Efficacy of Academic and Administrative Audit as a tool of Evaluation and Improvement

Dr Seemantini Chaphalkar

Professor (**Academic Head**),

Vidya Pratishthan's School of Architecture, Baramati

Abstract:

Academic and Administrative Audit (AAA) is a well evolved tool to evaluate if academic and administrative systems are working efficiently in a Higher Education Institutes (HEI). AAA helps to understand the weaknesses and challenges in the system and suggests measures of improvement. Though there is ample literature about the framework and advantages of AAA, very few post-audit studies, especially of Indian cases can be found. This paper critically looks at the experience of two AAA sessions to discuss the achievements and challenges of the template. Through the description and analysis of the observations it is clear that the AAA template can be used for improvement of academic and administrative systems and it can also be manipulated to institute's benefit. Moreover the template needs to be domain specific to serve its purpose well. The paper suggests that it is necessary to make the template of AAA itself more robust and self-amending to make it more relevant to various domains and discipline. More sensitization is needed to make the HEIs really participative in the exercise of self-evaluation and self-improvement to avoid the danger of AAA remaining a mandatory yet symbolic exercise.

Key Words: *Academic and administrative Audit, Evaluation, improvement, higher education, standards, AAA template.*

1. Introduction: The education of young generation is an important concern for all living species. In humans this is all the more important as we have largely modified our lifestyle by applying ever evolving technology and knowledge systems. Imparting higher education demands better planned systems to ensure productive teaching and learning processes. Various accreditation protocols require continuous assessment, analysis and re-alignment of knowledge delivery systems to achieve satisfactory outcome. Academic and Administrative Audit (AAA) is a tool used for ever renewing the framework and content as well as the environment of higher education.

Academic Audit reviews the quality of education, provides guidance and framework for improvement and quality assurance while the administrative audit evaluates administrative processes for efficiency and effectiveness by providing initiation and assessment policies, strategies and protocols. These audits are generally expected to involve internal and external peers and their outcome relinked to improve efficiency.

2. Review of Literature: There is a great amount of prescriptive literature as well as audio and video content on parameters and framework as well as objectives and process of AAA (Nitonde and Jadhav, 2015; Soni, 2016; NAAC Advisory Note 2017; Kumar, 2017; Balasubramanian, 2019; Shirke, 2021; and many others). However there are very few post- audit studies on efficacy of AAA especially in Indian scenario. There are ample and earlier studies critically evaluating AAA templates in universities abroad which bring in focus the theory-practice gaps and suggest remedial measures (Blackmore, 2004) and caution against increasing gender imbalance, significantly distorting academic mission and side-lining non-English speaking academics (Welch, 2016). The paucity of critical feedback on regional level AAA exercises underlines the need for sharing experiences on this most critical tool of self-evaluation and improvement for HEIs.

3. Research Methodology:

Following are key points of research methodology

1. Theoretical Framework: Empirical
2. Nature of Research: Descriptive
3. Data Type: Primary and Secondary
4. Data Collection Tool: Notes diary during event
5. Data Collection Method: Case Studies
6. Participants: AAA Committee members and stakeholders of participating colleges.

4. Research Question: How can the Academic and administrative audit help the institutes achieve evaluation and improvement of course contents, delivery and overall institutional environment.

5. Research Area: This paper presents some observations based on the experience of participating as an external review committee member in AAA of two architectural education institutes in a south eastern Maharashtra university.

6. Research Objectives: Broadly three aspects are examined after describing observations;

  a) The teaching- course contents i.e. the knowledge delivery
  b) The learning – understanding, retention and application by the students.
  c) Overall environment generated by administrative framework

7. Data Collection: The data is obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Notes were written while evaluating the case studies, especially about the discrepancies of the process, the discrepancies due to defective communication of the AAA exercise and the discrepancies arising out of inadequate understanding and lack of preparation of the participating colleges.

Three secondary sources referred are:
  1. NAAC AAA Advisory note 2017
  2. AAA formats of various universities.
  3. COA Minimum Standards of Architectural Education, 2020

8. Objective 1

The teaching is at the core of HEIs, most institutes make great efforts to acquire highly qualified faculty, but then fail to supervise their work. Council of Architecture (COA) is responsible for maintaining minimum standards of education and has prescribed the spatial, administrative and academic framework within which the education must be imparted. COA revises the standards from time to time after taking the feedback from the institutes, studying the ground realities and the advances in the field.   The minimum qualifications of the teachers are prescribed

thereby which are difficult to meet. There is variance in the minimum standards prescribed by various universities which creates frequent conflicts and unresolved issues of approval.

