Higher Education Quality Mandate: RSTV – Big Picture

Anchor: Vishal Dahiya

Guests: Prof. V. Ramgopal Rao, Director, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi; Prof. Anu Singh Lather, Vice-Chancellor, Ambedkar University, Delhi; Renu Batra, Additional Secretary, University Grants Commission.

What's in the News?

- The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has developed the **Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate** in an effort to improve the quality of Higher Educational Institutions.
- **The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** has adopted the Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate to improve the quality of higher educational institutions.
- The quality mandate aims at evolving the higher education system to equip the country's next-generation with vital skills, knowledge and ethics to lead a rewarding life.

Larger Background:

- UNESCO listed Quality Education as one of the top priorities on their list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), as the higher education system plays an important role in a country's overall development.
- India's higher education system is the third-largest in the world.
- The Indian Constitution places education as a concurrent responsibility of both the centre and state.
  - The centre coordinates and fixes the standards in higher and technical education, while the state takes responsibility for education at the school level.
- The UGC came up with the Higher Education Quality Improvement Mandate in May 2018, as India is a signatory to the SDGs. The Mandate was approved by the commission, and a meeting was held with the Vice-Chancellors from all over the country to discuss the adoption and implementation of the Mandate.

The Five verticals of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Mandate:

- The Higher Education Quality Improvement Mandate consists of five documents covering the five verticals of the Quality Mandate:
  - Evaluation reforms
  - Eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses
  - Human values and professional ethics
  - Faculty induction
  - Academic research integrity.
- **Evaluation Reforms-** have been introduced to make the student assessment effective, meaningful and more connected to the learning outcomes.
- **SATAT** was introduced as a framework for the development of an Eco-friendly and Sustainable Campus.
- **MulyaPravah** was introduced as guidelines, for the inculcation of Human values and Professionals Ethics.
- **Guru-Dakshta** has been introduced as a guide to Faculty Induction. This programme consists of ten modules which have to be undertaken compulsorily by the teachers who teach at the Higher Educational Institutions (HEI).
  - It aims to sensitize the faculty to adopt a learner-centred approach using an **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** integrated learning module. It would help the teacher

identify the individual needs of a student, thereby helping them become better learners.

- UGC has established a **Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (CARE)** to continuously monitor and identify quality journals across disciplines.
  - o It would help further the cause of promoting academic integrity and ethical publishing, as the credibility of a research publication has a direct impact on the individual and on the institution.
  - o CARE has a committee consisting of individuals from all the regulatory committees to help identify the list of good quality journals from various fields which are referred to as the '**CARE Reference List of Quality Journals**.'

Other Programmes introduced by the UGC:

- **Deeksharambh**- is a guide to the Student Induction Programme (SIP).
  - o It aims at helping the new students to adjust and feel comfortable in a new environment while helping them adopt the ethos and culture of the Institution.
  - o It would also be instrumental in helping the students create bonds with fellow students and faculty members. Mentoring is one of the key aspects of the programme as it would help in the development of a stronger bond between the teacher and the student.
  - o Various awareness programmes coupled with teacher training workshops would be conducted for facilitating the implementation of the SIP.

- **Paramarsh-** is a scheme for mentoring the **National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC)** accreditation aspirant institutions to promote quality assurance in Higher Education.

  - o The scheme will be operationalized through a "Hub & Spoke" model wherein the mentor institution, called the "Hub" is centralized and will have the responsibility of guiding the mentee institution through the "Spoke" i.e. through the services provided to the mentee for self-improvement.
  - o It would also facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in the Mentee Institutions.
  - o It would aid in improving the accreditation culture, as the scheme aims at accrediting all the Higher Education Institutions by 2022.
- **STRIDE** (Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy) is an effort to support multi-disciplinary, socially relevant and need-based research. The scheme has three components:
  - o Capacity Building
  - o Undertaking research in all fields of sciences.
  - o High Impact Research in Human Sciences

Advantages of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate:

- The report on Evaluation Reforms has insisted on the implementation of a learning outcome-based curriculum framework and supports the usage of a tiered intervention approach.
- The Mandate requires the institutions to ensure that there's an alignment between the learning outcome of the course and the acquisition of employable skill-set. Other attributes of the students would also be evaluated, such as the student's competency in extracurricular activities.
- The mandate places emphasis on scientific, practice-based learning and shifts the focus from rote learning. It supports internal assessment throughout the semester rather than conducting one exam at the end of the semester.
- The mandate also places focus on quality research and promotes ethical integrity in research and

publishing.

