



AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR) is an academic publication which focuses on aspects related to quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The journal aims to become an instrument for the transfer of best practices and to support communication between internal and external experts, as well as to contribute to the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR was created for those interested in the theory, practice and policies related to quality assurance in higher education.

Editor

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Mailing address

Bd. Mărăști, no. 59, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, postal code 011464

Phone: +40 21 206 76 00

E-mail: qar@aracis.ro

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Transforming Society: Social Responsibility Through Quality Assurance of Tertiary Education

Special edition: Papers submitted by the presenters of the 14th INQAAHE Biennial Forum 2024

The 2024 INQAAHE Forum was hosted in Bucharest, Romania, from June 10-13 by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), in collaboration with the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest (UNSTPB) and the Hipolitech Foundation, gathering over 170 participants from more than 50 countries.

The Forum's theme „Transforming Society: Social Responsibility through Quality Assurance of Tertiary Education” was explored through four sub-themes:

- Fostering Civic Engagement
- Bridging the Gap to Quality Education for All
- Designing Curricula for Societal Impact
- Fostering Opportunities for All Ages

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External quality assurance mechanisms to support the quality of blended and distance learning in tertiary education to foster learning opportunities for individuals of all ages. The Romanian approach

<i>PhD Professor Iordan Petrescu</i>	The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance In Higher Education, petrescu.iordan@gmail.com
<i>PhD Professor Florin Mihai</i>	The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance In Higher Education, fmihai@gmail.com
<i>Associate Professor Alexandru Chiş</i> <i>PhD</i>	The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance In Higher Education, alexandru.chis@ubbcluj.ro
<i>PhD Professor Mircea Neagoe</i>	The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance In Higher Education, mneagoe@unitbv.ro

Abstract: *In recent years, the field of education and teaching practice has gone through significant curricula, structural, taxonomic and pedagogical changes as well as policy reforms. As a consequence of that educators and the Education Ministries has had to keep updating and adapting instructional innovations to make teaching more effective, learning more inclusive and instructional strategies more efficient.*

These changes were driven by significant technological advancements, so the educators were increasingly challenged to migrate and design contents and learning models to help digital native students engage with their learning in deep interactive ways. From this perspective, the proposal paper reviews of QA of Distance and the Blended Instructional Methods, adopted by Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) in Higher Education system. It recommends strategies and migration objectives, from traditional instructional models to a more efficient, flexible and interactive learning models.

Keywords: *higher education, distance learning, blended learning, quality assurance, e-learning platforms*

I. Historical context. Current landscape. Legislation and accreditation

Distance education (also known as distance learning) is a form of education where the student and instructor are separated by geographical distance and often by time. Learning takes place through a variety of communication technologies and methods, instead of requiring physical presence in a traditional classroom setting.

1.1 General Trends and Estimates on Distance Learning (DL)

Distance/Online learning has experienced massive growth globally, especially since 2000, and this trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The global e-learning market was valued at \$227.34 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach \$740.46 billion by 2032, with a compound annual growth rate of 14.02%.

The number of distance/online education users is estimated to reach 87.6 million by 2029 in the U.S. alone, and globally, projections suggest around 57 million online learners by 2027.

Higher education institutions are increasingly expanding their distance/online program offerings due to student demand for flexibility and convenience. In the fall of 2023, in the U.S., 25.6% of students in higher education were enrolled exclusively in distance courses.

1.2 Romanian approach of DL

According to Romanian legislation, Distance learning is characterized by using specific electronic, computer, and communication resources, self-directed learning and self-assessment activities, supplemented by specific tutoring activities, involving a combination of remote and face-to-face educational activities.

This approach points out the following specific aspects:

Separation: Distance separates the learner from the instructor.

Communication Technologies: Learning is facilitated through various technologies, such as online platforms, videoconferencing tools, asynchronous communication channels (email, discussion forums), and even traditional methods like face-to-face (F2F) tutoring.

Flexibility: Distance education offers flexibility in terms of scheduling and location, allowing learners to study at their own pace and from a convenient location in combination with face to face activities.

The combination of pedagogy and technology has shaped the evolution of distance learning through several generations. It's important to note that these generations often overlap, and elements of earlier generations continue to be used in contemporary distance learning.

