

Paradigm Shift in Defining Quality Parameters of HEIs in 21st Century: Devising Strategies and Combating Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Institutions are not built in a day. It takes years, decades and sometimes more than that to establish an institution. Educational institutions, similarly take decades to establish themselves and post-establishment era comes the era of sustenance. No Higher Education Institution can sustain itself without setting quality parameters in its multiple spheres. These areas include- academics, human resource, administration, infrastructure, financial management to name a few. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council, Bengaluru has laid down seven criteria with over hundred metrics and key indicators to set quality benchmarks in higher education institutions. The New Education Policy 2020 also provides a roadmap to HEIs for setting up multidisciplinary education hubs that can provide holistic education to the students of 21st century. The paper aims to study the highlighting features of a 21st century higher education institution that can possibly attract students and act as areas of institutional distinctiveness. Institutions that fail to come up to the expectations of an aware and tech-savvy student of the current century and generation will definitely be lost in the annals of history before long. Hence, HEIs need to focus on the potential areas of improvement to ascertain that they retain their glorious past based of quality measures, enjoy their present status strengthened by quality initiatives and pass on the glowing baton to the future generations based on quality sustenance.

Introduction

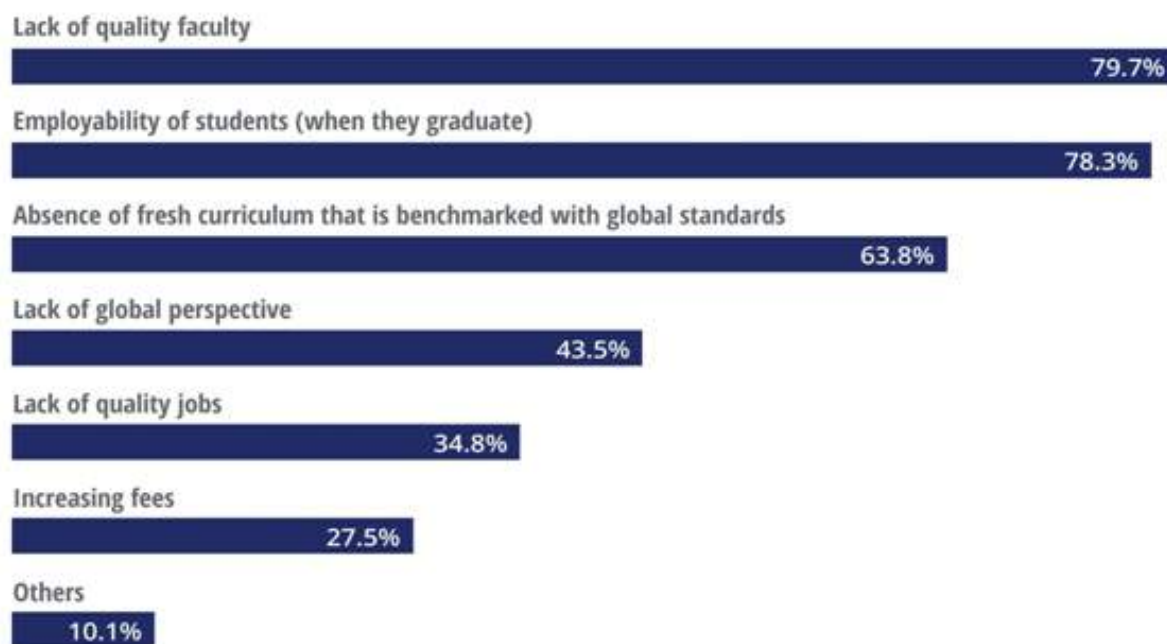
With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution, the role of education in society is also set to undergo drastic changes. The sphere of education in the current scenario is no longer limited to the teaching-learning process within classrooms through chalk and board method. The horizon of Higher Education is expanding day-by-day and is taking into its cover the holistic development of the students along with their transformation into “well rounded and creative individuals.” As per New Education Policy 2020, “Quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement and productive contribution to society.” (30) In such circumstances the role of a Higher Education Institute not only becomes more challenging but also of great importance. The students being the major stakeholders of the institution would prefer only those institutions that can provide him/her quality education as well as better job opportunities and can also help strengthen his/her creative persona. According to an article published by Gupta, Vikas, et.al. in *Deloitte Insights*,

