

ACCREDITATION AND ITS ROLE IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Prof. I. K. Bhat *

INTRODUCTION

The formal technical education in India dates back about a century and since then there has been a continuous growth in the number of such institutions. After independence, several technical educational institutions came into existence initially at government initiative and subsequently under self-financing category. Due to the quality of education imparted in these technical institutions there is a great demand for the technically trained manpower all

over the world. India today is among the first three largest number of producers of technically trained manpower. As per the latest records available [1] the total number of institutions granted approval by AICTE and total intake capacity in these institutes at undergraduate and postgraduate level in different disciplines is given in Table 1.

Recently Abdul Kalam [2] has emphasized that the present society is technology driven and future of a

Discipline	Degree		Diploma		Postgraduate	
	No. of Institutes	Intake	No. of Institutes	Intake	No. of Institutes	Intake
Engineering	776	185758	1215	211894		
Pharmacy	230	11725	349	18732		
Architecture & T.P.	103	4642				
HMCT	32	1875	61	4715		
MBA/PGDB					729	59937
MCA					494	21125
M.Tech					271	21822

Table 1 : Giving disciplinewise breakup of institutions and their intake

* Advisor, All India Council for Technical Education New Delhi.
Member Secretary, National Board of Accreditation New Delhi.

country lies with the technological developmental edge of that country. This growth and development would be sustainable if proper trained qualified manpower is also made available to the industry. In order to meet its requirement, there are enough challenges that lie and are also emerging and need to be recognised, analysed, understood and tackled. The capacity to do this will greatly depend upon how well we train the future generations in our technical institutions of our country. The fast growth of information and knowledge and its obsolescence is putting tremendous pressure on learning and acquiring of knowledge. The quantum, the content of what is to be learnt, understood and absorbed are changing radically. Knowledge acquired and utilizing it promptly and effectively require all together different strategies. It requires developing competencies which are grown within and developed over a period of time. This competence has to be in terms of people, with requisite knowledge for both industry and academics [3]. In an academic institution, it has to be reflected in teaching-learning research and its action plans based on its visions and mission. Some of these aspects are not addressed to seriously in many institutions by administration and need a serious thinking. Today, technical education requires exceptionally good capacity of the learner, creative thinking, innovative skills, ability to communicate, capacity to learn quickly, ability to capture knowledge and upgrade it and create new knowledge. This requires making students competent for life long learning. Such an education needs a

continuous improvement component imbedded into it. It requires a strategy of total quantity improvement and one such strategy could be as is given in the following steps [4]:

- Structure plans and missions
- Visible commitment
- Measurement and Control
- Training provision at all levels
- Innovations
- Problem identification and correction
- Recognition of achievement
- Learning from failure
- Involvement of all.

People at all levels need to be trained/retrained and be taught to undertake their job with a sense of mission. All our actions should be directed towards the benefit to the society. Training provided must be 'to develop team problem solving skills and also to develop individual problem solving skills. There is a paradigm shift from exclusive to mass in providing the higher education to a large number of stakeholders. Various stakeholders, be it a student, a parent, government or institute have varied expectations yet one common factor that is common in all of these expectations is that "quality of education to be imparted in these educational institutions must be exceptionally good". It would take care of the competitive global market where the sole concern would be the collective impact of an overall academic programme, designed and developed by

the institutions as a whole, for providing the desired knowledge, skills and competencies to the students. It implies that the institutions have the responsibility to ensure that academic standards are met and these standards are such that the quality is acceptable at national and international level [5]. A good technical educational system is one where-in the following four aspects should to be in built in our educational system so that it provides

- (i) Knowledge
- (ii) Know-how
- (iii) Wisdom
- (iv) Character

Such an educational system leads to value addition, sustained improvement, increased external stakeholders satisfaction, cost saving, develops engineering functional teams, improvement in moral, commitment and motivation and above all accountability and involvement. It requires a pro-active approach and initiatives of educational institutions to ensure better quality of human resource coming out of these institutions. This focuses the attention on the standards of education that is quality assurance in education. It requires assessment of an institutional structure and its resources in terms of their inputs, potential and process mechanisms, together with the quality and relevance of various programmes they design and deliver by the combination of both internal and external assessment on the academic outcome, may be termed as Quality Assurance. [c]

Quality assurance in an educational system could be thus defined as the totality of the system, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of the research and of students teaching - learning experience on a continuous basis. Juran described Quality a Journey and not an end.

It is not difficult to incorporate some new mechanisms and strengthen the already existing mechanisms to bridge the gap between expected and the actual performance, achievable and desirable as experienced in real life in our institutions. These quality assurance mechanisms could be internal as well as external, must be objective, transparent and reproducible. In the traditional system, various bodies constituted under statutory powers of the system like Board of Studies, Academic Councils, Examination Committee have a specific mandate and work within their own domains. It has been proved that an unbiased opinion/appraisal could be obtained by getting the system assessed by peer/expert groups from outside the system. The combination of these internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance is known as accreditation/academic auditing. Accreditation is thus a critical appraisal by external peers at regular intervals, to determine that the institution is above the threshold of minimum norms and standards prescribed by various regulatory agencies. Thus, accreditation is the process which determines whether an institutional programme of study meets the threshold quality criteria and thereby

satisfy the existence of minimum educational standards. It assesses the quality of educational programmes under consideration and indicates the level of its attainment, so as to serve as a guide to prospective students, parents, potential employers, counsellors, other educational institutions, government and non-government organizations that accept horizontal mobility of students.