Romanian Higher Education Institutions have progressed through the generations of distance learning, with a significant leap during the fourth generation with the advent of the Internet and LMS platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, forcing a rapid shift towards online learning and highlighting the need for robust and engaging online educational platforms.

Generation	Model	Description
First	• Correspondence	- based on print technology
Second	• Multimedia	- based on print, audio and video technologies
Third	• Tele-learning	- based on applications of telecommunications technologies to provide opportunities for synchronous communication
Fourth	• Flexible learning	- based on online delivery via the Internet
Fifth	• Auto Response	- based on the further exploitation of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence
Sixth	• Synchronous Community Oriented Reflective and Experiential	- based on interactive and collaborative technologies – fuses the activity-based online synchronous classroom and read/write web tools

In Romania, a mushroom growth of higher education institutions, particularly in the private sector, has taken place since 1992. Encouraged by certain legislative acts from the Ministry of Education and involvement in European projects, these institutions have started to develop and implement university-level distance learning programs. Figure 1. presents the trend of the number of HEIs by ownership type from 1991 to 2023 (in green colour private HEIs).

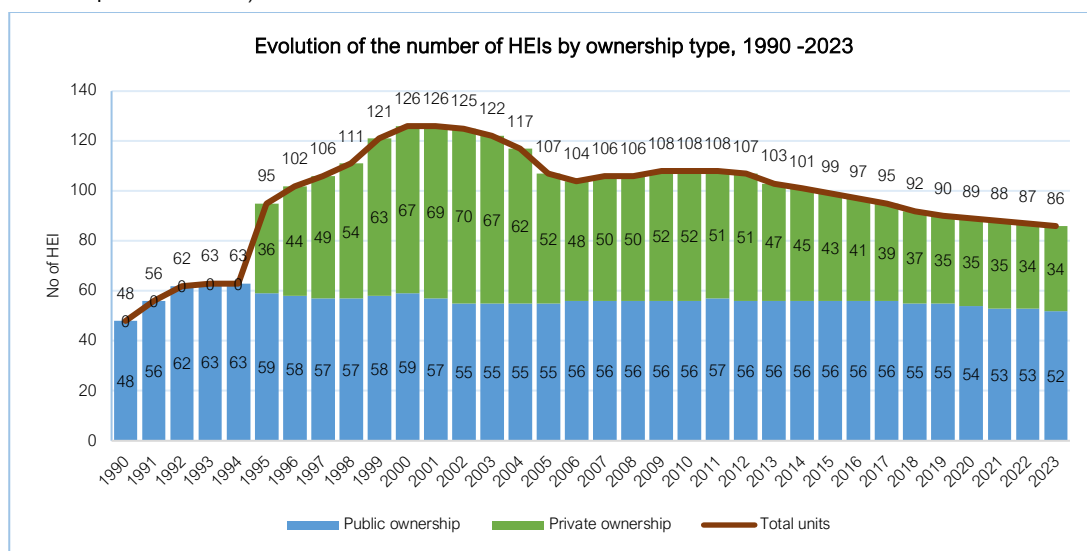


Figure 1.

Source: Authors' presentation, based on data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed in 2025. These study programs operated without accreditation until 1999, but they were recognized by the Ministry of Education based on institutional-level accreditation conducted by the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) established by law in 1993. The trend of undergraduate enrollments by mode of instruction from years 2000 to 2023 is presented in Figure 2. (in green number of DL enrollments).

It is obvious that the increase in the number of private universities that adopted a form of distance education for financial reasons was an important factor in the emergence of distance learning in higher education in Romania.

