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Quality Enhancement in Higher Education & RUSA



I take this opportunity to thank ICFAI University for giving me a opportunity to deliver a lecture on “Quality Enhancement in Higher Education and RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan)” on this special day. The day where we can remember NJY (1950-2011) who was the founder of the ICFAI Group of educational institutions and a pioneer to promote higher education in the private sector. His book – “Finance and Profits” and “Personal Investment & Tax Planning Year Books” have been read around the world and have achieved international acclaim. Every activity, according to him, has to be economically productive and socially useful – and every activity has the potential to be first a cost centre, then a profit centre. ICFAI University deserves special complements as it is taking lead role in promoting quality education by various initiatives.

One of the important issues before the Indian Higher Education System is to maintain the quality, so that the students can compete in the global market. Colleges and universities are the places to provide quality education. These are the institutes where the future of the country is shaped as rightly pointed out by the Kothari Commission on Education. “India’s destiny is being shaped in the class rooms” Colleges are at the core of the sector of Higher Education and graduation is the beginning of the higher education. The youth who are trained in these educational institutions join the society as citizens whose worthiness depend on the quality inputs provided to the students during the process of teaching – learning. The present day system of higher education in India is facing a quality crisis. There will be a need to make a shift from ‘Quality Assurance’ to ‘Quality Enhancement’. Of late, many institutions have been accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). These institutions should now strive for quality enhancement to survive in the stiff competition in the field of education. In view of the Government policy on higher education, in many institutions quality sustenance has become a herculean task for the managements. A large number of “now NAAC accredited affiliated colleges” may not go for re-accreditation in view of the prevailing conditions and deteriorating academic standards, for reasons many. But in the light of new innovation in the methodology, of imparting knowledge there is imperative need for institutions already accredited to strive for improvement in their performance in future. Any Quality education should provide necessary inputs to modern aspects like job oriented, need-based and work-centered education. Many NAAC accredited higher education institutions now strive for quality enhancement to survive in the competitive, globalized world.

The growing concern for quality in higher education institutions in the country assumed added significance with the setting-up of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in the year 1994. The concern has triggered academic initiative for quality evaluation, quality sustenance and quality up-gradation. Making NAAC accreditation mandatory by UGC for the colleges is highly desirable and commendable. The impact of NAAC is

- Created better understanding of Quality Assurance among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

- Triggered Quality Assurance activities in many of the Higher Education Institutions
- Helped in creation of institutional database of the accredited institutions of Higher Education
- Helped other funding and regulatory agencies to make some of their decisions based on the NAAC assessment outcomes
- Generated keen interest and concerns about Quality Assurance among the stakeholders of Higher education

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyaan (RUSA), emphasises to promote reforms in the State Higher Education System by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level. It will help to promote autonomy in state universities and include governance in the institutions. One of the goals of RUSA is to ensure academic examination reforms in the higher education institutions and enable conversion of some of the universities into research universities at par with the best in the world. The project was launched recently on 8th June 2013, it was implemented by HRD Ministry as a centrally sponsored scheme with matching contribution from the State Government and Union Territories. It is proposed to set eligibility criteria for states to achieve a high and sustained impact of the project through monitoring and evaluation. The primary responsibility of the monitoring will lie with the institution themselves. The state government and the center through The Project Appraisal Board will monitor the project annually. The main component of the programme is to set up new universities and upgrade existing autonomous colleges to universities. The other attempt will be to convert colleges to cluster universities and set up new model colleges. The strategy will also include converting existing degree colleges to model colleges. From all these schemes and ideas implemented by the Government of India, it is clear that all these attempts by the government are the noble one to educate the underprivileged children in India. As they say 'future depends on how you live your present?' These are some initiative by the Government of India to make the future of the country brighter, and by educating the future of the country, the government is giving a handy tool in the hands of children with which they can make their country's name shine high in world's galaxy.

