Fast changing technology - a need for dynamic accreditation

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ABSTRACT: Many academic institutions have not been accredited by qualified accrediting agencies due to paucity of time. In some cases, the institutions so accredited do not maintain their standard for a long period time for various reasons. In some cases, institutions so accredited for five years, do not match with the institutions accredited three to four years later. With the advancements in science and technology, and in the field of information technology, in particular, it is essential that such a dynamic accreditation system is put in place to apprise the stakeholders on the standard and quality of academic institutions. In this article, a dynamic model is proposed and discussed to validate the institution's standard correct in a short period of time.

INTRODUCTION

With an ever-growing number of academic institutions in the world and the advancement of knowledge in the field of science and technology in particular, it is inevitable that accreditation is required for undergraduate and postgraduate education programmes where adequate quality control measures should be instituted. The purpose of accreditation is to recognise excellence in professional education in colleges and universities at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The evaluated assessments are used by the stakeholders, viz. institutions, students, employers and the society at large [1-4].

Accreditation is a process used around the world to evaluate the standard and quality of academic institutions. It is an excellent concept from several perspectives, including institutional prestige, competitiveness, graduates' prospects, teaching quality, requirement compliance, and others. As the number of academic institutions is increasing globally, it has become mandatory to get these institutions accredited, to provide information for the benefit of stakeholders [5-7].

The aim of accreditation is to ensure that the institutions that offer education and training undergo a process of accreditation and ensure their quality at all times. To achieve perfection, it is essential to consider small things that constitute the whole education and training process. It is also apt that upgrading each of these components is essential.

The four components of quality assurance in education and training are as follows:

1. Quality of every component needs attention about the up-keep of quality standards;
2. Expiry of quality standards of these components with respect to the period of validity of accrediting grades;
3. Accreditation grades are valid for three/five years. This leads to outdated syllabi, as well as obsolete infrastructure and equipment. It should be dynamic, and should have the flexibility to upgrade or downgrade the status dynamically based on the factors concerned;
4. Accreditation should not be limited to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It should be extended to training and skill upgrade programmes and research programmes of universities and other tertiary education institutions [4][5].

It has been found that in the so-called developing countries, the parameters considered for accreditation that are set by local accreditation bodies are so vague that it is quite difficult to pinpoint and fix the grades for each of the parameters under consideration. What the governing councils often stipulate for the institutions is mostly name sake. They do not offer useful and measurable guidelines. They have no fixed guidelines regarding their work as members of the governing council. The growth of the institution is critical and has more dependence on the measures and guidelines provided by the council. In the absence of guidelines, the growth of the academic institution is skewed. In fact, there is

a vacuum in the constitution of the right kind of personnel appointed to the council and their useful and measurable guidelines [5]. These grossly undermine the purpose and process of accreditation with national bodies.

Today, there are international accreditation systems available to grade the academic institutions around the world. For evaluating the quality, self-appraised data about the institution is made available by the institution. A committee of experts is constituted. Experts are academic stalwarts and industrial specialists. If the experts are purely from the academic institutions the grading after valuation will be of one type. Where the experts are from academics and industry, the grading will be of different type.

After careful analysis of the above point, one may come to know the difference in both the systems. The industry experts are subjective in their analysis based on their background experience and exposure. In the case of academic experts only, the gradation is also subjective, but the variation from person to person may diverge in a limited way. However, the subjectivity in the accreditation will exist in both systems. If one must go close to the ideal system of accreditation, efforts have to be put in to reduce subjectivity [8].

SUBJECTIVITY

The present system of evaluation has to be carefully analysed. Awarding of marks to the items that will not change with persons have to be grouped as Part - I. Maximum subjectivity items have to be grouped as Part - II. Careful analysis of Part - II would provide more chances to split them further, to ensure lesser subjectivity.

Based on the self-appraisal reports forwarded by the institutions, a team of specialists will have to undertake the evaluation and provide gradation without unnecessary visits to the institution. In some cases, on-site verification of data and assessment by a visiting team will have to be made. The visiting team should be given the gradation made by the first team. If any abnormal variations in the academic grades between the two teams are detected, then, the two grades should be assessed by a higher-level assessment team. However, more weight should be given to the grades awarded after site verification. By this process, the subjectivity can be significantly minimised.

VALIDITY

The accreditation grading, once awarded, will be valid for five years and, in some cases, it could be valid for three years (especially in cases of new and emerging technologies). In three years, in the fast-changing technology scenario, many things may become obsolete and many advancements come into being and, hence, the validity once awarded may have to be revised by keeping pace with the technology changes.

Around the world, academic institutions are facing obsolescence - the syllabus becomes obsolete. In some cases, the curriculum itself must be reviewed and revised. One needs not to presume that obsolescence affects only some universities. It is relevant to all technical and higher educational institutions.

Advancements in science, technology and other subjects are happening to all courses and to all universities that offer higher education. The recent recession in some industries happened because of the great influence of information technology. The influence of information technology has resulted in influencing the academic curriculum and syllabus around the world. The net result is that that there is a kind of academic recession due to which university staff members have to rethink the academic gradation by accrediting agencies for *dynamic accreditation*.

DYNAMIC ACCREDITATION

The new system proposed will be a fore-runner in accreditation around the world. The institution will be required to file their self-appraisal data on-line to the accreditation agency through an outfit assigned for this purpose. The new outfit would process the data and make it available to the accreditation agency for assessment. The institution would also furnish data on new additions and obsolescence from the institution to the designated on-line outfit.

The new outfit will have experts (ombudsmen) appointed in each region for collecting information about the deficiency of the institution and keep the data profile current in the on-line outfit. The on-line outfit would process the data on file with new additions and subtractions of data. Accordingly, the grading on assessment would also change. Thus, dynamic assessment is also added.

This system would make the accreditation agency up-to-date and also accreditation grades awarded by the agency up-to-date.

Fast changing technology stimulates a need for dynamic accreditation for which the process should be as follows:

- Accreditation will become on-line;
- The quality of the institution will be dynamically presented by accrediting agencies;
- This process will enlighten all the stake holders on the current status;

- The general public can find out about the current status of the institution, where the change in the gradation will be made available;
- Institutions' accreditation status will be at the door-steps of the stakeholders;
- The proposed system helps accreditation agencies to keep the gradation dynamic;
- On-line accreditation for the first time being proposed by the author;
- It is high time that academic institutions and accrediting agencies wake up to the reality and be tech-savvy in offering the correct/current accreditation status.

All accreditation agencies should go for dynamic accreditation.

MOTIVATION

As then the Vice-Chancellor of Anna University in Chennai, India, the largest technological university in the world, the author introduced on-line *hall ticket* distribution for the students appearing for engineering admissions, for the first time in the world. This system has helped students from anywhere in India to have their hall ticket in three minutes.

The author introduced *distributed counselling* for engineering admissions, for the first time in the world, to help the students to minimise their travel and other expenses.

The author has served as a Member-Secretary of the National Board of Accreditation, an agency established by the Government of India through the All India Council for Technical Education.

The author has served on the Executive Council of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), established by the University Grants Commission of the Government of India.

The author has also served in the Government of India at All India Council for Technical Education, where he was involved in framing rules and regulations for technical education in India. Dynamic accreditation is the culmination of the experience at various levels of technical education management and administration.

Dynamic accreditation is a must for all accreditation agencies in the world.

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