

Quest for world-class universities in Assam

Developing holistic individuals, the capability of students in the form of skill development and enrichment of values through learning, from pre-school to higher education is essential in the 21st Century.

In the meantime, the National Policy of Education 2020 mandated that all higher educational institutions (HEIs) shall aim to become multidisciplinary institutions and shall aim to have larger student enrolment preferably in thousands, for optimal use of infrastructure, resources and for the creation of vibrant multidisciplinary communities by 2040.

We are all aware that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The new education policy has given due care to achieve the SDG 4s of the United Nations which sets 10 targets. Seven targets are outcome targets and 3 means of implementation of quality for world education.

Considering the targets for the year, all HEIs must first plan to become multidisciplinary by 2030, and then gradually increase the strength of students to the desired levels. The policy also felt the need for at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district by 2030. The target to achieve the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035 is another mission in the NEP 2020. In such a challenge, it is of great consternation to policymakers of HEIs in Assam that the scenario is comparatively poor to the peers at the national and international level. The target seems tougher in the sense that only a few Indian institutions are capable to enlist themselves among the top 200 in a prestigious ranking like the *Times Higher Education* World University, the QS ranking, or the Shanghai

Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). In addition to this, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was approved by the MHRD (presently as Ministry of Education) and it was launched by the Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development on 29th September 2015. This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country. The parameters broadly cover "Teaching, Learning and Resources," "Research and Professional Practices," "Graduation Outcome," "Outreach and Inclusivity," and "Perception".

India rankings introduce recently, a new category of "Research Institutions". The institutions that wish to participate should fulfil the following eligibility criteria:

a) At least 500 research publications indexed in Web of Science/Scopus for 3 years.

OR

b) At least 1,000 students enrolled in the PhD programme.

There is always a big question in the aspiring minds of Assam whether it is doable among the Universities of Assam or not.

Though the Indian education system is under tremendous stress in comparison to the universities of BRICK economies, higher education has expanded drastically with many changes since independence. On the other hand, the higher education system of Assam is gradually maturing with 18 State Universities, 2 Central Universities 6 Private universities only in the year 2020. Slow growth was seen in the higher education system in the state of Assam before the year 2010. Not many new specializations were created in the universities. India is already on the back foot in the academic standard in comparison to the global standard in terms of GER, Knowledge-Economy Index etc. In such a situation the universities in the State of Assam must be capable to achieve an average standard of the all-India standard.

The slower growth has been driven by the gaps in the demographic

profile and academic profile of Assam in comparison to India. It is seen that the General Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the Indian scenario is 26.3% while the GER in the context of Assam is 18.9%. The GER male and female in India is 26.3% and 26.4% respectively while these numbers for Assam are 19.1% and 18.3% respectively. The literacy rate in our country is 74.04% while Assam has a literacy percentage of 73.18%. The literacy rate in the male and female population is 82.14% and 65.46% while in the case of Assam the values are 78.81% and 67.27% respectively. The Gender Parity Index for India is 1.00 while it is 0.95 for Assam.

The academic profile of Assam can be compared with the national profile through some of the parameters. The percentage of NAAC accredited universities in the country is 31.92% while the same is 22% in Assam. In India 2.52% are graded as A++ while none in Assam is graded as A++, 7.85% are A+ while again in Assam there is none in this category. 47% of universities are graded A while 60% of the universities in Assam are graded as A. B++ universities are 7.26% in India, B+ are 7.26% and B are 24.29% while there is no university in Assam with B++, 20% with B+ and 20% with B. 3.78% universities in India are graded C while no university in Assam is graded C.

The percentage of NAAC accredited colleges in the country is 13.31% while the same is 26.65% in Assam. In India 0.3% are graded as A++ while in Assam 7.58% are graded as A++, 2.63% are A+ while again in Assam there is none. 21.27% of colleges are graded A while 8.97% of the colleges in Assam are graded as A. B+ colleges are 10.32% in India, B+ are 13.4% and B are 42.6% while there are 8.28% colleges in Assam with B+, 8.27% with B+ and 57.94% with B. 9.49% colleges in India are graded C while the number is 8.26% in Assam. The accreditation is valid for 5 years.

Teacher Pupil Ratio in India is 23.00%. It is 26.00% in Assam. 11 types of Degree awarding Universities/Institutions exist in the country while only 5 types exist in Assam. (Source: India Higher Education Profile 2018-19 by AIU.) However, in the last couple of years, the Government of Assam has taken positive steps by establishing a few types of State Universities to introduce divergence field of research studies.

Nomenclature of state Universities of Assam for Internationalisation of Education

Future growth potential and inbound or outbound student mobility ratio depend on the capability for

achieving the following ideas in the higher educational institutions in Assam.

■ Introduction of Educational administration system through digitization: This can be achieved by the introduction of ERP (Enterprise of Resource Planning).

■ Exercise institutional gap analysis & introduction of monitoring agency: Here, we mean institutional gap by:

■ Infrastructural gap which will help to identify the reason for inability and for not registering under Section 12(B) of UGC Act, 1956.

■ Faculty-student ratio will have a positive impact on academic quality. As per the AICTE guideline, the desirable ratio is 1:10 and the minimum is 1:15. AICTE gives deficiency in case the ratio is higher than 1:15.

■ Needs appropriate Educational Spending:

■ Coverage of Central Government funding by migrating of University registration from Section 2(f) to 12(B) of the UGC Act, 1956.

■ Appropriate & proportionate funding in all state universities:

■ Unitary department to handle budgetary code to all the state Universities in Assam

■ Introduction of Quality assurance and accreditation: Enhancement for capabilities of NBA or NAAC accreditation.

■ Target to the recruitment market

■ Culture for conducting Industry-academia meet in the form of PPP (Public-Private Partnership) model.

■ Development of entrepreneurship education:

The flagship programmes of the Government of India.

■ Institutional capabilities for providing education in emergencies: Both Central Government & State Government are committed to education as education is constitutionally defined as a concurrent area of the legislation.

However, the planners in the educational area need to be more resilient and responsive in emergencies and crises mitigation. The development of culture for strengthening the education data system is essential in emergencies and crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Education Management Information systems are essential. Learning Management software is essentially helping students in such crises. Last but not least that there is a need for stable high-speed internet connectivity in every college and University in Assam at an affordable cost. The functional framework of Higher Learning Institutions must be based on the edifice of Industry 4.0 technologies.

*Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes.
Don't resist them - that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality.*

— Lao Tzu