The council however gives ample freedom to universities to interpret the course contents and write their own curriculums in accordance to their vision and in a manner suitable for regional conditions. The colleges also get some amount of freedom to write their own syllabus, course plans and devise activities in accordance to the institutional vision and mission statement keeping well within the general framework prescribed by the university and COA. Effectively the delivery of the content widely varies across the nation though the content of architectural education remains more or less similar.

Observation

In the academic evaluation of institute A, which was a young institute, it was observed that the processes of content delivery were in place as seen through various other indicators such as students' performance and achievements. However the documentation of the process was much less than desired. In this situation it was advised to improve documentation by setting up simple systems. The AAA committee was confident that the advice would be implemented.

In institute B, a much older institute, it was seen that the documentation systems were in place, ample documents to verify the content delivery were available. All questions had ready answers with evidence. However other indicators such as students' performance and lack of feedback indicated that something was amiss. Some documents were probably prepared in anticipation of this audit. The AAA committee was not really satisfied, but could not figure out what was missing.

Analysis

This example shows how the AAA format can be used for sensitizing institutes for documentation, on the other hand the format can also be used for glossing over inactivity or lack of work. AAA can be helpful for self-evaluation and improvement provided that the institute is willing to

accept the shortcomings and wishes to improve. On the other hand for the institutes which are aware of the lacuna, but do not wish to improve for reasons such as shortage of resources or reluctance of management shall get an opportunity to paint a rosy picture with the help of AAA.

Institutes in the same university can interpret and deliver the curriculum differently which also gives them an opportunity to create their own identity. However this could also create some issues such as disparity between the course content in the institutes of same university. Though there is a general spirit of cooperation and collaboration amongst institutes, there is a perceptible spirit of competition, which is liable to turn fierce in the presence of external factors such as public image and its effect on next years' admissions. In such case the institutes may resort to unfair means such as being liberal with internal assessment or setting question papers only considering topics covered by them and so on. AAA format should be robust enough to take into account such cases and keep a check on such practices. It may have questions regarding conformation or variation from university curriculum and COA prescription which would probably stop institutes from taking unfair liberties.

9. Objective 2

Making the learning experience of students enjoyable and interesting is the most important achievement of the HEIs. Especially in the professional courses such as architecture, application of the skill, craft or knowledge gained through the teaching- learning to find solution to a practical problem is the desired outcome. Various projects, activities and experiments are devised to ensure that such application is practiced. There are numerous national/international design competitions with attractive awards floated for giving students a chance to hone their design skills. The participation of the students in solving practical problems, their involvement, creativity, innovation, presentation and passion are all indicators of the success of content delivery process, retention and re-production/application ability of the students and overall environment of the institute in which teaching learning takes place. Participation and recognition in institute level competitions earns brownie points not only for the

participating students but also for the institutes as this is the direct recognition of the fact that students can apply the knowledge they gained at the institute.

Earning merit in college/ university exams is another yardstick to measure students' acquisition of skills and knowledge and their ability to apply/implement. Often it is also seen that students who succeed in practice in real life were quiet, unassuming students. Hence successful alumni also earn prestige for their Alma matter. All these points are considered for measuring success of content delivery in current format of AAA along with direct feedback of current students and alumni.

Observation

For the evaluation of the students' response, in a different field such as architecture, samples of students' work should also be part of the AAA template. Such samples are included in the inspections by COA. This AAA format did not include samples of students' work, so the evaluators could not really assess the understanding and retention of students neither their ability to apply.

Other responses such as feedback forms, students' participation in co-curricular activities and domain specific competitions also help to assess the success of content delivery, but they are often speaking of the enthusiastic and better performing students. Average and non-performing students generally shy away from additional competitions and expressing themselves in feedback forms. Moreover very few colleges really analyze the students' feedback and link it back to improve course plans.

The expectation that students should get special attention and coaching based on their learning aptitudes is at best utopian. Institutes are aware of this requirement, but have not yet developed a system where better learners are offered more challenging tasks and slow learners are encouraged by slow pace of teaching. they are also limited by few number of students in a single batch. institute A did not have such special coaching system in place, Institute B claimed that they have such a system of assistance based on attendance and performance analysis,

but could not present documents of special classes nor the samples of improved work of slow learners.

Both institutes complained of poor attendance of students at regular theory and practical sessions. They also complained of non-performance and lack of interest in post Covid time.

