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A study on students' satisfaction based on quality standards of accreditation in higher education

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Quality standards are evaluated by the Higher Educational Institutions by self evaluation at different levels and are also assessed by external agencies. Application of quality standards in administrative practices have been associated with the quality of higher education. To improve the quality of administrative practices, evaluation scales are applied and the outcomes in terms of Quality perceived by the students and the higher level of satisfaction is evaluated. It is observed that the quality of implementation of standards and administrative practices adopted in various institutions needs care and consideration. There is lack of quality because all the policies and standards are adopted to the maximum in terms of mission and vision and the process of quality achieved is not adequate and permanent. Even-though accreditation provides quality assurance that the academic aims and objectives of the institution are honestly pursued and effectively achieved by the resources available, and the institutions may demonstrate the capabilities of ensuring effectiveness of the educational standards during the validity period, the lack of quality in terms of satisfactory level of students is observed in appropriate scales. In this paper findings of quality are evaluated using the same common factors used by accreditation.

Key words: Accreditation, quality, standards, administrative practices, Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), students.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education system varies in all countries in terms of their strength and size. Quality of higher education plays an important role. The core values of higher education should envisage national development, foster global competitiveness, balance ethical values, promote use of technology, and create an atmosphere and quest for excellence. Quality assurance in higher education can be defined and adjudged with various terminologies such as academic standards, academic

quality, administrative standards, administrative quality, quality assurance, quality enhancement, quality enforcement, etc, which are interdependent, interrelated and being interacted with one another. Higher education should ensure to safeguard educational standards of all stakeholders acquired with comprehensive knowledge and skills and to promote continuous enhancement of the quality of teaching, learning, research, consultancy, extension and support services. Quality is understood by

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the following five approaches as per David Garvin

1. Quality may be understood only by comparing the characteristics of excellence which approach is a philosophical
2. In measurable products Quality is defined as Product based
3. Quality which meets conformance of requirements of manufacturing products it is Manufacturing based approach
4. In Industries and business Quality approach is defined using value based.
5. The last approach is customer that is the person or user defines the Quality (Van der Berghe, 1995).

Different kinds of education systems are practiced around the world. Education system in India are governed and managed by the union government, state government and private bodies unlike western and European countries in which education systems are privatized. Education system in western country like USA is controlled and funded from three levels; they are federal, states and local. USA has the second largest number of education institutions in the world and has also the highest number of student enrollments in higher education in the world. United States Service Academies and Staff College are controlled by federal government whereas other universities are not directly regulated by federal government although federal government gives federal grant. Majority of the universities are controlled by the states and its territories. According to the status of higher education in different parts of the world, Murthy (2007) states, "India has the third largest higher education system in the world-after China and the USA-with 331 universities and 15,600 colleges as of 2004". The number of degrees awarded by Indian educational institutions has grown by 70 per cent between 1990 and 2004 and the number of engineering degrees awarded has grown by 90 per cent. Of the 10.5 million students attending India's universities, the majority of enrolment is at the undergraduate level with 88.9 per cent of students enrolled in undergraduate programmes and 9.4 per cent in postgraduate programmes. India produces 2.5 million graduates and 350,000 engineers every year. Despite being one of the largest producers of degrees in the world, the quality of education in India is still unsatisfactory. India has hardly produced any worthwhile inventors in recent years. Almost every technology we use is from abroad. According to the MHRD, Govt. of India, annual report 2009-2010, there were 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of Independence. At present, there are 746 universities and university-level institutions in the country. Out of which there are; 243 State Universities, 130 Deemed Universities, 53 States Private Universities, 40 Central Universities, 33 Institutions of National Importance established under the Act of Parliament and, 5 Institutions established under various states legislations. Apart from universities, there are 33,037 Colleges including 2,565 Women Colleges. Out of

total number of colleges, 7,362 Colleges (28 percent) have been recognized under Section 2 (f) and 5,997 Colleges (23 percent) under Section 12-B of the UGC Act, 1956.