In April 2019, Deloitte conducted a Deans Summit, attended by deans, directors, principals (all will be referred to as deans in this article) of 63 top-tier institutes in India. The deans from various institutions—including business, engineering, and other undergraduate schools—took a deep dive into the challenges faced by the higher education sector and discussed ways to address them. In addition to the deans' roundtable discussion, Deloitte surveyed the 63 deans, more than 900 alumni, and over 3,000 current students from these institutions. (Gupta, Vikas, et.al. 2019)

The survey concluded that following were the key issues plaguing higher education sector in India and until these problems are addressed, the HEIs in India will continue to lose their foothold.

Lack of quality faculty and student employability top the list of problems faced by Indian higher education

■ Frequency (in percent)



Source: 2019 Deloitte Deans Survey.

Deloitte Insights | deloitte.com/insights

The questions that now arise include- *What are the various spheres on which an HEI must focus to attract students? Are these areas only limited to imparting of education? Are traditional means of dissemination of education sufficient to attract students? Can institutions with average quality benchmarks survive in the long run?* The paper will try and focus on some of the above mentioned questions and an attempt will be made to understand the prerequisites pertaining to quality education in the twenty-first century.

1. Traditional student versus Modern: Demands and Requisitions

According to a 2008 report by UGC, there has been a multifold increase in the number of Higher Education Institutes in India from 1950 to 2020, that is, within a span of 70 years, the number of universities has rocketed from a paltry 25 to 1000 and the number of colleges has increased from a mere 700 to more than 52,000. Also, the number of students enrolled for higher education has also jumped from 1 lakh to 3.74 crore which is 374 fold increase in the overall enrolment of students. "India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. In future, India will be one of the largest education hubs. India's Higher Education sector has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of Universities/University level Institutions & Colleges since independence." (Sheikh, 2017)

The table below clearly delineates the exponential growth in the education sector and especially in the higher education scenario in India from 1950 to 2020, i.e. within a span of 70 years. If anything, the figures are an indication to the expansive reach of HEIs in the country.

<i>Type of Institution</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2020</i>
<i>Universities</i>	25	431	1000
<i>Colleges</i>	700	20,677	52,627
<i>Teachers</i>	15000	5.05 lakh	14 lakh
<i>Students</i>	1 lakh	116.12 lakh	3.74 crore

(source: <https://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/pub/report/12.pdf>)

What is evident from the above data is that the students as well as their parents now seek higher education more than ever and the demand for higher education is escalating on a daily basis. With increase in demand arises awareness and knowledge. A student in present times unlike his counterparts of 1950s does not take admission in any other HEI. He and his parents, who are also stakeholders in the entire scheme of things, undertake a lot of research and analysis pertaining to the institution in which they are seeking admission. Students are no longer satisfied with limited courses and subjects available. They need diversity and this is sought not only in academics but also in multifarious fields like co-curricular activities, sports, cultural, extension and outreach programmes, etc. Students no longer look for the nearest available colleges or universities for admission. They are ready to travel distance and leave the comforts of their home, if the HEI they wish to seek admission in, promises to offer quality and quantity. The onus, therefore, lies with the HEI whether it wants more students on its roll or not by offering multiple options to the students along with high standards of quality in every sphere. Similar conditions have also been laid down by NAAC for all the HEIs- for a better environment, the HEI must offer quality education as well as quality facilities for the all-round development of the students' personality. Student is the largest stakeholder in an educational institution and therefore, his/her opinion matters. HEIs should realize this and seek regular feedback from their students for taking quality measures and maintaining established standards. Modern students are well aware of their requirements and hence demand world class institutions, for, it is a matter of their future and their dreams.