India achieved a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 18.8% in higher education by 2012 through expansion schemes under the XIth Five Year Plan (FYP). Recent higher education surveys have documented three aspects. One, quantitative expansion has not always led to quality enhancement. Two, employability of engineering graduates ranges between 20% and 40%, but that of arts and science graduates is only around 10%. Three, a survey revealed value degradation and decline in gratitude to teachers by 61%. To address the mismatch between expansion vis-a-vis quality of employable, value-inculcated graduates and to bridge the quality gap, a multidimensional reforms package has been evolved by UGC in its XIIth FYP document. As 94% of students' pool is through 33,023 colleges affiliated to 316 universities, which are seats of expansion, innovative reforms in colleges and in the process of affiliation to universities have been formulated in XIIth FYP. These have been further necessitated by the compounded load of affiliated colleges. For instance, Osmania University has 901 affiliated colleges and Pune University 811. The system is, thus, stifling quality enhancement of state universities. After assessment of the requirements for these reforms and the limitations of UGC, the government has evolved the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a Centrally sponsored scheme for higher education, in a mission-mode to focus on state higher educational institutions.

Besides, certain other reforms have also been initiated. These include a proposal to limit the number of colleges to be affiliated to any university to 100; encourage large autonomous colleges to develop into universities; create college cluster universities by clustering a minimum of 50 colleges in a city or district; and allowing Central and state universities to have 5-10 constituents, autonomous colleges, to be mentored by the parent university as "model colleges". These schemes are being funded with proportionate participations of state governments. RUSA envisages elevating 45 out of the 441 autonomous colleges as unitary universities, establishing 'model colleges' in educationally backward districts and infrastructure strengthening of state colleges. A `25,000-crore package of quality rejuvenation schemes for state universities and colleges has been approved by which 316 universities and 13,024 government and aided colleges would receive performance-linked funding.

RUSA is an excellent opportunity to the state universities to upgrade educational and research ambience of infrastructure, knowledge resources and skill development expertise to produce international quality manpower. It should also be underscored that the upgraded colleges and

universities would be mentored for high-quality research outputs with fund-associated expertise through RUSA. Considering that teachers are the backbone of educational reforms, any genuine service-related/administrative concerns highlighted by teacher bodies have to be parallelly remedied by governments. The bodies also have to pragmatically approach this reform scheme and provide collective wisdom for further quality refinement. Resistance to change is born out of inadequate understanding. Through RUSA it aims to cover 316 states public universities and 13,024 colleges across the country. The government is looking at bringing various reforms to improve the quality of higher education sector by creation of a State Higher Education Council, creation of accreditation agencies, preparation of the state perspective plans, commitment of certain stipulated share of funds towards RUSA, academic, sectoral and institutional governance reforms, filling faculty positions etc.

As per the RUSA document, greater emphasis will be laid on the improvement of the quality of teaching-learning processes in order to produce employable and competitive graduates, post-graduates and PhDs. With respect to the planning and funding approach, some key changes are envisaged; (a) funding will be more impact and result oriented, (b) various equity related schemes will be integrated for a higher impact, (c) instead of unplanned expansion, there will be a focus on consolidating and developing the existing system adding capacities and (d) there will be a greater focus on research and innovation. “The most significant paradigm shift proposed by the Planning Commission is in the arena of funding of state higher education system. Strategic funding of this sector has been strongly proposed in order to make a marked difference in the overall resource endowment for the state higher education sector,” states the document.

There are three broad categories of the higher education institutions in India, centrally funded institutions, state funded institutions and private institutions. While the centrally funded institutions (Central Universities, IITs, NITs, IISERs, Institutes of National Importance etc) receive generous funding from the center, they have a limited coverage in terms of enrollment. About 94 per cent of the students enrolled in state funded or state controlled private institutions come under the state higher education system. It is worth noting that most private education institutions are affiliated to state universities. Thus, any efforts for development in this sector must recognize the importance of state higher education institutions and strive to improve their status.