UGC is one of the apex bodies of Higher Education in India. UGC, after the four decades of administered in higher education, National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) is going to be replaced by 2012. The system of higher education in India is going to be transformed by the policies of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The foreign countries educational institutes are ready to collaborate with Indian universities in order to bring better constructive educations system in the country. Higher Education and Research Draft Bill (2010) explain that the act to promote autonomy is necessary in Higher Educational Institutions to pursue knowledge and innovation and to facilitate access and opportunities to all and also to provide Integrated and solid growth in higher education (Retrieved from URL <http://www.aiuweb.org/Notifications/HERB.pdf>, on 2 June 2011). Specially, the Western and European countries will be collaborating with Indian universities to transform the higher education system in India. The Union Government has been taken up an initiative by creating joint venture and public-private partnerships with foreign countries to improve the quality of higher education in the country.

The Indian system of higher education system of India is considered (10+2) as Higher Secondary or Pre-University, which consists of compulsory two year course (class XI and XII). Higher Secondary level is the crucial stage of learning knowledge because is the stage to train the level for direct profession. The next level is considered as three years degree course (10+2+3). This undergraduate three years degree course can be pursued after the completion of compulsory (10+2) level. The level of (10+2+3) three years degree course is considered as higher education that gives an options to specialize in the subject which he/she wants to pursue. Some of the professional educational councils in the country have different structures in higher education (10+2+4); it has four years degree courses unlike other degree courses. These courses are, Bachelor of Law (LLB), Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech), Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Medicine (MBBS), etc. Higher education can be also called tertiary or third stage post secondary education; it also can be referred to as graduation. After crossing the line of three or four years degree courses, the individual can opt for (10+2+3+2) or (10+2+4+2) which is called post-graduation. In this stage, the courses are offered to specialize in various streams of higher learning and research. Apart from these degree courses, there are different kinds of academic Diplomas and Certificates depending on the structures and qualification of individual achievement. The growth of Higher Education from the year 1990 to 2011 is represented Table 1.

Educational institutions are expected to go through stringent quality assessment procedure by establishing Internal Quality Assurance Cell and conducting external

Table 1. Growth of higher education in India (yearwise).

S.No.	Yr	No. of universities	No. of colleges
1	1990-91	190	7346
2	2000-01	256	12806
3	2010-11	634	33023

quality assurance check by Academic and Administrative Audit Committee (AAAC) and also series of accreditation by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of the respective countries based on a set of pre-determined academic and administrative criteria. The monitoring and evaluation of the institution requires carefully structured system of internal and external introspection.

Quality assurance organisations followed in Indian higher education

1. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to be superseded by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) for technical and management colleges
2. Quality Council of India (QCI)
3. Distance Education Council (DEC)
4. National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
5. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)
6. Bar Council of India (BCI)
7. National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)
8. Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)
9. Medical Council of India (MCI)
10. Pharmacy Council Of India (PCI)
11. Indian Nursing Council (INC)
12. National Council for Indian Education (NCIE)
13. Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH)
14. Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)
15. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)
16. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)
17. Association of Indian Universities (AIU)

The National Board of accreditation (Accreditation manual for UG programmes) has mentioned the operations of their two tier system. TIER- I is offered by Autonomous Institutions and University Departments particularly for engineering Programmes. TIER II is operated for non autonomous affiliated institutions. The criteria followed by both the systems are same and the only difference is the weightage on outcome parameters. Non autonomous and affiliated institutions are eligible for applying for TIER –I if they are sufficient with their outcome with TIER I weightage parameters.

The main significance of accreditation is

1. To make the institute/department aware about

weaknesses of the programme offered by it and act on suggestions for improvement.

2. To encourage the institute to move continuously towards the improvement of quality of its programme, and the pursuit of excellence.

3. To facilitate institutions for updating themselves in programme curriculum, teaching and learning processes, faculty achievements, students' skills/abilities/knowledge.

4. To excel among stakeholders. (peers, students, employers, societies etc.)

5. To facilitate receiving of grants from Government regulatory bodies and institutions/agencies.

6. To attain international recognition of accredited degrees awarded.

7. To facilitate the mobility of graduated students and professionals.

The evaluation team will visit the institution seeking accreditation of its programme(s) evaluate and validate the assessment of the institute. The common factors assessed by the evaluation team are,

1. Outcome of the education provided
2. Quality assurance processes, including internal reviews
3. Assessment
4. Activities and work of the students
5. Entry standards and selection for admission of students;
6. Motivation and enthusiasm of faculty;
7. Qualifications and activities of faculty members;
8. Infrastructure facilities;
9. Laboratory facilities;
10. Library facilities;
11. Industry participation;
12. Organization.