2. Alumni as the Brand Ambassadors of HEIs

In an article published in *The Hindu*, Madhumitha Srinivasan claims that

Colleges in India too are becoming aware of the benefits an actively engaged alumni can have for the institution and its students... With mushrooming educational institutions around the world, one way for an institute to stand out from the domestic and international competition is by promoting its brand. And an institute's alumni are its best bet. (Srinivasan, *The Hindu*)

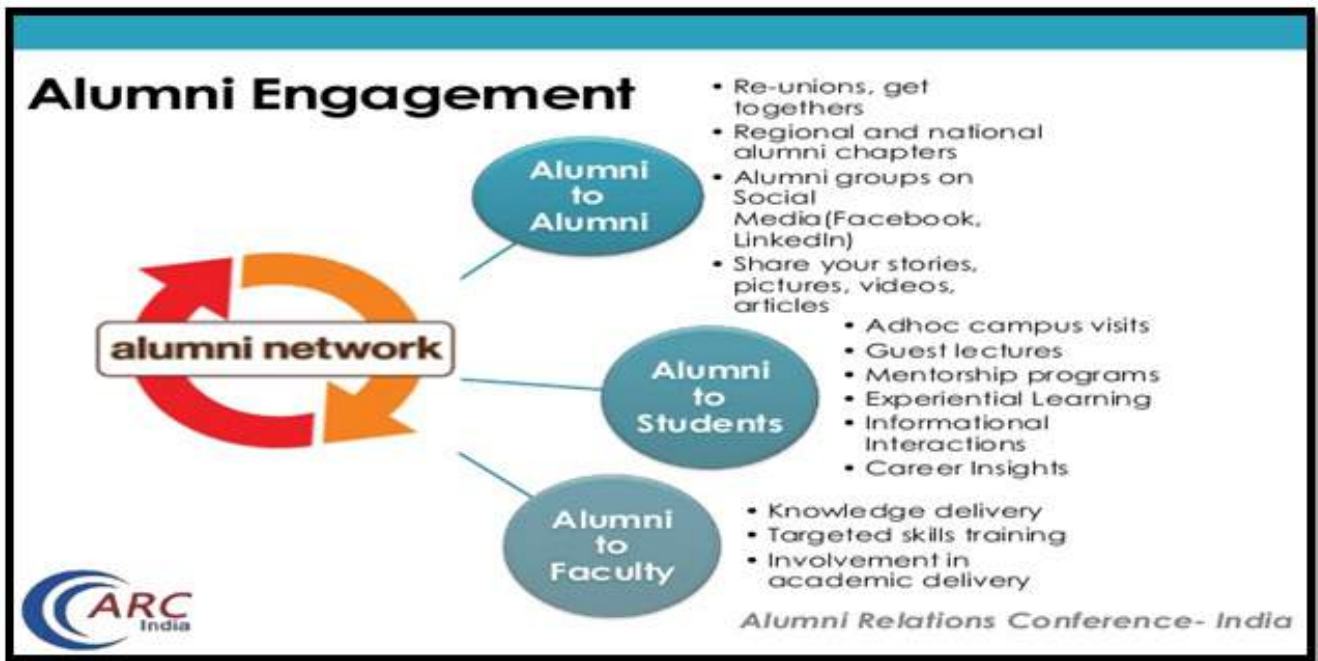
For a long part of their tenure most of the HEIs have been ignoring their alumni except for some established and renowned institutions. But with the National Accreditation and Assessment Committee revising its manual in the year 2017, a considerable amount of importance is being paid to hitherto neglected area. In an article “PM Modi urges educational institutions to develop creative platform for alumni engagement” published in *The Times of India*, the paper quotes from the Prime Minister's talk

show “Mann kiBaat”. The PM said, “I would like to urge former students to keep consolidating their bonding with the institution in which they have studied. Whether it is at the level of the school, college, or university. I also urge the institutions to work on new and innovative ways of alumni engagement and develop creative platforms so that alumni can be actively involved.” (Modi quoted in *Times of India*) The chart below highlights the communication network that an HEI can build with its alumni.

Considering this to be the need of the hour, every HEI must focus on developing healthy and mutually benefitting engagements with its alumni. Engaging alumni in various financial and non-financial activities can give impetus not only to the image of the institution but also result in forging ties between Industry and academia. An HEI can explore vistas like engaging alumni to address and interact with the newly inducted students of first year in the beginning of the session; inviting alumni to interact and motivate the students through expert lectures- the alumni can share their experiences and journey with the students; alumni working in industry sector or other MNCs can be approached for hiring or campus placement activities for final year students. It has been observed over the years that a company that has already hired students from an institution and if the employee enjoys a good reputation in the company, the company prefers to hire its future employees from the same institution.