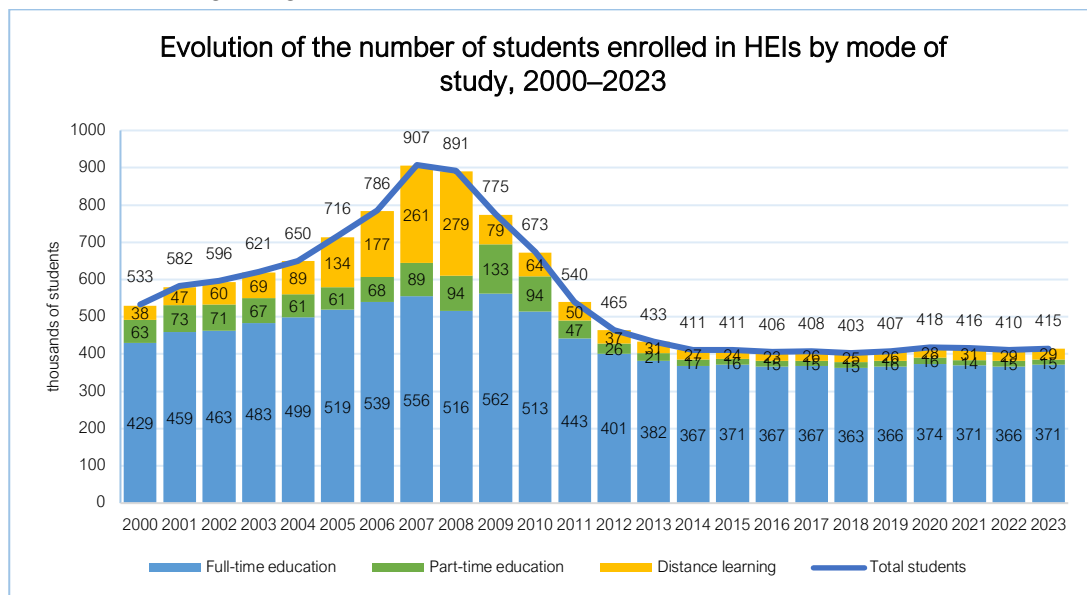


Figure 2.

Source: Authors' presentation, based on data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed in 2025.

In 1999, after the first distance education regulations were issued by the Ministry of Education, CNEAA developed and implemented the first standards and performance indicators for the external evaluation of distance education programs. Once the Bologna Process was implemented, these standards were taken over by the new agency for quality assurance in higher education - ARACIS - and subsequently improved in line with the provisions of the current legislation and technological developments in education.

1.3 Legal provisions on Distance Learning in Higher Education in Romania

Mode of instruction in HE	Study programs offered by DL
1. F2F – Face to face in campus	1. Bachelor - Diploma
2. DL - Distance Learning	2. Master (only some subjects) - Diploma
3. IFR – Part time instruction	3. Postgraduate courses - Certificate
4. Mixt mode – F2F and online	

Considering the legislative constraints and the requirement for the equivalence of diplomas upon completion of studies, ARACIS, after consulting with universities, proposed and developed a blended learning model for the organization of didactic activities in distance education.

The blended learning model was formalized into a set of standards and performance indicators for the external QA of study programs delivered by universities through distance learning. The model is a combination of multiple approaches to learning such as self-paced, collaborative or inquiry-based study, and can be accomplished using technology-based materials, face-to-face sessions and print materials.

The development of QA standards for the blended instructional model has considered the following aspects: be in line with ESG 2015 that is equally applicable to all forms of teaching and learning, but it needs an appropriate interpretation of its application, and with the ARACIS methodology for QA of traditional face-to-face in campus teaching & learning, the full transposition of the program curriculum delivered traditionally to those delivered by distance including ECTS credits, provide high quality educational services on an up to date basis and finally, to include the assessment of e-learning platforms.

1.4 Accreditation of Distance Learning Programs

Preliminary criteria for the accreditation of DL programs

- ✓ The program is offered by recognized HEI
- ✓ The study program is accredited in the F2F mode of instruction
- ✓ The Curriculum for DL delivery is the same as for F2F (structure, disciplines and learning outcomes)
- ✓ The study period for DL delivery is the same as for the F2F program
- ✓ The number of ECTS credits per course is the same for both modes of instruction
- ✓ The diploma upon graduation is the same for both modes of instruction.

Characteristics of specific QA standards for DL

- ✓ The body responsible for QA in HE in Romania is ARACIS
- ✓ QA Standards are in line with ESG
- ✓ QA standards ensure that HEIs have control over distance learning processes
- ✓ QA Standards ensure equivalence to F2F delivery
- ✓ QA standards have provided a framework for applying distance education principles in HE
- ✓ QA standards are oriented to the blended learning mode of instruction
- ✓ QA standards have become a training package in DL for HEIs

It is noteworthy that those higher education institutions that offered accredited distance education programs were able to maintain their instructional activities within these programs even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, they provided support for the adaptation of other study programs to utilize cutting-edge educational technologies specifically designed for distance and online learning.