For this assessment of evaluation team discussion with Head of the Department, Faculty members, students and management are arranged. The same scales are used as different questions from students of various institutions of South India.

Objectives of the study

1. To Study the quality standards and nature of higher education pursued by the selected districts in South India.
2. To assess the level of satisfaction by the students regarding the administrative practices at higher education institutions in the selected Districts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To measure service quality, widely SERVQUAL measure (Parasuraman et al., 1988) has been used. The importance-performance framework (Martilla and James, 1977) is best explained as an absolute performance

measure of customer perceptions (Wright and O'Neill, 2002). In order to compete the quality of Higher Education globally various studies have been focused on (Aldridge and Rowley, 1998; Athiyaman, 1997; Moogan et al., 2001; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). It is important for institutional policy makers to be aware of the influential factors and the associated impact on potential students (Moogan et al., 2001) in order to satisfy the student's requirements and the universities must be aware of how they are perceived in the market by their own product offerings. Expectations and perceptions have been measured separately to produce a relative measure of service quality in Higher Education with relative to the consumers' expectation (Wright and O'Neill, 2002). For instance, Crosby has defined quality as "conformance to requirements" that has a producer perspective, and Deming's and Juran's definitions have a user-based perspective.

At present high premium for students' satisfaction and their perception of service quality focus more attention on these institutions of higher education. The implication of students' satisfaction for higher education by Firdaus (2006a, 2006B); Gbadamosi and De Jager (2009) and these have been used in various contexts. Oliveira-Brochado and Marques (2007) argued that instruments used should be specific to the country, as there are significant country-specific implications arising from the context in which the institution belong. Over the last decade service quality in Higher education has become very important (Athiyaman, 1997; Cheung et al., 2011; Oldfield and Baron, 2000). Munteanu et al. (2010) also state that customers satisfaction becomes an important differentiator. While the SAC student as customer, in many HEIs university administrators are forced to provide students satisfaction. In an attempt to get an indication of the successfulness of providing products to the market, organizations are engaging in measuring customer satisfaction. Senthilkumar and Arulraj (2011) argue that students are the primary customers of an institution of higher education and often take different roles. Hemsley-Brown (2006) and Senthilkumar and Arulraj (2011) point out that, based on a solid understanding of higher education and on management thoughts and practices, currently higher education systems are democratized. In the service delivery process employees of institutions of higher education are also related to quality. The student as customer (SAC) model of higher education is relatively recent but has generated heated debate among academics. Recent studies (Finney and Finney, 2010; Maringe, 2011; Nordensvard, 2011; Williams, 2011) have all argued for a more cautious and balanced position. The pro-SAC model and position is provided fortress by many world governments' move to redirect the responsibility for funding HE in universities from central governments to individual students (Maringe, 2011). The SAC model advocates have posited that promoting this model helps to democratise the HE experience, increase accountability and contributes to enhanced quality (Maringe, 2011). On the other hand, however, students being only one of the

stakeholders in HE (others include parents, government, staff and other parties) make this model both unbalanced and inadequate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used is qualitative and descriptive in design. Stratified proportionate sampling is adopted and the required samples were collected in selected region. Primary Data were collected from Educational institutions of Southern Region of India through a well structured questionnaire format, based on accreditation criteria for evaluation of students feedback from quality ensuring institution regarding all information from all the academic, administrative and infrastructural units on programmes offered, performance of teaching, learning, research and extension activities of teachers, students enrolment, faculty strength, infrastructure, evaluation, internal assessment, results of students, placement, student support services, progression of students, etc, is assessed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To improve the quality of administrative practices, evaluation scales are applied and the outcomes in terms of quality perceived by the students and the higher level of satisfaction are evaluated. Even-though accreditation provides quality assurance that , the academic aims and objectives of the institution are honestly pursued and effectively achieved by the resources available, Quality in terms of satisfactory level of students is observed and it is evaluated in appropriate scales in this research. Students satisfaction is more important and it plays the major role in creating Quality impact of an institution'. This study is proposed and various standards adopted in all levels of the institution are assessed in this research. Quality practices adopted, applied and delivered in terms of students satisfaction are evaluated by the based on the Feedback of students in the form of questionnaire as common factors used by the accreditation team quality of administrative practices and evaluation scales are applied and the outcomes in terms of quality perceived by the students ; and the level of satisfaction is evaluated.