Alumni who are running their own business or industry can also be approached to provide internships or job opportunities to the students of the institution. Apart from all these, of course, the financial aspect can always be considered from the alumni. They can contribute significantly to their alma mater by providing donations, scholarships, freshships, books and infrastructural facilities to the institution. An HEI can always look up to its alumni for strength and support in all forms.



(source: <https://image.slidesharecdn.com/2-141107000718-conversion-gate02/95/power-of-alumni-engagement-schools-8-638.jpg?cb=1415318947>)

3. *Making Students Market Ready: Providing Job Opportunities*

In an article published in *Digital Learning*, the writer claims that,

Campus placements provide the students with a foot-in-the-door opportunity, enabling them to start off their career right after they have completed their course curriculum. Furthermore, they get to interact and engage with the industry professionals during the placement drives, which further help lay a foundation for their prospective career in the future as they familiarise with potential contacts from their chosen career field.

The article also suggests that “Placements have gradually become an integral part of an institute's offerings, which was not the scenario earlier. Nowadays, students pay special attention to placement records while selecting a college or university for the admission.” (Digital Learning)

In a survey conducted by ILO (International Labour Organization), it has come to the fore that half of the jobs in India remain unfilled because of a deep chasm that exists between the job requirement and the skill sets possessed by the fresh graduates. The organization lays the onus of this gap on the education system as well as the curriculum deficit that HEIs choose to overlook. Most of the curriculum planned by HEIs involve imparting of education and skills that are no longer in use or are already obsolete whereas the market demand requires the students to be well-in-tune with the job requisitions of the 21st century. Therefore, a lot of focus needs to be laid on curriculum planning and development in the HEIs if they wish to compete with the institutes of international repute or Ivy League institutes that are waiting in the corner to jump into the Indian education sector in the near future.

Institutions also need to focus on the new/ futuristic model of placement scenario. The current placement scenario includes:

- ◆ On campus Placement Drives
- ◆ Off campus participation in Placement Drives

- ◆ Pool Placement Drives
- ◆ Pre-Placement Workshops/Training Sessions
- ◆ Career Counseling & Skill enhancement
- ◆ Personality Development
- ◆ Coaching for Competitive Exams

There is a need to drastically shift this age-old perspective of campus placement methodology and adopt a futuristic approach for the same. The future of job recruitment or placements involve the following:

Recruiters' Perspective

- ◆ Save cost & time in campus recruitments
- ◆ Innovative hiring styles- Online interviews through Skype, Video calling or Telephonic
- ◆ Aspirants apply through social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

Institute's Perspective

- ◆ Establish their Brand value to bring Industry/Company to their doorstep
- ◆ Facilitate E-recruitment to save time, energy and money

Students' Perspective

- ◆ Prefer paperless recruitment
- ◆ Prefer Job profiles/company profiles at the click of the button
- ◆ Prefer E-recruitment
- ◆ Look for challenging jobs with innovative profiles

4. *Holistic Development: Create Individuals, not Machines*

Holistic education leads to holistic development which is similar for institutions and individuals. The New Education Policy 2020 as well as NAAC lays great emphasis to imparting of holistic education to students. NAAC specifically focuses on aspects of Human Values and professional ethics in key indicator 7.1 of Criterion 7. Also, it raises queries related to the provision of an inclusive environment by the institution to its students for their over-all and holistic development. In Criterion 5, dealing with Student Support and Progression, NAAC raises questions related to the development of Life Skills, Soft Skills and other development related skills provided by the institution to its students. Here, NAAC enquires if the institution lays focus on the physical and mental fitness of the student or not by organizing Yoga classes, health and hygiene awareness programmes, etc. According to Wikipedia,

Holistic education is a relatively new movement in education that seeks to engage all aspects of the learner, including mind, body, and spirit. Its philosophy, which is also identified as holistic is based on the premise that each person finds [identity](#), [meaning](#), and [purpose in life](#) through connections to their local community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace.

Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for [life](#) and a passionate [love of learning](#), gives attention to [experiential learning](#), and places significance on “[relationships](#) and primary [human values](#) within the learning environment”.

