleasure without conscience. All of these can have some implications for conceptualising the philosophy and broad goals of education, and for evolving indicators of its quality and performance.

II.4. Planning, Regulatory and Market Perspectives:

It is worth noting that neither the recent National Knowledge Commission of India nor the University Grants Commission seem to be concerned about the larger perspectives on higher education discussed in the previous sections. For example, the NKC, whose primary task was to advise the Prime Minister about an approach and plan to enable education to transform India into a knowledge society, broadly notes that "higher education in India has made a significant contribution to economic development, social progress and political democracy..." and "is a source of dynamism for the (vibrant) economy" (Report to the Nation, p.1). This it has done, and is expected to continue doing more effectively in the future, by creating, imparting and disseminating knowledge. Thus the Commission focuses on contribution of knowledge to long-term economic development, where it is more visible, without articulating how knowledge and economic development would also contribute to social progress and political democracy.

The UGC is a standing regulatory body whose main functions are to determine, coordinate and maintain "standards", recognise universities and academic programmes, and release Central Government grants for development and maintenance. The UGC sets regulatory processes and standards for teaching, examination and research. Thus, its focus is on the processes of setting and maintaining specific academic performance standards and resource allocation, and not on achieving broad-based goals of social development.

The market trends in India are increasingly in favour of expanding higher education for the development of more narrowly skilled and immediately employable young people (e.g., engineers, IT professionals, managers, etc), mostly through private and private-public institutions, though also in public universities and colleges. Even the Government of India's latest Union Budget encourages expansion of elite institutions of higher education over mass based institutions, leadership of the private sector, and public-private partnership (Tilak, 2008). The specialised professional institutions offer less opportunity for exposure to inter-disciplinary academic environment. At the same time, there is a noticeable general decline in student enrolments in humanities and social sciences

in universities, except in the more job-oriented programmes. Some universities, however, are facilitating a more rounded and inter-disciplinary development of students through the credit system. (It was a pleasant surprise to learn during a visit that in the Central University of Allahabad, the three departments with the highest number of students were Philosophy, Hindi and History-Archaeology - no doubt a welcome exception.)

In these perspectives the quality and performance of higher education are viewed more in terms of its contribution to economic benefits, academic standards and market-driven supply, than in terms of character development.

II.5. Possible Strategic Options:

As already noted, the contemporary option is to let the “market” – students and parents, employers, sponsors – determine the quality of higher education. The more responsive the educational system is to the market demand and supply of students, resources, etc, the “better” its quality and performance in terms of private and economic benefits. Thus, relative enrolments in market-oriented academic programmes, willingness and ability to pay higher fees, and placements may indicate the delivery of market-assessed quality and performance.

However, it may be argued that the higher education system should not only respond to present (usually short-term) market demand; it should also proactively anticipate more long-term economic as well as social demand for higher education, help develop young people with new employable skills and social attitudes for the future, and create demand for such persons in different sectors of the market. This is not such a far-fetched proposition, as even commercial enterprises sometimes first create new products, and then generate demand for them.

Furthermore, to help develop more “rounded” young people, more universities with multidisciplinary programmes on their campuses may be encouraged rather than specialised institutions. More ambitiously, the overall environment and ambience on campuses should present a model for personal, economic, social and ethical behaviour.

Before we look into the extent to which these perspectives are reflected in the actual performance and quality assessment of universities in India in Section IV, we briefly review some quantitative and structural dimensions of the higher education sector in India in the next section.

III. QUANTITATIVE AND STRUCTURAL INFORMATION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA - AN OVERVIEW:

It is well to note that the relevant reported numbers on institutions of higher education vary from source to source. For instance, one international source gives the following numbers for universities in four South Asian countries.

Table: List of Universities in some South Asian Countries

Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
19	280	45	17

Source: Commonwealth Universities Year Book 2006.

How accurate are these figures? During a recent (2007) visit to Dhaka, it was informally learned that many more private universities have come up in Bangladesh to meet the rising demand which cannot be met by public universities. It is similarly learned that the situation in Pakistan may not be too different. But the actual figure for Bangladesh is likely to be much higher than noted above, compared to that for Pakistan.

The National Knowledge Commission states that there are “about 350 odd universities and 18000 colleges providing higher education” in India (Report to the Nation, 2007, p.16). The Government of India provided to the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament) the following information furnished by the University Grants Commission on degree granting institution in India on 10.9.2007 (prayatna.typepad.com). The country has 221 State Universities, 24 Central Universities, 11 Private Universities, 114 Deemed-to-be Universities, 13 institutions of National Importance, and five Private Universities established under State legislations. Of the 232 State Universities (including the 11 Private Universities), 161 are recognised by the UGC, apart from the 24 Central Universities. The 114 Deemed-to-be Universities in both the public and private sectors offer UGC-recognised programmes mostly in professional and specialised disciplines. This recognition helps the Deemed Universities to maintain acceptable national academic standards and to access medium term and project-specific development funds from the UGC and elsewhere in the government.