It is found that customer satisfaction largely depends on the degree to which a product that is supplied by an organization meets or surpasses customer expectations (Khan and Matley, 2009; Telford and Masson, 2005). Furthermore, in their exploratory study to bridge our knowledge gap Finney and Finney (2010) found that students are the major beneficiary and suggest a more blended approach which allows students to take a citizenship perspective.

Frequency distribution of the students from selected districts of South India

In this frequency distribution Table 2 represents 23.8% of the respondents belong to Madurai, 31% of the respondents belong to Dindigul, 11.9% of the respondents

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the students from selected districts of South India.

Place of the college		Frequency distribution of students	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Madurai	140	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Dindigul	182	31.0	31.0	54.8
	Theni	70	11.9	11.9	66.7
	Ramnad	56	9.5	9.5	76.2
	Sivagangai	140	23.8	23.8	100.0
	Total	588	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Chi-square test for association between administrative practices adopted and quality of administrative practices perceived by students.

Level of administrative practices adopted	Level of administrative practices perceived by students			Total	Chi square value	P value
	Low	Moderate	High			
Low	93 (54.1%) [62.8%]	54 (31.4%) [19.9%]	25 (14.5%) [14.9%]	172 (100.0%) [29.3%]	198.154	<0.00 1**
Moderate	38 (15.8%) [25.7%]	162 (67.2%) [59.6%]	41 (17.0%) [24.4%]	241 (100.0%) [41.0%]		
High	17 (9.7%) [11.5%]	56 (32.0%) [20.6%]	102 (58.3%) [60.7%]	175 (100.0%) [29.8%]		
Total	148 (25.2%) [100.0%]	272 (46.3%) [100.0%]	168 (28.6%) [100.0%]	588 (100.0%) [100.0%]		

Note : 1. The value within () refer to Row Percentage; 2.The value within [] refer to Column Percentage; 3.** Denotes significant at 1% level.

belong to Theni, 9.5% of the respondents belong to Ramnad and 23.85% of respondents belong to Sivagangai Districts.

Hypothesis – I

H_0 = There is no association between quality of administrative practices adopted in HEI and satisfaction of the students

Since $p < 0.01$ (Table 3) the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level of significance. Hence concluded that there is association between administrative practices adopted and quality of administrative practices perceived by students. Based on the row and column percentage, the quality of administrative practices adopted in Institutions is low and needs to be improved by satisfying the level of perception of the student.

Brochado (2009) points out that students are considered to be “primary customers” of an institution of higher education, because they are the direct recipients of the service provided by the Educational Institution. Yeo (2008) places higher education as a service industry and the primary focus of institutions is to provide quality learning experiences to students.

Hypothesis – II

H_0 = There is no lack of Quality with regard to Administrative Practices perceived by students in HEI

Table 4 represents that $p < 0.01$ and the null hypothesis is rejected at 1 %level of significance. Hence concluded that there is significant difference between mean ranks towards administrative practices perceived by students.

Placement opportunities to students and industrial visit expertise needs to be concentrated and improved. Next

Table 4. Friedman test for significant difference between mean ranks towards administrative practices perceived by students.

Administrative practices	Mean rank	Chi-square value	P value
Computing facilities to students is good	6.44		
Library facilities to students is satisfied	6.09		
Class room / Laboratory facilities to students are very good	6.78		
Curriculum / project guidance to students is remarkable	7.36		
Student assessment is satisfied	7.32		
Extracurricular activities facilitated to student is good	6.20	383.154	<0.001**
Industrial visit expertise is carried out	5.94		
Students involvement in Symposiums, Seminars, Conferences held at your college	7.36		
Disciplinary actions towards student is satisfied	7.13		
General facilities like Toilet, Drinking Water, are adequate and maintained properly	6.04		
Administrative approach for utilization of facilities is satisfied	6.42		
Placement opportunities to student is highly appreciated	4.93		

Note: ** Denotes significant at 1% level; N = 588; Chi-Square = 383.154; df = 11; Asymp Sig = .000.

