

Academic Performance Indicators (API): Quality versus Quantity? – A Deep Dilemma

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Abstract

The present paper reports an empirical research carried out to critically examine API (Academic Performance Indicator) and PBAS (Performance Based Appraisal System), which has been applied in higher educational institutions in India since 2010. In India, at all higher educational institutions academic performance indicator is applied for the direct recruitment and internal promotion of teachers under Career advancement scheme. The API was introduced in the form of quantitative approach as an attempt to link teacher's selection and their promotions according to their academic performance and also as measures for maintenance of standards in the higher education. Controversies surrounding the API since its introduction have been revisited empirically. Data was collected through Focused Group Discussion and content analysis was done qualitatively. Findings indicate that the flexibility given by UGC to best fit the API system as per the University need has its pros and cons and should be considered as an important aspect for further improvisation of the same.

Keywords: Higher Education, API – Academic Performance Indicator, CAS – Career Advancement Scheme, PBAS – Performance Based Appraisal System, UGC - University Grants Commission.

Introduction

India has a long and esteemed history in the arena of higher education. It was regarded as a noble centre of wisdom. In ancient times, the country was known to have shouldered some of the oldest formal universities in the world. In present scenario India's higher education system is the third largest in the world after the United States and China¹. The chief governing body of higher education in India is the University Grants Commission, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the centre and the state². Accreditation for higher learning is overseen by 15 autonomous institutions established by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Many bureaucrats approve that Indian higher education, despite significant and remarkable progress over the past decade, still copes with major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. It was reported in 2013^[13] news report that ex-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, , sternly criticized the serious qualitative deficiencies in Indian higher education while at the same time announcing plans for a major expansion of the system Perhaps the clearest and boldest statement of this issue can be found in the "Report to the Nation 2007" of the National Knowledge Commission which concludes that there is "a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep", and that it has to do with both the quantity and the quality of higher education in India. It is perhaps with aim to improve the Quality of Higher Education in India that the UGC adopted a quantitative approach to measure performance of teachers. the question then is, to what extent was this aim achieved and what were the controversies arising out of this approach?

Objective

The objective of this paper is to review and critically examine the API System introduced by the University Grants Commission for the purpose of Performance Appraisal of teachers in higher education.

Review of literature

Mann (2015) suggested that quality teaching has become an issue of importance as the landscape of higher education has been facing continuous changes³.

The literature stresses that “good teachers” have empathy for students, they are generally experienced teachers and most of all they are organized and expressive. (UGC, 2010)¹⁴. Hau (1996) argues that quality in higher education, and Quality Teaching in particular, springs from a never ending process of reduction and elimination of defects¹⁴. Quality of research and education cannot be enhanced, unless teachers employed in the higher education are made answerable for the low quality of research and teaching. Creating a tradition of research in schools and universities is an imperative if India has to transform itself from being only a consumer of available knowledge to being a leading producer in the world of new knowledge and ideas.

Out of several policies mooted and implemented by the central government to reform the higher education sector, one major change was introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the wake of the Sixth Pay Commission in 2008 for teachers in colleges and universities. This change sought to usher in institutional reform vide The Gazette of India (GoI 2010) by stipulating service conditions for the direct appointment and Career advancement scheme (CAS) for internal promotion of teachers under the system of Academic Performance Indicators (APIs) – Performance based appraisal system (PBAS) was introduced⁵.

These regulations explain qualifications for candidates, their eligibility for recruitment and promotion to higher positions under Career Advancement Scheme. These qualifications are related to teaching staff (university and college teachers) as well as principals (directors of educational institutions), sports staff and librarians. APIs take into account credits for various research and teaching assignments such as research paper publications, research projects, research guidance, etc. API has been demarcated into three divisions dealing with different aspects of teaching assignments, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and research assignments (GOI, 2010)⁶.

The API has always been a contentious topic of discourse (Education Today, 2016)¹⁵, ever since its introduction. Many teacher Unions protested against API system as a faulty one and it could allow favouritism and benefit only a select few. UGC was asked by the ministry for human resource development to have a re-look at the decision to scrap API. The 489th meeting of the UGC in October 2012 took up the matter on the recommendations of the Revisit Committee on granting of exemption to PhD holders from NET and removing the API and PBAS. Subsequently In January 2013 Commission decided to scrap the PBAS with API. The argument given for scrapping the API was that the strict but inflexible parameters of the UGC’s API were holding up appointments and worsening faculty shortage scenario across universities. Scrapping of the API

apparently gave the universities flexibility to evolve their own mechanisms to screen teacher performance. However, scrapping the PBAS has evoked much criticism from the academia. But, according to a senior official with MHRD, “The ministry intervened and asked the UGC to take a re-look at the decision and to retain the API and work out necessary modifications to improve the system.” it has been decided that the PBAS with API system will continue for promotion and selection of senior university teachers (Baroniya and et al. (2014)⁷.

Academic Performance Indicator (API), a mandatory requirement for universities to select and promote faculty members, the University Grants Commission has decided to retain the Performance Based Appraisal System (PBAS) with API. As per UGC regulations 2010 on minimum qualifications for appointment of teachers and other academic staff in universities and colleges it is mandatory for all universities and colleges to prepare Performance Based Appraisal in the prescribed format for applying to any teaching post or career advancement (Gazette of India, 2013)⁸.