Problem of universities in India

The document says that, in order to raise funds, most universities rely heavily on the affiliation fees they receive from affiliated institutions and on self-financing courses. Treating affiliation fees as source of income and starting courses for revenue-generation have led to further dilution of quality and perpetuation of inequity. Except a few institutions, most affiliated institutions depend heavily upon the University for administrative, examination- related and curricular matters. This adds to the burden of the university as it is reduced to an administrative and exam conducting unit rather than an institution focused on promoting teaching, research and faculty development of associated colleges. This system also takes away the autonomy of affiliated institutions in teaching and conducting examinations. Instead of increasing access in a positive way, the affiliation system creates a highly centralized and inefficient institutional structure, which does not allow its constituents any room for creativity in teaching, learning, curriculum development or research. In such a structure, quality enhancement can only be brought about by reducing the burden at the university level and giving greater autonomy and accountability to the constituents through affiliation reforms.

There is a lack of vision and planning for the development of institutions and the higher education sector at the state level. Given the complexities of managing the access and equity issues within and amongst states as well as the large number of institutions that already come under the state university system, there is a crying need for planning in higher education focusing on the state as the basic unit. This planning should be done by an autonomous body that can raise and allocate funds from the state as well as central governments. The State Universities are already provided some funds from the central government through the University Grants Commission. However, UGC’s mandate allows it to fund only a limited number of institutions that are Section 12B and 2f (UGC Act) compliant. This excludes about 33 per cent of the State Universities and 51 per cent of the colleges under such universities.

UGC funding pattern

UGC is also not allowed to channelize funds through the state government or through any entity other than an educational institution, which makes it impossible for the UGC to fund any planning, and expansion activity through a state level higher education body. UGC as a regulator should be actively involved in planning for new institutions but the present system does not permit it to do so. Thus states often complain of being unaware of the development funds that come to the state institutions from the centre; this makes planning and funding very difficult for the states. Under RUSA the centre aims at an 'optimum' solution to create an alternate way (a centrally sponsored scheme) of providing funding to a larger number of institutions and channelize fund through a body that ensures cohesive and integrated planning at the state level. Such a solution eminent management sense since it is almost impossible for any central agency to deal with 35000 odd institutions on a one- on- one basis. "Given the pitiable condition, wide reach of the state university system and limitations of the UGC, there is a strong need for a strategic intervention for the improvement of access, equity and quality in Indian higher education, that focuses on state universities and state institutions through a special centrally sponsored scheme in a mission mode. This document proposes a new centrally sponsored scheme for higher education which will spread over two plan periods (XIIth and XIIIth) and will focus on state higher educational institutions," it says.

Performance related funding

RUSA will have a completely new approach towards funding higher education in state universities; it is based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivizing well performing institutions and decision making through clearly defined norms, which will establish and rely upon a management information system to gather the essential information from institutions.

Autonomy to universities

The document states that RUSA will aim to provide greater autonomy to universities as well as colleges and have a sharper focus on equity-based development, and improvement in teaching-learning quality and research. It will be a new flagship scheme of the government that will pave the way for far reaching reforms at the state level. The document talks about the various types of control that state universities have over them thereby leading to degradation of their quality. It says, "Many of the problems in the state universities are linked to the archaic systems and regulations that govern them. Without bringing about reforms in the existing governance and regulatory systems, it will not be possible to unleash the potential of the state universities. The reforms initiated under RUSA will build a self-sustaining momentum that will push for greater accountability and autonomy of state institutions and impress upon them the need to improve the quality of education."

Eligibility for funding under RUSA

In order to be eligible for funding under RUSA, states will have to fulfil certain prerequisites. These include the creation of a State Higher Education Council, creation of accreditation agencies, preparation of the state perspective plans, commitment of certain stipulated share of funds towards RUSA, academic, sectoral and institutional governance reforms, filling faculty positions etc. Under the scheme, an initial amount will be provided to the State government to prepare them for complying with these a-priori requirements. Once eligible for funding under RUSA, after meeting the prerequisite commitments, the States will receive funds on the basis of achievements and outcomes. The yardstick for deciding the quantum of funds for the states and institution comprise the norms that reflect the performance in key result areas (access, equity and excellence). The State plans will capture the current position of the states and institutions with respect to these indicators, as well as the targets that need to be achieved. The State Higher Education Council will undertake this process of planning, execution and evaluation, in addition to other monitoring and capacity building functions.

