

QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH ISO SYSTEM

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Abstract

Globalization, privatization and liberalization are forcing nation of the world to open business policies; education sector is also not unaffected from the same. Ministers, Educationist, Government-officials, employers, accrediting bodies, university, institution, researchers, faculty, and faculty development specialists all have a lot to share about this topic. The growth of population, unemployment and under-standing make this topic of National concern. Improvement in the quality of education system is the prime need of not only India but of complete world as it can tackle maximum social and economical problems. There are various systems to improve and assess the quality of higher education institutes and universities; again the issue is critical especially the new ones. To address some of these issues this paper is drafted with following objectives: Understanding the word quality for educational system, to understand the importance of ISO-9000 & ISO philosophy and to understand the methodology to obtain ISO certificate. The paper is based on literature survey and interaction with experts. It is very useful for education institute looking to improve or establish quality system based on ISO.

Keywords: quality, ISO, higher education, ISO-philosophy

1.0 Introduction

Globalization, privatization and liberalization are forcing nation of the world to open business policies; education sector is also not unaffected from the same. There is much discussion these days about quality in higher education. Ministers, Educationist, Government-officials, employers, accrediting bodies, university, institution, researchers, faculty, and faculty development specialists all have a lot to share about this topic. The growth of population, unemployment and under-employment made this topic of National concern. Improvement in the quality of education system is the prime need of not only India but of complete world as it can tackle maximum social and economical problems. There are various systems to improve and assess the quality of higher education institutes and universities; again the issue is critical especially the new ones. To address some of these issues this paper is drafted with following objectives:

1. Understanding the word quality for educational system
2. To understand the importance of ISO-9000
3. Understanding of ISO philosophy
4. To understand the methodology to obtain ISO certificate

2.0 Meaning of Quality:

To engage in meaningful conversation, we must first recognize what we mean when referring to word quality. It is common for people to speak at cross-purposes on this subject when they are using different frameworks for defining quality. Broadly speaking, there are five popular ways to define the quality in higher education, as follows:

2.1 Quality as endurance

The endurance (ability to perform intended function over long period of time) is a primary sign of quality. If an institution stands the test of time for more than a decade we might use that endurance with quality. It is very difficult to define for new institute, unless it has some successful pre-existence.

2.2 Quality as luxury

Objects that are luxurious, beautiful, or prestigious are often associated with great quality. This view of quality is certainly seen in higher education, where institutions invest in beautiful garden-like campuses, stately buildings, luxurious suites in athletic stadiums, and every convenience that students from affluent backgrounds are accustomed to at home. Quality as luxury extends to providing the most up to-date research facilities, light teaching loads for faculty, deep pockets to support sabbaticals, and investment in scholarships to attract the most promising new students and push up rankings that imply prestige.

2.3 Quality as conformance

This approach reduces quality to a set of specified attributes or characteristics to achieve. Most approaches to accreditation are based on this framework. The accrediting body specifies a set requirement that a college, university, or specific academic program is required to meet, and then reviews performance to see if there is conformance the requirements. Educational institutions establish requirements for learning outcomes, support services, financial well-being, library resources, and even for demonstrating effective planning assessment, and improvement.

2.4 Quality as continuous improvement

Quality leaders focus on the reduction of variation in repeatable processes that would lead to continuous improvement and encourage innovation through applications of new technology. This concept has found its way into higher education as some believe that defined requirements can never keep pace with organizational learning and technology, so quality should mean achieving the fastest rate of innovation and improvement in all aspects of an institution.

2.4 Quality as value added

As service organizations perspective of quality process, such as education, should add value to the consumer or society. In education this perspective suggests that students should know more after they complete an academic program than before they started. Completing a college degree should mean some measurable improvement in student learning, social skills, social contacts, writing skills, reading skills, critical thinking, or other attributes that are consistent with the mission of an institution, such as the ability to dance, speak another language, or plan how to construct a building.

3.0 Status of higher education in India

The higher education system in India includes both private and public universities. Public universities are supported by the Government of India and the state governments, while private universities are mostly supported by various bodies and societies. Universities in India are recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC), which draws its power from the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. In addition, 16 Professional Councils are established, controlling different aspects of accreditation and coordination. The types of universities controlled by the UGC include Central universities, State universities, Deemed universities and Private universities. The status of education as per UGC is presented in the Figure 1.

