

# QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION (QAA) OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NEPAL: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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# Introduction

- Nepal: a Himalayan country
- situated on the slopes of the central Himalayas
- lies between China on the north and India on the east, south and west
- roughly rectangular
- Land area: 147,181 sq. km.
- about 83 per cent of total land area: high mountain and wavy hills and
- remaining 17 per cent flat lands of the terai.
- Altitude varies from some 60 m above sea level in the terai to 8,848 m in the mountain with the Mt. Everest on its lap.



- Commencement of higher education in Nepal in the early quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Establishment of Trichandra College in 1918 AD.
- The first University, Tribhuvan University,
- established in 1959AD.
- A sole university up until 1986 AD.
- A multi-university concept was visualized only after the establishment of one other University, Mahendra Sanskrit University in 1986.



- Nepal is undergoing rapid changes in terms of higher education development.
- Nonetheless, this has given rise to major concerns of higher education development in the country towards ensuring quality of the higher education programs.
- The development of higher education institutions and enrolment expansion in the country has taken place without a system to ensuring quality norms and standards.

- This paper lists the issues of higher education development in terms of:
  - QAA efforts
  - QAA practices
  - QAA challenges

- **QAA Efforts in Nepal**
- Concerned with the need to establish a system to ensure quality of higher education institutions as well as to monitor them on periodic basis, the government envisioned the formation of Quality Assurance and Accreditation system in the 10<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan (2002-07).
- Prior to that quality assurance and accreditation was unheard of in Nepalese higher education institutions.

- University Grants Commission (UGC), established in 1993, using the authority provided in its regulation, formed Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee and Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division (QAAD) to work as its secretariat in 2007.
- The QAA setup is permanent functional entity to undertake quality assurance and accreditation of higher education programs and institutions.

- The establishment of QAA system in the country is a part of the Second Higher Education Project, a national reform initiative supported by the World Bank.
- It is being piloted through some selected institutions, not as discriminatory evaluation system, but as confidence building measure towards achieving and sustaining better quality.
- The ultimate goal of QAA system is to building a culture of quality standards in the field of higher education.

- For the promotion of quality culture coupled with good practices, the triangulation of bottom up and top down approaches has been exercised in the QAA system in Nepal following the ongoing international experiences.
- The concerned institutions undergo their own quality audit before they submit their SSR for peer evaluation.
- Then onwards, the UGC facilitates the peer review of that institution.



- The UGC wishes to continue to assist the HEIs to develop their internal quality assurance systems and enhance their programs.
- The evaluation framework inscribes internal and external review processes. Evidence-based self-evaluation by institutions is central to the internal and external review processes.
- External peer review is employed to reach evidence-based judgments.
- National reference standards have been developed to inform institutions, reviewers and other stakeholders.

- The participating institutions of higher education on voluntary basis take self initiatives for quality self assessment and submit for peer review.
- The Peer Review Team (one foreign expert included) makes critical examination of the self assessment report and makes field based observation towards completing the assessment diagnostically and make suggestions for quality enhancement in line with the criteria and indicators of QAA system.



- **QAA Approach in Nepal**
- In Nepal, QAA is a new concept and thus is in a formative stage.
- Universities, their constituent Institutes, Campuses and Departments, as well as the affiliated colleges are covered by the QAA system in the country.
- Since most of the institutions have been established without the basis of QAA standard, joining and completing the QAA process has been felt as a challenging task.
- For this Nepal is endeavoring to enhance the capacity for establishing a viable QAA system in the country.

- Therefore,
  - motivation,
  - facilitation and
  - support -- the key aspects of the strategy taken by UGC to promoting
  - QAA system in the country.
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- The QAA process in Nepal is rightly depicted in the following schematic diagram.

# Schematic Presentation of QAA system in Nepal

- **Some of the QAA Accomplishments**
- The QAA process has been piloted through selected institutions participating on voluntary basis under this system. These institutions are examined under 8 benchmarks supported by 120 indicators.
- More importantly, the personnel of concerned institutions are given orientation on preparation of self assessment report/ Self Study Report (SSR). Eleven of the participating Institutions have already been accredited.
- Similarly, nine institutions have prepared their SSRs and are in the Peer Review phase. Thirteen institutions have completed QAA cycle. Another 64 Campuses are on the SSR phase.