The experience gained by HEIs during the pandemic was later put to good use by adopting the use of synchronous online technology in a certain percentage of the traditional face-to-face form of education.

II. DL Curriculum Design and Delivery in Romania

In the Romanian educational framework, the curriculum for DL degree programs is designed to be equivalent to that of Full-Time Learning (FTL) programs, as mandated by national regulations.

The initiation, development, implementation, and management of distance learning programs are handled by specialized institutional structures, called DL Departments or Centres. They are organized and function under a regulation approved by the university senate.

To organize the learning process adapted to distance education, the scheduling and sequence of subjects in the curriculum will be aligned with the duration and content of the study program in the full-time education. To ensure the equivalence of both educational approaches, each subject will involve the following types of activities:

- a) tutoring activities (TA) – consist of face-to-face meetings on the university campus and synchronous online sessions, along with ongoing assessment tasks (TC) through recommended assignments conducted preferably via online asynchronous, equivalent to seminar hours in full-time education. The total number of seminar hours in the full-time education format is equal to the combined hours designated for assessment tasks (TC) and tutorial activities (TA);
- b) assisted practical activities (AA), equivalent to laboratory, project, or practical hours in full-time education, are conducted face-to-face on the university campus or only in well-documented cases, synchronously online. The number of hours for laboratory, project, and practical work in full-time education is equal to that of assisted applied activities (AA);
- c) classroom hours in full-time education are compensated through self-instructional activities (AI) based on the specific learning resources provided to students in digital or printed format, tailored to distance learning.

This structured approach ensures that DL programs uphold the same educational standards, fostering both independent and interactive learning experiences.

In this framework, Distance Learning (DL) is structured around two fundamental educational pillars: (a) self-learning materials and (b) a tutorial system, both supported by the interactive capabilities of e-learning platforms. DL is distinguished by the integration of specialized electronic, computer-based, and communication tools that facilitate self-directed learning and self-assessment activities.

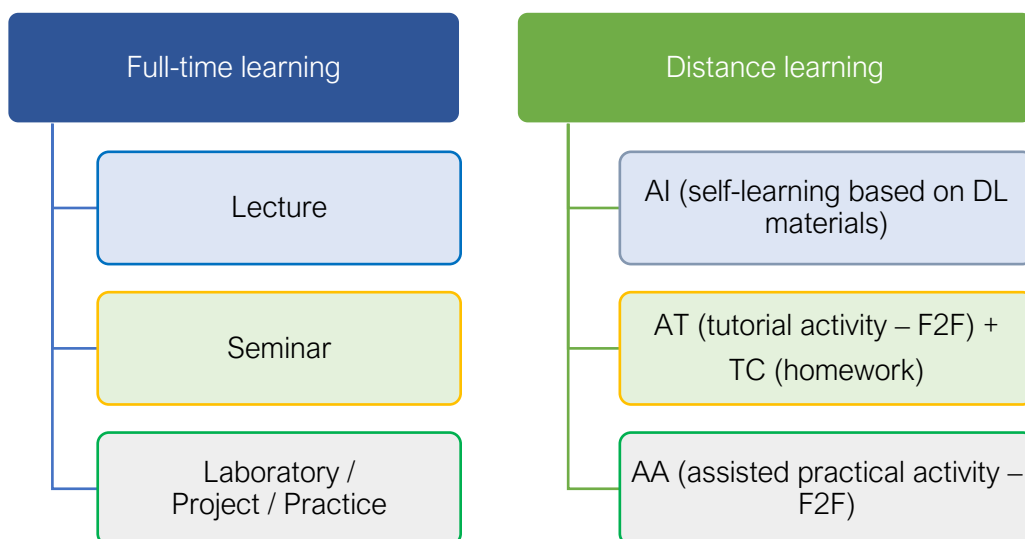


Figure 3. Full-time vs. distance learning activities in the Romanian educational framework

Students receive academic support through a structured tutorial system, which combines remote and face-to-face educational interactions to enhance engagement and comprehension. Figure 4 illustrates the organization of these key components within the DL framework.