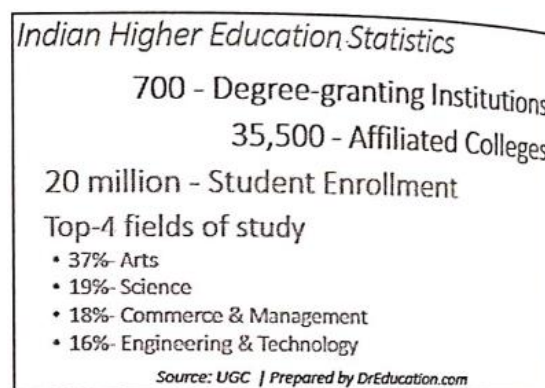


Figure 1: Higher education in India

In addition to the above universities, other institutions are granted the autonomous award degrees, and while not called "university" by name, act as such. They usually fall under the administrative control of the Department of Higher Education. In official documents they are called "autonomous institutions", or even bodies, "university-level" simply "other institutions". Some of these have their set working process, some are working to develop but only a few are internationally accepted/recognized for their quality of education system.

4.0 Introduction to ISO

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in

the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electro-technical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electro-technical standardization. International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2. The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75% of the member bodies casting a vote. The adoption of a quality management system should be a strategic decision of an organization. This International Standard promotes the adoption of a process approach when developing, implementing and improving the effectiveness of a quality management system, to enhance customer satisfaction by meeting customer requirements.

5.0 Philosophy of ISO

The model of a process-based quality management system shown in Figure 2, illustrates the process linkages presented in Clause 4 to 8. This illustration shows that customers play a significant role in defining requirements as inputs. Monitoring of customer satisfaction requires the evaluation of information relating to customer perception as to whether the organization has met the customer requirements. The model shown in Figure 2 covers all the requirements of this International Standard, but does not show processes at a detailed level. In addition, the methodology known as "Plan-Do-Check-Act" (PDCA) can be applied to all processes. PDCA can be briefly described as follows.

Plan: establish the objectives and necessary to deliver results in accordance with customer requirements policies and the organization's policies.

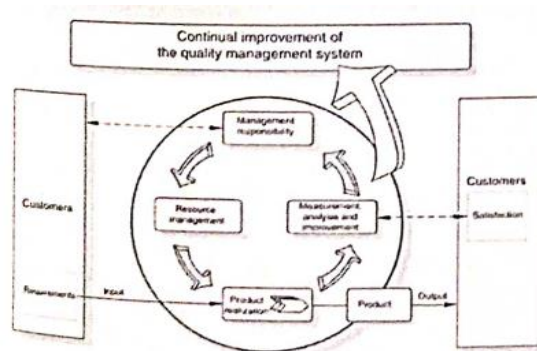


Figure 2: ISO requirements

Do: implement the processes.

Check: monitor and measure processes and product against policies, objectives and requirements for the product and report the results.

Act: take actions to continually improve process performance.

6.0 Benefits of ISO certification

ISO improves organization in all aspect. The main benefit of ISO is improved functionality and thereby better profitability and quality. The main benefits can be enlisted as:

- Global recognition and acceptability
- Process improvement and better functionality
- Consistent process output
- Improvement in financial performance
- Raising the level of motivation and participation of employees
- Increase in market share and brand positioning
- Improved documentation

7.0 Methodology of achieving ISO certification

ISO 9000 registration needs development and establishing the documented system in practice. Normally, external experts are needed to develop document compatible for ISO standard. The stepwise procedure for obtaining ISO certification is as follows:

1. Management commitment
2. Set up a steering committee
3. Establish scope of registration
4. Audit existing system
5. Identify, report and remove deficiencies
6. Review report and develop action plan
7. Develop/revise quality manual
8. Implement documented system
9. Approach certification body
10. Submit quality manual for approval
11. Implement any change necessary to quality manual
12. Pre audit by certification body
13. Final audit and implementation of corrective actions
14. Train internal auditors
15. Assessment by certification body
16. Registration is granted/not granted
17. Ongoing surveillance audit-internally and externally

8.0 Conclusion

ISO system is an inevitable requirement to establish standard process approach. Effective implementation of document process produces consistent performance. It can be very useful for new institutes and universities. Various accreditation processes are naturally achieved if ISO is implemented before it. To make our education system competitive worldwide ISO can be one of most useful tool.

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