- Another important achievement is the completion of the Draft Act for the establishment of QAA Board, an independent body, for QAA in the country.
- It is at the disposal of the Ministry for Education for final enactment through the Constituent Assembly/Parliament.
- The UGC has signed MoU with NAAC, India for mutual cooperation in the sphere of Quality Assurance and Accreditation.
- Entering into the arena of global quality concerns, UGC has become an intermediate member of APQN body and a full member of INQAAHE.



- **Transformation of the Accredited Institutions**
- Most of the accredited institutions witnessed transformation from physical infrastructure to academic infrastructure.
- Introduction of accreditation system as a formative assessment system of participating HEIs has helped them transform at a greater speed.



- Most of the HEIs were not familiar with the quality culture within themselves for Self Assessment and Peer Review system.
- QAA system has helped develop quality culture among the participating HEIs.
- They have come up with their own monitoring and evaluation system as well.
- They were motivated to enhance their academic buildings with modern facilities in terms of empowering the students with ICT facilities and improved library services.
- In the mean time, community outreach program and cultural activity as an extracurricular activity of the students have also increased.



- A separate subject-wise Department with logistics has become a trend among participating HEIs.
- Such a system has helped them maintain their academic calendar and information system coupled with modern tools and techniques in class delivery.
- The HEIs have been inspired towards good governance and
- QAA system has become a boon to them to restructuring their institutions whereby they could motivate the stakeholders in decision-making and driving them towards their accountability to the students and the community.

- Moreover,
- They could come up with their vision, mission and goals for their better performance.
- A collaborative learning environment has been built up encompassing consultancy, counseling and extension activities that has shaped the teaching-learning process as learner centered approach.
- Furthermore, a participatory and transparent system has been developed among the HEIs as a result of reform in information system.

- QAA has been proved to be a means of transformation of participating HEIs.
- The Institutions which have participated in the process have transformed themselves to becoming model institutions.
- They could establish international linkages and could establish a new discipline within the Institution on community demand.
- A Japanese Language centre was established in one of the accredited campuses, Balkumari Campus in Chitwan on community demand.



- As QAA assessment proceeds, the magnitude and intensity of the task go on increasing.
- In this regard, as HEIs attempted to undertake self assessment towards meeting the criteria of QAA.
- They could realize the depth and difficulty level of accomplishment of self assessment and meeting the target.

- **Challenges**

- Despite the existence of internal quality cell in the respective institutions, their internal audit system has not been developed at an appreciable level.
- Thus, it does not reflect the true institutionalization of quality culture in the HEIs.
- In addition, most of the HEIs suffer from the lack of highly qualified faculties and administrative personnel who could drive those institutions towards the path of sustainability of quality culture with them.
- Such a gap has debarred them to initiate their own international linkages for engendering quality in their teaching-learning process coupled with research and other quality outsourcing.

- This has become an inhibiting factor for the promotion of credit transfer across the border and recognition of degree conferred by them.
- It is paradoxical that the growing private HEIs are almost outside the regime of quality culture restricting them from both regional and central level interactions.

- **Way Forward**

- Since external quality assurance is the core part of our accreditation process, it has definitely made an impact in our practice.
- It has given the participating institutions an external exposure about the QAA systems in other parts of the world.
- It is an opportunity for them to learn about their own evaluation and rankings.

- More so, it has helped the participating institutions to raise their bar after accreditation in many aspects including the introduction of ICT in teaching-learning process and elevation of their research front.



- Moreover, they would establish their own link with the foreign countries as a partner in the promotion of their academic infrastructure to a greater extent.



- In this way, it is moving towards the achievement of its goals in the accomplishment of quality in higher education in the country.
- Nevertheless, one of the major lacuna of quality assurance process has been the lack of research in the impact analysis of the higher educational institutions.



Thank you