As per the amended version of the regulation (GoI, 2013)⁹, a major change has been affected in the assessment of teachers in all the three categories of academic output. While teachers are expected to “recognize the difference in aptitude and capabilities among students and strive to meet their individual needs” and inculcate values, at the same time they are required to remain concerned with accumulation of points and comply with the norms of time allocation as dictated. In a system which thrives on malpractice, and the inherent problem of quantification of academic performance, increasingly, teachers are resorting to alternative means to accumulate points that are best described as unfair⁵. This change sought to usher in institutional reform vide The Gazette of India (GoI 2010) by stipulating service conditions for the recruitment of new faculty and promotion under the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS). The Regulations (GoI 2010, 2013) require evidence and detailed documentation of all the activities under different categories. In activities like teaching and research supervision, time spent is in fact a poor measure, and cannot capture the level of motivation and therefore the quality of delivery.

Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers in Universities and Colleges & Other Measures for the Maintenance of Standards, 2009 and Amendments in 2010, 2013 and 2016 and Employment Benefits available to teachers and the ground realities prevailing in the majority of private and public institutions involved in imparting education, it can logically be inferred that the low quality research or no research is happening (GoI, 2010, GoI 2013, GoI 2016)^{6, 9, 10}. Thus review of Literature reveals that despite the introduction and enforcement of the API and PBAS, quality of higher education in India and also the research output needs to be addressed further. This paper attempts to analyze critically this system with the help of those who are involved in the system itself.

Methodology

To achieve the objective of this study, a focused group discussion was held. The focused group comprised of eight faculty members from various institutions of higher education. Three Professors, three Associate Professors and two Assistant Professors participated in the discussion. Members of the FDG were selected purposively on the basis of their comfort level to discuss about the API system. The discussion was moderated by the researcher.

Findings

Analysis of data collected during the FDG indicated the following:

1. Participants agreed that there are some contributory factors for low quality research and standard of education, which include lack of committed faculty, low quality of research and pedagogical innovation, lack of accountability and incentives among teachers, system of evaluation which encourages rote learning, governance structures of universities which make innovations difficult, system of affiliated colleges. It was emphasized that infrastructural facilities like presence of a well equipped laboratory, proper library and access to online digital libraries, computer laboratory etc. affected the research and teaching of faculty members. However, this has not been factored in by the API scoring system.
2. Group members asserted that, the present system of score-sheet contains different main heads with different marks for various activities in an academic year. However, teachers expressed confusion in the proposed system, because the proposed present API score-system is not properly followed in all universities in our country. It was also noted that, doubts are largely confined to the inclusion of different patterns of mark-distribution in the score-sheet and year wise assessment.
3. One of the main condemnations of API system, expressed was, that UGC, Higher Education Division of the Ministry of HRD have failed to take stock of the infrastructural inadequacies such as quality of IT facilities, books, journals, space for teachers in staff rooms, printers, especially in rural areas, before the introduction of such an important scheme on API. Those with better facilities would be able to score higher API, than those with less facilities, it was agreed.
4. API has also generated a business as large number of teachers and researchers across India's academic institutions, including many at prestigious universities are involved with the paid or s called predatory publications that are wanting in research quality. This appeared to be a popular business generated due to API policy, it was articulated. It is seen that as per UGC mandate, research papers in case of CAS must be sent to the experts for quality evaluation of the research papers, but in practice, the same is hardly done by the majority of educational institutes.

5. Participants who were Assistant Professors asserted with regret that the basic objective of such a scheme is to punish non-performers and reward performers in education and research assignments. However, the senior members countered this argument saying that, the API must be viewed positively as an encouragement towards more and more research rather than a punitive and negative measure.

The above findings were supported by literature review which indicated that teachers reportedly from various universities across the national capital including JNU, Jamia, IGNOU and Ambedkar joined the ongoing agitation by DU faculty members in protest against the new UGC criteria to ascertain their academic performance. Similarly, Mr. Gopal Pradhan (2016), member of Ambedkar University, expressed similar views to the above findings of the Focused group discussion by stating that, "each university has its own special character and needs, and the mindless, bureaucratic mechanism laid down in the Academic Performance Indicators (API) could not be applied to all". He further stated that fund-granting authority has no right to effect unilateral changes in the number and proportion of lectures, tutorials and practicals as it constituted an attack on the academic autonomy of the varsities.

API System has been criticized by teachers at the individual level and also at the group level by various associations of teachers, who do not want to fulfil the mandate of the teaching profession for various relevant and irreverent considerations. Joining the protest were teachers Associations of Jamia, IGNOU and Ambedkar University besides JNU Students Union along with other student organisations such as AISA, AISF, CYSS, DSU, NSUI, and SFI¹⁶.

Conclusion

The discussion and responses of members from the Focused Group Discussion led to the following questions in the mind of researcher:

- In the prevailing scenario in higher education –
1. What is the nature and scope of APIs for the promotion of quality of education and research?
 2. Whether APIs for the promotion and recruitment of teachers in Universities, have promoted the quality of research?
 3. How far the introduction of APIs for the teachers, have influenced the quality of research and teaching of teachers employed in Universities.
 4. Is there any need to expand the horizon of the existing scheme of the API?
 5. What are the hindrances in the compliance of API for the promotion and recruitment of teachers in India?
 6. Education system needs to know that is there a wide gap between preaching and practicing for the promotion of quality education and research by the Policy makers on higher education in India?

Thus, demanding UGC to answer above mentioned questions^[3] as API-PBAS is not only conceptually untenable with adverse implications on

academic ambience, but suffers from structural flaws^[5].

There is still a need to plug the existing loopholes in API score; else such metrics would only accelerate the transformation of intellectual efforts of faculty towards the race for gathering numeric to climb up in their career ladder API score, as in its current form, can do more harm than good. Just to improve their API score, teachers turn their full attention to be the forerunners of the 'API score race'^[11]. As UGC has granted freedom to all the Indian Universities to modify the competencies of API based on the need without disturbing the weightage of the score and the minimum score requirement, thus giving a scope for researcher to improvise it further.

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