In the 12th Plan period, RUSA would have a financial outlay of Rs. 22,855 crore, of which Rs.16,227 crore will be the Central share. In addition, allocation of Rs. 1,800 crore in the 12th Plan for the existing scheme Sub-Mission polytechnics would also be subsumed in RUSA. Thus the total central share, including the existing scheme of polytechnics will be Rs. 18,027 crore during the 12th Plan. Centre-State funding would be in the ratio of 90:10 for North-Eastern States, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and 65:35 for other

States and Union Territories. The country will substantially increase the number of students in higher education in next seven years. The presentation made by the HRD Ministry to the Consultative Committee expressed that Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) will increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from 18% to 30%. The scheme estimated to cost Rs.99000 crore will include other existing schemes in the sector. The highlight of the scheme will be that central funding from the Ministry and UGC to institution will be through the State Council of Higher Education as against the direct funding by the Centre and UGC to educational institutions of higher education. Moreover, the funding by the Centre will be upto 90% and it will be available to even private institutions based on certain norms.

The scheme emphasizes to promote reforms in the State Higher Education System by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level. It will help to promote autonomy in state universities and include governance in the institutions. One of the goals of RUSA will be to ensure academic examination reforms in the higher education institutions and enable conversion of some of the universities into research universities at par with the best in the world. The project will be implemented through HRD Ministry as a centrally sponsored scheme with matching contribution from the State government and Union Territories. It is proposed to set eligibility criteria for states to achieve a high and sustained impact of the project through monitoring and evaluation. The primary responsibility of the monitoring will lie with the institution themselves. The State Government and the Centre through The Project Appraisal Board will monitor the project annually. The main component of the programme is to set up New Universities and Upgrade the existing autonomous colleges to universities. The other attempt will be to convert colleges to Cluster Universities and set up new Model Colleges. The strategy will also include converting existing Degree colleges to Model Colleges.

RUSA aims to provide equal development to all higher institutions and rectify weaknesses in the higher education system. Its target achievement is to raise the gross enrolment ratio to 32% by the end of XIII Plan in 2017. The major objectives are to:

- Improve the overall quality of existing state institutions by ensuring that all institutions conform to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- usher transformative reforms in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level, promoting autonomy in state universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure academic and examination reforms in the higher educational institutions.
- enable conversion of some of the universities into research universities at par with the best in the world.
- Create opportunities for states to undertake reforms in the affiliation system in order to ensure that the reforms and resource requirements of affiliated colleges are adequately met.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.
- Create an enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations.
- Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions, in order to achieve enrolment targets.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by facilitating access to high quality institutions in urban and semi-urban areas, creating opportunities for students from rural areas to get access to better quality institutions and setting up institutions in un-served and underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently abled persons.

The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level. Such planning will create by creating new academic institutions, and expand the existing institutions, that are self-reliant in terms of quality education, professionally managed, and characterized by greater inclination towards research and provide students with education that is relevant to them as well the nation as a whole. The following are the primary components of RUSA that capture the key action and funding areas that must be pursued for the fulfillment of the targets:

- Creation of new University and Colleges
- Converting existing Colleges/cluster of colleges into Universities
- Expansion of courses and disciplines (with special focus on inter and cross disciplinary learning)
- One Model College in each district of the country by creation/up gradation
- Research and innovation grants/funds- one University to be made Research University
- Creation of State Higher Education Councils
- Creation of Accreditation agencies
- Infrastructure upgradation of existing institutions with special focus on quality and equity (e.g girls hostels, toilets, libraries and laboratories)
- Expansion of quality distance learning programmes and improvements in usage of ICT for leveraging learning efforts.
- Establishing Management Information System
- Faculty support – recruitment and capacity building
- Administrative/ governance reforms
- Academic and examination reforms
- Affiliation reforms (target being less than 100 colleges for each university)
- Leadership development of Educational Administrators

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- name enrolled in philosophy of International Directory of Philosophy and philosophers from Philosophy Documentation centre, Bowling Green state University, USA
- American Biographical institute, Inc. honoured “Great minds of 21st Century”
- Participated in “Advaita Vedanta” a group discussion which was recorded/ telecast from Gyan Darsan channel prepared by IGNOU, New Delhi.