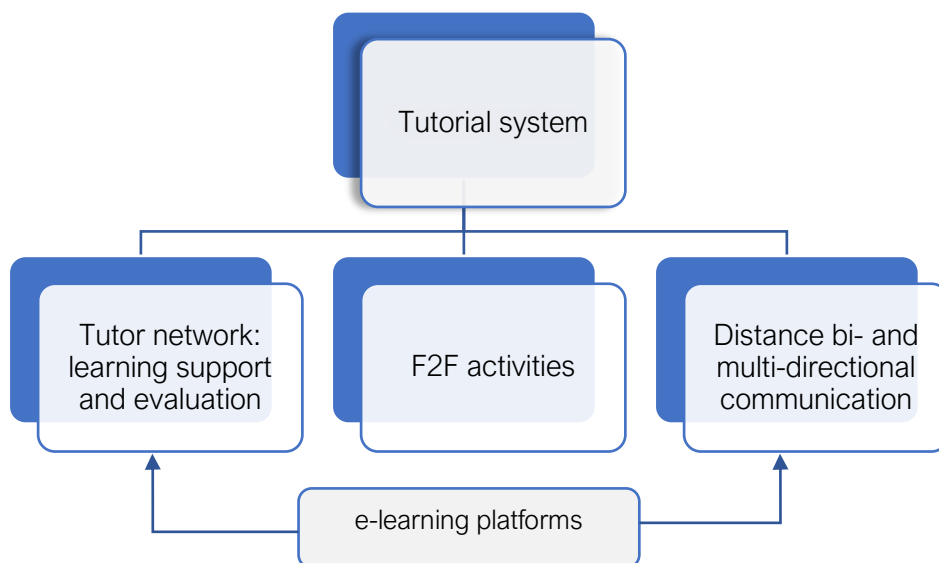


Figure 4. Tutorial system pillars for distance education in Romania

II. 1 Assessment of learning outcomes in DL

The assessment of learning outcomes in DL is designed to be equivalent to that in FTL in terms of academic rigor, effectiveness, and comprehensiveness. The evaluation of DL

students' competencies is a fundamental component in the development of curricula, syllabi, and instructional materials.

Summative (final) assessments in DL are exactly the same as those conducted in FTL, ensuring consistency in certification and qualification standards. Formative (continuous) assessments in DL may incorporate self-evaluation tests, including automated feedback and commentary, as well as practical applications embedded within learning materials or interactive tools available on e-learning platforms. These mechanisms enable students to monitor their progress and refine their approach to learning.

Additionally, feedback provided by tutors in graded assessments plays a pivotal role in supporting students' academic development, reinforcing conceptual understanding, and guiding future learning strategies.

II.2 Design of learning resources for DL

Distance Learning (DL) resources serve as comprehensive teaching, learning, and assessment tools, effectively replacing the role of a traditional instructor in most aspects. These learning materials are primarily developed as digital resources hosted on e-learning platforms, offering a high level of interactivity that fosters self-directed learning and self-evaluation, eliminating the necessity for direct instructor involvement.

QA standards in DL promoted by ARACIS point that learning resources are systematically structured into learning units, each containing an introductory section that outlines key elements such as learning outcomes, objectives, core content, supplementary resources, evaluation methods and tools, as well as assignments. They integrate diverse formats, including text, graphic elements, multimedia content, and interactive applications, ensuring a dynamic and engaging learning experience. Additionally, they incorporate various strategies to enhance comprehension and retention, such as illustrative examples, summaries, and conclusive insights.

The design of DL materials is tailored to students' prior knowledge and training levels, aiming to facilitate individual learning, maximize interactivity, provide real-time feedback, encourage student-teacher and student-student interactions, promote active learning methodologies, and leverage digital tools for assisted learning and automated self-evaluation. This holistic approach ensures that DL programs maintain academic rigor while offering flexibility and accessibility in the learning process.

II.3 Tutorial system: student support in the learning process

Student guidance and support services are fundamental to distance learning, forming the backbone of remote educational activities. Tutors play a crucial role in guiding students throughout their DL study programs and contribute to periodic assessments of their academic progress. This guidance is provided both individually and in groups, through

face-to-face (F2F) meetings on campus or via online platforms, in synchronous and asynchronous modes. Additionally, instructors actively encourage students to engage in group-based or collaborative learning activities, fostering interaction and peer-supported education.