Accreditation is also useful in identifying the strengths and weakness of the programme in aiding the institution to identify the areas, in which action is to be taken, to upgrade the quality of education it seeks to provide. Further it will also provide models to develop new programmes of academic activity in emerging frontier areas of education.

Accreditation doesn't seek to replace the system of award of degrees and diplomas by universities and boards of technical education. Accreditation provides quality assurance and indicates that the academic aims and objectives of the institutions are known to be honestly pursued and effectively achieved by the resources currently available, and the institution has demonstrated capabilities to ensure continued effectiveness of the educational programmes over a period of time.

One of the most important stake holders of technical education is the employer, mainly the industry of the country. The industry should therefore clearly come out with specific ideas so that the students

leaving the portals of various institutions are directly useful to them without incurring much expenses on their retraining and orientation. The industry should have a close co-ordination with technical educational institutions in deciding about the content of the syllabus and also in restructuring various programmes in these institutions. Accreditation which requires visits of peer groups should include persons from all walks of life who have stake in technical education. It is therefore imperative that everyone who is conscious of quality in technical education should participate in the accreditation programmes and contribute his part to the society. The industry at its own level should create an environment of awareness about the accreditation, exchange ideas and also support activities for improving the infrastructural facilities, joint research and development projects, curriculum development activities, teaching learning processes and other continuing education programmes.

To meet this challenge the National Board of Accreditation(NBA) was setup by AICTE on 27th of September, 1994. Its objective is to assess the qualitative competence of educational institutions from the diploma level to postgraduate levels in engineering and technology, architecture, pharmacy, town planning, management etc. It is; concerned with assessing and assuring the quality of various constituents of education in these educational institutions, such as academic ambience, administrative infrastructure, physical resources, human resources, supporting systems,

like library resources, computational resources and avenues for moulding and developing the students' personalities and learning characteristics. NBA accords accreditation at the programme level such as electronics engineering programme, computer science and engineering programme, management programme, architecture programme etc. It evaluates the system on a 1000 point scale and grades these programmes accordingly. This is significant for promoting a healthy competition for quality among different degree programme of the same institution, as well as, among similar programme in different institutions. Thus, in a given institution some programmes may be accredited with high grades, while, some weak programmes may be either rated low or even denied accreditation.

For accreditation to be effective and also successful, an awareness of its importance must be created. Accreditation is not only recognition of quality but it also promotes quality. At present the accreditation is not mandatory so institutions of their own choice seek the assessment of their programmes, but is going to be mandatory in near future MHRD has taken a decision that all the institutions in the country will be ranked and the funds may also be linked with the accreditation results as well [7].

Accreditation will help to market our services and products (in terms of human resource) globally. Accreditation of educational programmes will help our students to move to any part of the world and render their services without any challenges to their credibility, and also

establishing the credibility of our educational system. It is in the interest of all of us that we should have an effective accreditation system which will support the growth of quality education and that the system may have international recognition on a mutual basis particularly since a single standard of accreditation is not possible. Thus, it should be our endeavour to continually strengthen the NBA and its accreditation system by understanding, accepting and appreciating it. Some of the aspects that need to be discussed and understood by each one, who would like to venture into assessing the educational systems, in greater detail are

- Purpose
- Organizational Structure
- Participation of Professional Societies
- Methodology of Accreditation
- Performance Indicators/Criteria, weightages
- Other related issues.

WHY ACCREDITATION?

The chief purpose as well as the ultimate objective of the Accreditation process is given below.

- To assist all stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, educational institutions, professional societies, potential employers, government agencies etc.), in identifying those institutions and their specific Programmes which meet the current Norms and Standards as well as other quality indicators specified by AICTE.

- To provide guidelines for desirable upgradation of existing programmes and for development of new programmes.
- To encourage the maintenance of standard of excellence and to stimulate the process of continual improvement in technical education in the country.
- Continual improvement in technical education in the country.

The need and demand for Accreditation of technical education programmes has risen, especially as mentioned earlier as well, due to the extra-ordinary quantitative growth in the number and variety of educational institutions and programmes over the last fifteen years. It is not possible to meaningfully sustain the present growth rate without a parallel exercise in quality assessment and its assurance of the programmes and institutions offering courses in technical education.

Such an exercise will ensure that the institution indeed has, and is, likely to continue to have in the near future, the necessary infrastructure, equipment and resources and the programmes to produce technical manpower that not only meets the local industry requirements, but produces also an acceptable human resource for the global job market.