Issues:

- **Shortage of Teaching Staff:** According to UGC, 35% professor posts, and 46% associate professor posts which are vacant. There is a shortage of good teaching staff in the regional-state level universities.
  - o There is an increased demand but a stagnant supply of teachers.
  - o The committee concluded that this could be due to the following reasons:
    - ▪ The students are not finding the teaching profession attractive or promising.
    - ▪ The hiring procedure could be tiresome and involve many procedural formalities.
- **Shortage of Funds:** Majority of the funds from the Ministry of Human Resource Development is allocated to the Central Universities, although the number of students attending the central universities is very less compared to the state colleges.
  - o Nearly 65% of the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** budget is utilised by the central universities and their colleges while state universities and their affiliated colleges get only the remaining 35%.
  - o Indian R&D expenditure has remained constant at around 0.6%-0.7% of its GDP.
  - o India has severely under-invested in education over the last 40 years, and today even the top institutions have very poor laboratory facilities.
- **Research and publications:** Most of the time, the faculty is under pressure to publish a certain number of papers to gain promotion, which often makes them publish in predatory journals as a way out.
  - o The pressure to publish papers can also deviate the focus from teaching.
- **Political Motives:** The head of some Institutions are appointed due to political motivations in certain cases, which has a negative impact on the development of the Institution.
  - o This not only hampers the growth of the Institution but also discourages the potential leaders with talent.
- **Lack of employable skills:** students lack employable skills in technical education. Most of the graduating students find it difficult to get a job due to the lack of relevant skills, as skill acquisition is not focussed upon during the course.

- **Poor Quality of Infrastructure:** most of the Universities lack proper facilities, such as access to properly equipped labs, which has an impact on the quality of education offered by the Institute. Most of the colleges and universities lack basic and high-end research facilities. Many institutes are running without proper infrastructure and basic facilities like libraries, hostels, transport, sports facility etc.

Way Forward:

- **Creating Positive Peer Pressure:** This would push the students and the faculty to improve the standards of their work while creating a healthy competitive environment.
  - o This would also prepare the students for the competitiveness of the real world.

- **Increasing the funding for the R&D Sector:** The funding for the R&D sector should be increased to improve infrastructure and the funding for research. It would also prevent the brain-drain of talents from the country.
  - o There are many Indian-born PhDs in universities around the world, kept away by paltry salaries and poor funding.

- **ICT integrated approach towards learning:** ICTs can enhance the quality of education by increasing learner motivation and engagement, facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, and by enhancing teacher training.

- ICTs are transformational tools which, when used appropriately, can promote the shift to a learner-centred environment and place emphasis on the acquisition of a relevant skillset.
- The skill gaps in different sectors should be identified and courses for enhancing employability in them should be offered.

- **Prioritization of Research:** Universities have to give equal priority to teaching, research and practice. This entails balancing faculty members' time between teaching, research and institute-building based on their individual capabilities.
- **Assessment and Accountability of the faculty:** The system of a performance audit of professors based on the feedback given by their students and colleagues should be set up. Other inputs like research papers, publications by teachers should be added in the performance audit in due course of time.

- **Leadership:** The Vice-Chancellors of the institutes should be evaluated based on their publications and the journals they've published in. This evaluation of the faculty should be adopted with a top-down approach. Action should be taken against faculty and Vice-Chancellors with more than 30% of publications in predatory journals.

- **Predatory Journals** are publications that accept manuscripts from researchers, but have no peer-review system. They also lack an editorial board. These are often found to publish mediocre papers, while charging huge publication charges.

Conclusion:

There is a need to implement innovative and transformational approach form primary to higher education level to make the Indian educational system globally more relevant and competitive. The journey has been initiated in the right direction. However, implementation in the strictest sense should be ensured. The mandate needs to be implemented with a top-down approach with the focus on research, faculty induction and the evaluation of the students. Efforts should be taken to spread awareness and inform students and the faculty regarding the predatory journals and research ethics.