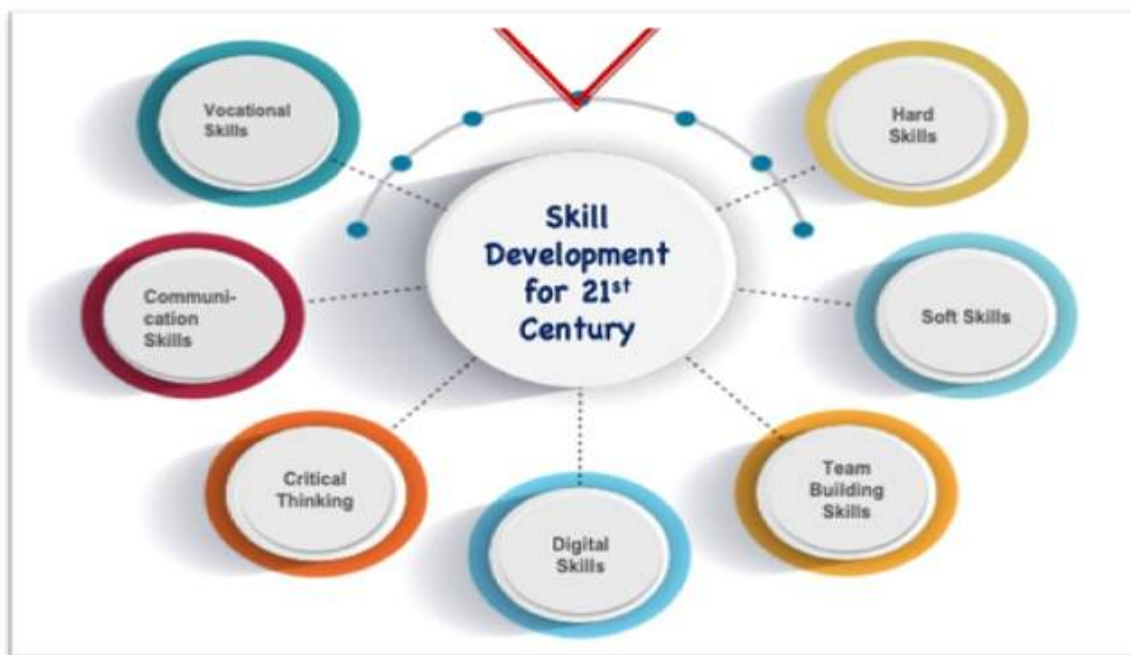


Holistic education not only lays emphasis on the mind and body development of an individual but also gives equal importance to the relationship between man and nature; man and community, etc. Hence, NAAC also lays stress on the community outreach activities undertaken by the students of the institution. Criterion 3 discusses in detail all such activities that involve students reaching out to the community and doing extension activities and thereby establishing a healthy relationship. 21st century students are fully aware of the importance of conservation of environment and the urgent need to conserve and sustain resources. They wish to contribute generously to the issues pertaining to environment conservation and other social causes. Hence, they look out for such institutions, while seeking admission, that can provide them a foothold in the social pyramid.

5. Skill Development for 21st Century: Getting Ready for the Plunge

Albert Einstein said, “Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.” Following steps are required for skill development at institution level to make students market ready:

- ◆ Curriculum strengthening to meet the demands of industry
- ◆ Introduction of skill-based Courses
- ◆ Industry Institute Academia co-operation
- ◆ Role of Alumni as Mentor/Skill enhancer
- ◆ Feedback from stakeholders for initiation of new Courses
- ◆ Market analysis to upgrade/update existing skill/ vocational courses



Students in present times need more than text-based education to attain a livelihood. Hence, they ensure before selecting an institution whether it is capable of enhancing their skill sets and in the process making them job-ready according to the diverse needs of the market. They look for an institution that provides broad-based education rather than typical, conservative orthodox teaching methodology and outdated skills.

Conclusion:

It goes without saying that the student is the major stakeholder of an educational institution and with the current generation of tech-savvy and street smart individuals, HEIs will have to gear themselves up to, either meet their demands and expectations or get out of the race. Institutions that do not adapt to the current student demands, market scenario and job requirements will soon perish. Also, institutions who prefer quantity over quality will also lag behind in the long run. Therefore, it is high time that the HEIs put on their thinking caps, do some brainstorming, refer to the NAAC recommendations and manuals, follow guidelines issued by NEP 2020 and usher in a new culture into their work environment- the culture of excellence.

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