

Role of Academic Libraries towards Digital Transformation of HEIs from the Perspective of NAAC Evaluation Process in India

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation refers to the transformation to ensure the consumption of services in a digital environment where the process of digitization plays a vital role in the modern ICT era. This process uses digital technology to usher change the way institutions operate and delivers value to the end-users. From the perspective of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) evaluation process for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) digital transformation is very much important and it is encouraged in the evaluation process; it is quite visible that digital transformation of HEIs would carry huge weightage in the evaluation process which, in turn, fetches for HEIs greater grades. Being constituent part of HEIs library and information centres have greater responsibilities towards fulfilment of digital transformation of HEIs. It promotes greater accessibility, transparency and quality within the higher education sector. The present study highlights the role of academic libraries in digital transformation of HEIs from the perspective of NAAC evaluation process in India.

Keywords: digital transformation, higher education institutions, academic libraries, national assessment and accreditation council (naac)

I. INTRODUCTION

Change in any sphere of life is constant where variable matters get associated with. The world of education cannot be an exception to it as the education system essentially remains to be an open system where continuous interaction with the society happens day in and day out. Advent of technology plays a catalytic role in this transformation or change process. Digital transformation refers to the transformation to ensure the consumption of services in a digital environment where the process of digitization plays a vital role in the modern ICT era. This process uses digital technology to usher change the way institutions operate and delivers value to their end-users. From the perspective of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) evaluation process for the higher education institutions (HEIs) digital transformation is very much important and the evaluation process can yield a better result for the HEIs if digital transformation process has been carried out. So, it is always encouraged to give importance to the digital transformation process for increasing the intrinsic value of the HEIs. Being constituent part of the HEIs library and information centres have greater responsibilities towards fulfilment of digital transformation of the HEIs. It promotes greater accessibility, transparency and quality within the higher education sector. The present study highlights the role of academic libraries in the digital transformation of the HEIs from the perspective of the NAAC evaluation process in India.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims:

- 1) to cater awareness about digital transformation of HEIs
- 2) to give an understanding on different aspects of digital transformation of HEIs
- 3) to discuss digital transformation of HEIs from the perspective of NAAC evaluation process in India
- 4) to discuss the role of academic libraries towards digital transformation process of HEIs in the context of NAAC evaluation process in India.

III. METHODOLOGY

It is a theoretical pursuit in respect of the role of academic libraries towards the digital transformation of the HEIs from the perspective of NAAC evaluation process in India. Primary sources of information like NAAC documents, etc were consulted to make the study.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Suresh Jange (2021) stressed on the librarians' role in a NAAC accreditation process in the pursuit of quality excellence in the Indian Higher education system in India.

R. Goarty and K.P. Gupta (2023) mentioned the various factors (like technological factors, organizational factors, environmental factors, etc.) responsible for digital transformation in higher academic institutions. They also highlighted how the academic and administrative processes were influenced by these factors.

T. Gkrimpizi (2022) mentioned various barriers to digital transformation in HEIs.

Berman SJ (2012) stressed on the adoption of a suitable plan for introducing various digital and physical components required for execution of business operations to run successfully in the long run.

NAAC has given specific metrics for improving quality education with greater visibility, acceptability and sustainability. The seven criteria have been identified by the NAAC as the basis of its assessment process in which digital transformation is encouraged to have better result in respect of achieving higher grade. In respect of the academic library, being an integral part of Higher Education institutions, Criteria IV of the NAAC evaluation document focuses on infrastructure and learning resources which can be improved with the help of digital transformation process.

V. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Digital transformation in education refers to the integration of digital technology into all aspects of teaching, learning and administration. This transformation goes beyond just using new tools; it represents a significant change in how educational institutions function and interact with students. The goal is to provide more personalised, efficient and accessible learning experiences.

1. Enhancing Teaching and Learning: It involves leveraging technology to create more effective, efficient and personalized educational experiences with emphasis on personalized learning, blended learning, and virtual and augmented reality. It also enhances student engagement in their learning process with using several techniques for gamification, interactive learning and hybrid learning.

2. Fostering Innovation and Improving Research: Fostering innovation and enhancing research are crucial for driving growth improving learning outcomes and staying competitive. HEIs should provide researchers with access to digital tools, data sets and high-performance computing infrastructure to facilitate cutting edge research. Inter disciplinary collaboration fosters collaboration across disciplines, Institutions and borders to tackle complex problems and drive innovation.

3. Streamlining Administration: Introduction of learning management systems along with other automation systems can greatly support the digital transformation process of HEIs. These are intended to manage daily operations, track attendance, and communicate with the stakeholders concerned.

4. Promoting Accessibility: Online learning platform and digital classrooms make quality education more accessible to students from diverse geographical locations. In this context the open universities like Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India are setting examples.

5. Developing Digital Skills: In this context digital skills for students have to be taken into consideration. Several aspects like digital literacy, technical skills and soft skills are to be inculcated among the students of the higher education institutions. For faculty members digital skills can be developed with the help of professional development programmes, digital pedagogy (supporting faculty members in designing and delivering online and blended courses, leveraging digital tools and platforms) and technical support. Higher education Institutions also develop long term digital transformation roadmap, plan for infrastructure and resources and opt for collaboration and partnerships to stay updated on emerging trends and best practices.