Analysis

It was feared by the evaluating committee that the AAA template was used by the institutes, to create documents as evidence for processes which were only partially conducted or not conducted at all. This can only be remedied by making the template more robust, by linking various different indicators to assessment of content delivery and students' progress.

Post Covid lack of enthusiasm and stress may be genuine in some students' case, for which counselling can be offered. Generally the lack of interest and enthusiasm must be treated with renewed and revised activities, mentoring and rethinking and revising pedagogies. delivering technical content in an interesting manner is not easy and the teachers have to take extra efforts for achieving it. On the other hand lack of interest may point to external factors such as easy availability of admission to architecture. Availability of scholarships for the entire duration of course and for entire fees amount irrespective of merit or successful completion of yearly exams may be the reason for lack of passion. These factors are more sociological and economic than related to teaching-learning process. Remedies to them need to be found after discussions on larger platforms such as UGC and Ministry of Education.

10. Objective 3

The overall environment of the institute is made up of two components- administrative and academic. The administrative component depends on institutional policies as well as management's approach and vision. The administrative systems facilitate the academic environment. If the management and administrative set-up is supportive, the overall functioning is smooth and academics will be free to concentrate on the educational concerns. In some cases the administrative personnel is

skeptical or critical of the academic counterpart which may create some issues, blow some issues out of proportions and hide some issues to postpone decisions. This will in the long run generate an environment of distrust and doubt which hinders the healthy growth of academic interests and endeavors.

Observation

The institute A was part of a larger campus, the administrative mechanism was subsidiary, slow and hindered at every step by a delay of financial and administrative decision- making depending on approval of board of directors. Resulting environment was slow, unsure and less confident. It delayed processes and created an overall relaxed environment for students who were habituated to delays and extensions of deadlines. On the other hand the academic wing was completely independent to take decisions regarding schedules, activity planning and course outcomes without any undue involvement of the management.

The institute B, a standalone institute, developed a better environment, more confident, prompt and enthusiastic. The administration moved quickly in terms of decisions which developed trust among the stakeholders and a competitive academic environment. However the board of directors took active interest in everyday running of the college which created stress on the academics and wasted their time and energy in explanations and debates.

Analysis

It is necessary to have a proactive, prompt and sincere administrative wing at the institute which is supportive of the academic wing. The management must keep its role limited to financial supervision and administrative aspects and involve themselves minimally in the academic planning and execution. AAA format must include the questions leading to this understanding.

11. Conclusions

It was clear from the AAA exercise that institutes were recently awakened to their role as responsible and efficient facilitators of high quality education who must set up systems for self-evaluation and continuous

improvement. Their performance will surely improve with more cycles of this exercise.

Though AAA is a great tool for self-evaluation and subsequent improvement, it is a two sided weapon. It may be misused in the hands of some misguided people and institutes, or those institutes which are running with limited resources and high ambitions and wish to achieve success by taking short routes. The training and sensitization of evaluators to make them aware of such tendencies/ practices is necessary.

AAA format should be aligned to domain specific requirements to make them more relevant. e.g. the AAA formats for architectural schools may have questions regarding samples of students' work. The evaluators should be selected and trained keeping in mind domain specific qualifications.

Linking of AAA outcomes with the next years' academic planning is necessary as AAA is established as a yearly protocol. Additional weightage for such linking will incentivize the cyclic processing of outcomes with planning. As institutes get habitual with audits and accreditation protocols, the self-amending and ever renewing nature of templates will enhance with more innovation and participation.

--

References:

1. Balasubramanian, A. (2019). Checklist for Academic and Administrative Audit. 10.13140/RG.2.2.17295.53923.

2. Blackmore, J.A. (2004), "A critical evaluation of academic internal audit", Quality Assurance in Education, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 128- 135 https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880410548753

3. Kumar, P. M., (2017). Academic Audit and Quality Assurance in Higher Education. International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS), 2(2), 61-68., Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3061297

4. Nitonde, R. and Jadhav,B.U.(2015). Academic and Administrative Audit: A Parameter of Quality Education. South Asian Academic Research Chronicle v 2 n 9 p 67-72

6. Shirke, A. (2021) https://www.iitms.co.in/blog/how-to-conduct-academic-and-administrative-audit.html. accessed on 25/9/20

7. Soni, M.(2016) Academic and Administrative Audit, RRJPER - Vol.1 (1) – April, 2016 ISSN 2455-7900,p 59-61

8. Welch, A. (2016). Audit Culture and Academic Production. High Educ Policy 29, 511–538 https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-016-0022-8