



# Improvement on the quality assurance system in higher education

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## ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and clarifies the fundamental concepts and implementation frameworks of Quality Assurance and Total Quality Management in Higher Education (sometimes also known as Total Quality Education). It is based on research, empirical studies, best practices and consultancy activities. The paper is useful both for quality professionals as well as academicians in interpreting the critical issues and designing the core elements of Quality in Education. Learning outcome is considered as the core focus of quality in educational institutions. The Bloom's (1958) provided learning classifications in three basic domains, i.e. Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor. His work has provided the basic gadget for measuring and managing learning. This is used in developing academic standards, lesson plans, academic standards, exams, teaching methodologies, etc. They are discussed in detail with examples. The quality of learning can be framed against each of these levels. The importance of lesson plans (quality plans) is specially addressed.

## Keywords:

Objectives of Education and Quality, Social Excellence, National Excellence, Academic Excellence, learning levels, Academic Standards and Performance Measures, Quality Teacher

## Introduction:

It is not just the quantity but the quality of education which leads a country to rapid growth and industrialization. In other words, it is not about just the "output" but about the "Outcome" of colleges and universities. The number of graduating students is considered the output, while the quality of graduates is the outcome. Quality Assurance (QA) is an important and organized discipline for the academia, as well as planners and government to ensure appropriate outcome of educational institutions. This is carried out at two levels. External QA (also called accreditation) is carried out by regulatory/professional bodies at the national/provincial level to ensure the

minimum performance level of educational programs and institutions. It must be independent and unbiased. The other level, Internal QA, is an internal and integral part of the institution's administration and management systems. It implements a set of policies, programs and procedures set-up by an institution to provide confidence and transparency in their outcomes related to their graduates, teachers, exams, and infra-structure. QA in education does not focus just on the academic performance, but also on the social and national outcomes. In many countries, the Quality of Education is not being addressed properly. As a result quality deteriorates at the country level.

## Objectives of Education and Quality

The QA framework of any institution is derived from its broad objectives. Therefore, the right objectives of education must be set, both at the national as well as institution levels, before designing the QA framework. Most developed countries policies of QA revolve against these objectives. The US Strategic Education Plan 2002-2007 (Ref 1) as well as Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area 2005 (Ref 6) define quality of education as fulfilling the national educational goals and objectives. These objectives may broadly be classified into the following three categories:

### 1. Social Excellence.

Social norms are the foundation of a country's culture and provide longevity to its social values. Many religions and/or political systems attempt to provide such norms. Different groups/countries have chosen different models for their community affairs and ethics, e.g. Islamic ethics, Christian Ethics, Hindu Ethics, socialism, etc. The believers of these religions derive their social norms from their religions. Many countries measure the social outcome of their institutions at the country levels. Some of the social performances of the US schools are measured as follows (Ref: Strategic Education Plan of the USA for 2002-2007 - USA Dept. of Education)

### 2. National Excellence.

Unity and integrity among the countrymen cannot be taken for granted. It must be designed, developed and groomed through the educational processes. It can easily be lost with unplanned and borrowed literature of other countries. For this to be a strong objective, every mean must be used, including education, media, and the law. The subject of Social Studies taught in schools is specifically designed to achieve this goal. These values are also normally imbedded in many other subjects, like Literature.

Similarly, many extra-curricular activities are also designed to achieve this goal, e.g. the morning assembly in schools, the national anthem in all public functions, national integrity in classes, defence training in schools and colleges, etc. For example, the national educational policy of Japan focuses on the development of nationalist and ethical Japanese irrespective of the level, type, or location of education. The Japanese design every curriculum to ensure this and arrange various activities, e.g. preparedness and readiness for any national disaster through effective practical training in the courses and an annual day to prove this.

### 3. Academic Excellence.

This focuses around academic outcome, i.e. results of academic learning. This is creation of the right capabilities of the subject matter/discipline, e.g. engineering, medicine, chemistry etc. Its quality is usually measured by many indicators, including but not limited to Student Grades. Other measures also include Industry Feedbacks, Employability, Career Progression, Job Retention Rates, Accessibility, Affordability, and fulfilment of National Economic and Defence Priorities, etc. University Degrees without ensuring such measures will create an unstable educational infrastructure in the country. Excellence in Professional education implies relevant and particular set of knowledge, skills and capabilities that are required by the employers of that country.

**Learning Levels** Teaching by itself is not and must never end in itself. It must ensure appropriate learning. Before any Quality Assurance framework is established, it is important to establish the required LEARNING OUTCOME – the quality of the output of the institution. Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom B., Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, 1956) provides six levels of learning, which should be used for setting standards in every educational

institution. They are in an increasing order of difficulty:

**Academic Standards.** These standards can become an important component of any QA program. They can also be used for teachers' validation and development purposes; as well as designing examination which evaluate students truly for each level separately and appropriately (familiarity, comprehension, application, etc.) For example, the math tables are taught and memorized (Knowledge Level) in early classes, but many children are found unable to use these tables in every day life (Application Level problem). Similarly, five time prayers are taught in Islamiat (Knowledge Level), but most students in schools and colleges cannot pray correctly, and many do not pray at all (Application Level problem). In higher business education, Leadership is commonly taught as a subject up to Knowledge Level, whereas most students do not develop leadership skills (Application Level problem) and do not understand what leadership is from a practical point of view (Comprehension Level problem).

**Quality Teacher:** A highly qualified teacher does not mean high Quality teacher. Highly qualified refers to high level of degrees (e.g. MS or PhD, etc.). Whereas, this does not mean he/she can teach the subject matter effectively. For a teacher to be good, he/she will to build capabilities in many other fields, in addition to the subject matter.

### Conclusion:

In order to address QA effectively in the education sector, the following areas need special attention and improvements: 1. It is not just the quantity (output) but the quality (outcome) of education which leads a country to rapid growth and industrialization. 2. The objectives of education must be clearly understood and imbedded into the policies.

These can be divided into three domains: Social Excellence, National Excellence and Academic Excellence. 3. There are six key educational processes where quality gets affected: Teacher, Curricula, Exams, Research, Communication and Students/Parents. 4. There are four aspects of Management Processes which affect quality: Leadership, Administration, Quality Assurance Program, and Institutional Culture. 5. Every institution should seriously into Quality Assurance and should prepare an action program to deal with it effectively.

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