Benefits from Digital Transformation

1. Improved access to education
2. Enhanced learning experience
3. Increased efficiency
4. Economy in handling expenses
5. Alignment with NEP 2020

Challenges of Digital Transformation for the Higher Education Institutions

1. Digital divide
2. Resistance to change
3. Security and privacy
4. Digital literacy

VI. IMPACT OF NAAC EVALUATION PROCESS ON THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEIs

The Self Study Report (SSR) is based on seven criteria that includes the whole aspects of the HEIs. The following are the seven criteria which serve the basis of NAAC assessment process:

- 1. Curricular Aspects:** Under this criterion curriculum design and development, curricular planning and implementation, academic flexibility, curriculum enrichment and feedback system are assessed. Making institutional website and portraying the above aspects in the same is considered for having weightage for the higher education institutions.
- 2. Teaching, Learning and Evaluation:** In this criterion several aspects like student enrolment and profile, catering to student diversity, teaching-learning process, teacher profile and quality, evaluation process and reforms, student performance and learning outcomes and students' satisfaction survey are included. These areas are better served with indulgence in different digital transformation technologies.
- 3. Research, Innovations and Extension:** The areas included in this criterion are promotion of research and facilities, resource mobilization for research, innovation ecosystem, research publications and awards, consultancy, extension activities, and collaboration. It's worthy to mention here that the above aspects can bring about a phenomenal change and fetches an outstanding result with the technological upliftment.
- 4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources:** Here in this context physical facilities, library as a learning resource, IT infrastructure and maintenance of campus infrastructure are dealt with during the evaluation process. Development of infrastructure with latest technology always remains a part and parcel of the HEIs in the modern ICT era.
- 5. Student Support and Progression:** Assessment of student support, student progression, student participation and activities and alumni engagement are emphasized under the criterion.
- 6. Governance, Leadership and Management:** Institutional vision and leadership, strategy development and deployment, faculty empowerment strategies, financial management and resource mobilization, and internal quality assurance system fall under this criterion. Aspects like introducing e-governance system, installation of ERP software, LMS (Learning Management System) will gain extra weightage in the evaluation process.
- 7. Institutional Values and Best Practices:** Institutional values and social responsibilities, best practices and institutional distinctiveness will be counted here under this criterion. These are actually long-term issues. With a strong digital and physical infrastructure HEIs can develop far-reaching institutional values and best practices in the long run.

For considering the above aspects digital transformation process will be strengthened in a democratic way for accomplishing the goal of the HEIs in an effective and efficient way. In a nutshell we can conclude:

1. The assessment and accreditation criteria encourage the use of technology in various areas such as online learning platforms, digital libraries, research tools, etc.
2. Digital maturity, i.e. HEIs' ability to effectively integrate technology into its operations for achieving goals.
3. Continuous improvement for improving digital infrastructure, processes and practices to be competitive and relevant in the digital age.
4. Online teaching and learning infrastructure for designing and delivering high quality online courses.
5. Student engagement to create more interactive and personalised learning experiences.
6. Transparent administration in respect of admission to the courses and other administrative affairs.

NAAC encourages the importance of digital transformation and provides a framework for HEIs to assess and improve their digital capabilities. It aims at leveraging technology to enhance the processes undertaken for teaching, learning, research and administration.

The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasizes use of technology and innovation for the sustenance of the HEIs.

VII. ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESS OF THE HEIs FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NAAC EVALUATION PROCESS IN INDIA

Under criterion number 4 of the accreditation document 'library as a learning resource' is mentioned. The following aspects are considered under this point number 4.2:

a) 4.2.1 library is automated using integrated library management system (ILMS): -

An ILMS has the modules such as acquisitions (ordering and receiving the library materials), cataloging of the library materials procured, circulation of library materials among the patrons, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). 'Koha' developed by Katipo Communications, New Zealand is an example of ILMS.

b) 4.2.2 institution has access to the following:

(1) e-journals (2) e-ShodhSindhu (3) Shodhganga membership (4) e-books (5) databases (6) remote access to e-resources

c) 4.2.3 average annual expenditure for the purchase of books/ebooks and subscription to journals/ e journal during the last 5 years

d) 4.2.4 Percentage per day usage of the library by teachers and students (footfalls and login data for online access)

Academic libraries support the digital transformation of HEIs by transforming their activities and delivering the services to the users into a digital atmosphere. They have to embrace the developments in the IT field. In this context digital curation, digital preservation and digital archiving are taken into consideration.

Digital curation stresses on practices of managing and preserving digital assets ensuring their accessibility and usability overtime. It involves selecting, acquiring, organising, describing, preserving and making accessible digital materials for current and future use. Managing metadata, establishing access policy and ensuring the long-term sustainability of digital collections are needed.

Digital literacy and skills are the most important aspects because without these skills users and staff concerned will not be able to reap the benefits of digital resources. In this way the teaching and learning process can greatly be supported. Libraries provide access to a wide variety of digital resources like e-books, e-journals and databases. It facilitates research and scholarly communication. Libraries manage institutional repositories and data management systems helping researchers disseminate their works. Digital transformation results in 24/7 access to resources. Social inclusion of diverse fields of potential learners can be brought into the periphery of the learning environment. Academic libraries can act as a hub for digital transformation initiative bringing together technology, expertise and resources. Libraries ensure digital transformation efforts to be user centred and aligned with institutional goals. In a nutshell the role of academic libraries in the digital transformation process of the HEIs can be summarised into the following aspects:

1) adopting to digital landscape, 2) building a platform for digital transformation, 3) supporting teaching and learning processes, 4) facilitating research and innovation, and 5) enabling digital literacy and skills to harvest the result of digital transformation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Digital transformation can be possible if there is a strong physical infrastructure which will be greatly supported with advanced digital technology in higher education setup. In this context the author is pleased to refer to the renowned Indian cartoonist RK Laxman by remembering one of his masterpieces which follows like - I can show you our progress in this system but due to power cut it could not be possible right now. So physical infrastructure is essential and administrative heads of HEIs must see to that.

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