Academic and infrastructural standards in higher education in many specialised disciplines like engineering, management, agriculture, medical sciences etc. are also set and maintained by 12 statutory autonomous professional/scientific bodies under the UGC, or directly by the Government Departments concerned. The Central Advisory Board of Education helps ensure that parity of standards is maintained between Central and State Universities. The autonomous National Assessment and Accreditation Board awards quality ratings up to five stars for 5-year periods to universities.

An earlier (2002-2003) estimate (indiastudycentre.com) by UGC shows 9.2 million students (40% women) enrolled in 196 recognised universities and 15,437 colleges. Still, they accounted for only 9 % of the 20-25 age group-compared to 20% in China and 45-85% in developed countries. Thus, there is a very high level of unmet demand. This has prompted the Central and State Governments to ease restrictions on entry of private suppliers, especially of technical and professional qualifications. For instance, in one southern state in India, 490 of the newly approved 500 engineering colleges have been set up by the private sector. Similarly, overwhelming proportions of recently set up management schools and medical colleges in the country are in the private sector. Thus, the for-profit private sector is coming forward to help fill the demand-supply gap. It is open to debate the extent to which such private institutions provide more holistic and more equitably accessible higher education.

IV. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/ASSESSMENTS OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: ILLUSTRATIONS AND A CASE:

This section is based on the author's involvement in assessing the performance of a few Central and State Universities in India. As such, it is not exhaustive or inclusive, but illustrative. Nor does it cover performance assessment of professional colleges done by specialised statutory bodies.

IV.1. Central Level:

Two major performance assessments of universities at the level of the Government of India relate to (a) Recognition of emerging institutions as Deemed-to-be Universities, and (b) Central Government Allocations for 5-year Plan periods. Recommendations for National Recognition and Plan Allocations are made by Expert Committees set up by the University Grants Commission, and finalised by the Commission. The UGC comes under the executive and financial purview of the Central Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education.

(a) Deemed-to-be Universities:

The recognition of private, semi-public and public institutions as Deemed Universities officially enables them to grant university degrees, and provides access to Central and State financial resources under specified development and project budget heads. Recognition of individual applicants is recommended by UGC Visiting Committees chaired by a UGC member and comprising independent senior academics. In principle, the recommendations of the Visiting Committee are to be based on examination and verification of the applicant institution's academic, physical and financial viability, faculty appointment procedures, qualifications and service conditions, academic programmes, admission criteria, student mix, management structure, bye-laws, etc.

Informally, however, broader considerations such as promoting educational development in "backward" areas, increasing access to more "employable" market-driven qualifications, and encouraging supply by the private sector, among others, may also influence the Committee's/UGC's recommendations. Recognition may be granted unconditionally, conditionally, or denied.

While such recognition brings the institutions under the policy and regulatory net of the UGC/MHRD, it also improves their access to student and faculty markets and public and private financial resources. Thus, there is an increasing demand for such recognition, especially from private institutions offering market-led professional qualifications.

Such universities, depending on their overall performance, can be recognised as full-fledged regular universities.

(b) Plan Performance and Allocation:

The Central Universities are assured reasonable and more or less complete development and maintenance funding by the UGC annually as well as for the 5-year Plan periods. The State Universities are primarily funded by the State Governments, but they also receive supplementary Plan and other development assistance from the UGC, but not for normal faculty and campus maintenance. Central and State Universities can also access project/scheme-specific funds through the UGC and various Central and State Departments and autonomous academic Councils of Central and State Governments.

Visiting Committees to assess previous Plan period performance and recommend UGC allocations for the next Plan period for Central and State Universities are constituted by the UGC. They are chaired by a senior and experienced academic administrator and broad subject experts. Their resource allocation recommendations are based on visits to and interactions with major stakeholders in the university. They reflect the Committee's (a) assessments of the academic performance of various departments and utilisation of development funds during the previous Plan period; and (b) assessments of the financial requirements for the on-going and proposed new academic and physical activities during the forthcoming Plan period. UGC funds are to be utilised for the development of academic departments, academic and physical infrastructure, campus services, new academic programmes, administration development, new facilities, etc.