The overwhelming aim and objective of the accreditation is, thus, to recognize and acknowledge the value-addition in transforming the admitted raw students into capable technocrat, manager, etc. having sound knowledge

of fundamentals and an acceptable level of professional and personnel competence for ready employability.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS OF NBA

Policies about Accreditation process

- The National Board of Accreditation will undertake evaluation, for purposes of Accreditation, of all Institutions and Programmes approved by the Council, at regular intervals not exceeding five years, the sixth year will be the preparatory period for the next accreditation.
- The Board will provide feedback information to the Institutions, Universities and Boards of Technical Education on innovative activities to assist further initiatives or improvement of the duality of education.
- The Board will communicate its findings and recommendations to the Institutions concerned, and also give reasons for the intended action, including 'No Accreditation'.
- The Board will periodically publish a list of accreditation programmes.
- The Institution is expected to continue to maintain the standards on the basis of which Accreditation was given to its programmes. If at any time, the Board considers that the accredited programmes are no longer in conformity with the

required criteria, the accreditation can be revoked. The reasons for such an action will have to be communicated to the Institution, the University and to the Board of Technical Education.

- The National Board of Accreditation will undertake Accreditation of only those programmes from which at least two batches have graduated, unless specifically requested by the AICTE.

Programme-level Accreditation

The NBA has, after considerable deliberation and extensive debate, taken a conscious decision to focus the accreditation process on the individual programmes offered by an Institution rather than on the Institution itself [8].

Grading of Degree Programme

Unlike many other countries, the process of Accreditation by the NBA is a multilevel one rather than a "yes" or "no" type single-level Accreditation, Individual Programmes shall be classified into one of the following categories.

A) Excellent Very good; meets all Accreditation criteria or exceeds them.

B) Good, meets the minimum criteria, and deficiencies are marginal and can be improved within a short time.

C) Satisfactory; deficiencies exist, but the Institution has the potential to make up it in the near future, say in one to two years.

NA) Not Accredited; not ripe for Accreditation, in view of the

seriousness of the deficiencies.

Provision for withdrawal

The institutions have the option to withdraw a Programme from the Accreditation process by a written request to the Visiting Team Chairman, after being informed of the strengths and weaknesses, but before the Visiting Team holds formal discussions among its members for finalizing its report. The purpose of this provision is to enable the Institutions to improve the programme quality after making the necessary investments and corrections to overcome the indicated weaknesses rather than be assigned a lower grade or not being accredited at all.

After a Programme which is successful in obtaining Accreditation, the entire process will be repeated at the expiry of the specified Accreditation period. The normal period of Accreditation shall be five years. The Board may however accredit a programme for a shorter period if some of the criteria are satisfied while some weaknesses have been noticed in some critical areas.

CONCLUSION

As we are entering the third millennium revolutionised by information technology and liberalised economy, e-commerce and business, process of learning and teaching in technical institution will be increasingly characterised by diversity, complexity and flexibility. Traditional pedagogical approaches have to yield to information technology inspiration, cyber space dedicated methodologies and strategies.

Virtual centres of learning and Virtual university systems would supplement to start with, and gradually replace the conventional system of learning. The status and the position of a nation, in near future, will be decided by its share of technology contribution and its quality. This necessitates that the quality of technical education should be of the highest possible standard and should continuously try to achieve this desired objective. The technical education sector in India has been traditionally subject-oriented rather than task oriented with focus on absorption and diffusion of improved technologies. Innovation and creative talent of students are not adequately nourished and blossomed to provide appropriate competence and skills to become prime movers for economic growth and social development. To usher India in this new millennium as a super power, technology driven and environmentally sustainable growth would have to be encouraged and promoted. This requires an efficient technical education system capable of delivering product which are world class. India must meet the demand of its local as well as global market. This does necessitate utilization of all possible (tangible as well as intangible) resources to be utilized optimally. NBA's accreditation, of course, is an earnest attempt to improve performance and resource utilization in the academic institutions. NBA is trying to bring up standards of programmes offered by various institutions at par with the best programmes offered in any good institution of the world. Its

recommendations also become basis for updating the guidelines, norms and standards of AICTE. The buzz word which NBA is trying to address is Quality. There is a saying in Japan "Sail the Boat by Looking at the Horizon" that is sight of world class quality should never be lost.

REFERENCES

- (1) AICTE Annual Report 1998-99 & Newsletter
- (2) Kalam Abdul A.P.J., India 2020, 1999
- (3) Singh, D.V., Quality Education in Management Institution in National Seminar on 'Quality Assurances and Accreditation of Management Education' held NMIMS Mumbai on 13-14" August 1999.
- (4) Richard Tear, Gyril Atkinson and Clive Westwood "Achieving quality Performance Casel Publication 1994
- (5) Doherty, Geoffrey D. 'Developing Quality System in Education' Routledge London 1994,
- (6) Bhat I.K. and Chaturvedi H. 'Quality Assurance & Accreditation of Management Education in India' National Seminar held at NMIMS Mumbai on 13-14th August 1999.
- (7) Press release by MHRD in The Times of India on 18th December, 1999.
- (8) Accreditation Manuals of NBA