Table 5. Pearson correlation coefficient between administrative practices adopted, applied, delivered and perceived by student.

Administrative practices	Administrative practices adopted	Administrative practices applied	Administrative practices delivered	Quality of administrative practices perceived by students
Administrative Practices Adopted	1	.802(**)	.620(**)	.767(**)
Administrative Practices Applied	.802(**)	1	.720(**)	.827(**)
Administrative Practices Delivered	.620(**)	.720(**)	1	.712(**)
Quality of Administrative Practices Perceived by Students	.767(**)	.827(**)	.712(**)	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at 1% level.

the general facilities like toilet, drinking water, are not adequate when compared to number of students and it is not maintained frequently. Curriculum and project guidance is remarkable; also student assessment is comparatively fair ; overall all the factors do not fulfill the satisfactory level of students in higher degree, as observed in this hypothesis,

Hypothesis – III

$H_0 =$ The students are satisfied with the quality of administrative practices adopted applied and delivered in higher educational institutions

In Table 5, the correlation coefficient between administrative practices adopted and administrative practices applied is 0.802 which indicates 80% positive relationships between administrative practices adopted and applied and is significant at 1% level. The correlation coefficient between administrative practices adopted and administrative practices delivered is 0.620, which indicates 62% positive relationships between administrative practices adopted and delivered and is significant at 1% level. The

correlation coefficient between administrative practices adopted and administrative practices perceived by students is 0.767 which indicates 76 % positive relationships between administrative practices adopted and administrative practices perceived by students and is significant at 1% level. The correlation coefficient between administrative practices applied and administrative practices delivered is 0.720 which indicates 72 % positive relationships between administrative practices applied and delivered and is significant at 1% level. The correlation coefficient between administrative practices applied and administrative practices perceived by students is 0.827 which indicates 82 % positive relationships between administrative practices applied and administrative practices perceived by students and is significant at 1% level. The correlation coefficient between administrative practices delivered and administrative practices perceived by students is 0.712 which indicates 71% positive relationships between administrative practices delivered and administrative practices perceived by students and is significant at 1% level. The increased level of competition in the education environment has led

to institutions of higher education including managerial techniques to improve the efficiency and quality. (Telford and Masson, 2005; Yeo, 2008) and switch from a passive to a more active market approach (Ivy, 2008).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The practices and standards of quality assurance are framed by methodological questions about the quality understood by the evaluation team. This paper reveals that the quality assurance determinations need to take account of students' expectation and satisfaction. Excellence is appropriate term to mention the degree of quality. To excel in quality of standards and administrative practices students' output and satisfaction is more important. As per the degree of level of satisfaction, the following findings were made in general. Educational Institutions should enhance the resources mobility. Flexible and transparent recruitment procedures should be adopted to maintain the Administrative Policy strong. Research independence should be provided for every individual career prospects. Educational Institutions should concentrate to promote knowledge with full involvement in focusing on Communication and Personality skills to overcome this knowledge based society. Learning opportunities should be open to all in a systematic and merit based offers. They are expected to refine and redefine the educational system focusing on priorities which could enrich the research and scientific areas.

To this end, Institutions will have to revise their structures and organizations such as staff management, evaluation, funding, teaching methods, Infrastructural facilities etc., Therefore educational services by institutions of higher education necessitates interaction between the students, lecturers, parents, alumni, employers, the community and the government, amongst others, and will influence overall satisfaction of the various stakeholders (Nicolescu 2009) Senthilkumar and Arulraj (2011), however, state that among all stakeholders, the students of the institution are to be considered the most important stakeholder as they are the most significant customers of institutions of higher education compared to other stakeholders.

It is observed that the quality of implementation of standards and administrative practices and the process of implementation needs care and consideration with regard to perception of the students in the research area. There is lack of quality because all the policies and administrative practices are adopted to the maximum. This study is based on the students' perception and research may also be considered by taking all the stakeholders of Higher Educational Institutions in all the region. To create quality in all dimensions to reach the best practice by means of vision and mission higher satisfactory level for evaluation is used considering the most common factors used by accreditation evaluation

team. It is significant that even after or before quality assurance is validated by expert team, the satisfactory level of students is not registered openly because of limitations and restrictions crossed by the students.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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