(c) Reflections:

There perhaps cannot be much dispute about the formal transparency and professionalism on which the UGC's recommendatory processes are based. Nevertheless, informal factors within and outside the Committees naturally have their own role in the process and outcome. A major constraint is the short period of on-site Committee visits. It severely limits the periods of substantive interaction with the major stakeholders on the campus. Some of the latter sometimes implicitly reflect the "ceremonial" nature of the visits, and "deck-out" for them. The UGC Guidelines for Recognition or Plan Allocations may sometimes be inadequately communicated and internally discussed before the Committees visits, cutting into the Committees time for more focussed interactions. The Committee members are not always kept informed about the follow-up on their recommendations. Thus, the effectiveness and credibility of the recommendatory role of the Visiting Committees can be improved in many ways.

IV.2. State Universities: A Case:

The State of Andhra Pradesh has 10 public universities funded primarily from allocations from the State Government, supplemented by Central Development

Plan and other allocations. While most are multi-disciplinary universities, some specialise in technical, agricultural, health and cultural disciplines. A separate State university functions as an Open University specialising in distance education. A heterogeneous lot.

The Andhra Pradesh State Council for Higher Education set up a Committee on Performance Parameters for Universities. The underlying public motivation was that the State-funded higher educational institutions have “responsibility to maintain (public) accountability”. Therefore, “the Government desires that the functioning of the Universities of the State needs to be monitored within the frame-work of some broad parameters” (Report of the Committee ..., 2006).

After extended deliberations in several meetings, the Committee came up with a set of measurable parameters and weightages initially. It then suggested that its recommendations on the parameters and their relative weights may be discussed by the Council (whose members include the State University Vice-Chancellors), which may also suggest a broad scheme for their quantification.

The broad performance parameters and weightages recommended by the Committee are in the Table below.

Sr. No.	Performance Parameter	Weightage (%)
1	Teaching	35
2	Research	25
3	Infrastructure/learning resources	10
4	Administration	10
5	Extension/outreach activities	10
6	Consultancy	5
7	Support services	5

Each of these parameters was divided and subdivided into assessable components and sub-components, listed in Annexure-I. Later, the Committee suggested a broad scheme for quantifying and scoring the components and sub-components. The procedural suggestion of the Committee was that the total package of its recommendations be discussed again in the Council or with the Vice-Chancellors, for finalisation. The recommendations of the Council could then be issued in the form of relevant “Government Order” by the State Department of Higher Education. After due trial and experience, the performance of the State Universities could be monitored annually or in the medium-term by a final user-friendly proforma, which could be reviewed every three to five years.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:

In Section II, we elicited some broad social perspectives on assessing the quality and performance of higher education more generally as well as with a particular focus on India. Given the quantitative and structural dimensions of India’s higher education sector in Section III, assessing its quality and performance in terms of public-merit good, character-building, socio-

cultural development, and even economic development aspects is a complex long-term task. It would require in-depth research studies across the entire spectrum of higher education in particular and education in general, taking into consideration a whole lot of other contributing factors. Because of this complexity, and in the absence of sufficient evidence, it is generally assumed that education's contributions to these broader aspects of development are positive. However, it is also generally assumed that the quantitative expansion of education will suffice, and inadequate consideration is given to its specific content and broader quality and delivery aspects. The normal performance assessment processes for universities, as brought out in Section IV, are designed for specific (narrow?) purposes to facilitate institutions-specific decision-making, and not for purposes of facilitating education policy and strategy formulation for broad-based social development. How to bridge this gap in quality assessment remains a challenge for researchers, educationists and policy makers.

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ANNEXURE-I

Performance Parameters, Components and Number of Sub-Components

Sr. No.	Parameter	Components	No. of Sub-Components
1	Teaching	a) Academic Programme b) Teacher Awards etc c) Curricular Aspects	15 3 5
2	Research	a) Personnel b) Publications c) Projects d) Funding e) Patents and Awards f) Special Assistance g) Collaborative	4 3 2 2 2 2
3	Infrastructure	a) Laboratory/Equipment, Internet & Computers b) Library c) Communication	3 5 2
4	Administration	a) Academic Administration b) Financial Administration c) E-Governance d) Decentralization e) Visits/Inspections of the Vice-Chancellor to Departments	6 7 2
5	Extension/Outreach Activities	a) NSS activities b) Community and Social Service c) Games/Sports Activities d) Cultural Activities e) Literary and Competitive Events f) Training Programmes conducted by the Departments (Not ASC)	3 3 3 3 2
6	Consultancy		3
7	Support Services	a) Student Amenities b) Healthcare Services c) Security Services d) Engineering Department/Maintenance Services e) Women's Cell f) Grievance Cell g) SC/ST Cell h) Placement Cell i) Alumni Association	2 5 3 3

Source: Report of the Committee , 2006.