Given the flexibility of DL in terms of study time, location, and pace, support services must be available 24/7 throughout the academic year to ensure continuous access to academic assistance. Communication between students and tutors occurs periodically through individualized or group interactions using accessible communication channels.

The tutor's responsibilities include monitoring student progress, identifying challenges in subject comprehension, motivating students in their learning endeavours, assisting in the development of individualized study plans, providing timely feedback on formative assessments, and offering academic support for course content and related activities. This structured approach ensures that DL students receive comprehensive guidance, promoting academic success and engagement.

III. QA Management for Distance Learning Programs in Romania

In the context of the expansion of flexible forms of education, distance learning (DL) in Romania has undergone a significant institutional consolidation process between 1998 and 2024. This period was marked by the continuous development of quality assurance mechanisms consistent with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area. An essential contribution in this regard was the implementation of structures, policies, and procedures dedicated to managing the quality of alternative modes of educational delivery, particularly within the HE sector.

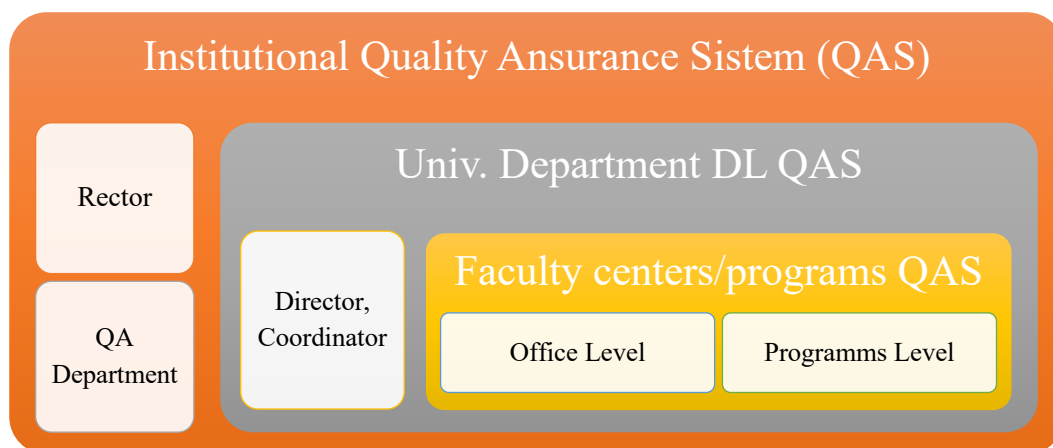


Figure 5. Management of Quality Assurance of Distance Learning

Higher education institutions (HEIs) offering DL programs have consistently undergone a process of adaptation to the QA standards of ARACIS and international good practices in quality evaluation and monitoring. To this end, quality assurance systems have been established, including clearly defined components regarding strategies for developing an institutional culture of quality, specifically oriented towards activities conducted via DL.

A defining element of this process is the existence and application of procedures for curricular equivalence between activities conducted via DL and those in the traditional F2F mode of learning. These procedures were designed to guarantee the coherence and equivalence of acquired learning outcomes, regardless of the mode of delivery of educational content, thus contributing to the full recognition of DL-based education.

Another essential component is the procedure for periodic updating of study materials developed in digital format and adapted to modern learning technologies. This reflects the commitment of institutions to maintain the relevance, accessibility, and quality of content offered to students through DL platforms.

Operationally, quality assurance has been supported by the implementation of performance indicators correlated with the activities of the human resources involved in DL. These include:

- ✓ The existence and application of procedures for continuous training and periodic professional development of all teaching and administrative staff involved in DL university programmes.
- ✓ The existence and application of procedures to monitor and evaluate the performance of teaching and auxiliary personnel.
- ✓ The existence and application of procedures dedicated to evaluating teaching and communication processes specific to DL.

These practices support the development of a robust framework for institutional and individual evaluation, which contributes to the consolidation of an educational system centred on results, quality, and adaptability. Periodic performance evaluations of the staff involved have become not only a quality control instrument but also a support mechanism for professional improvement and the consolidation of academic accountability within DL. Overall, the period 1998–2024 was marked by a transition from an incipient approach to distance learning, based on local initiatives and ad hoc technical solutions, to an institutionalised, regulated, and strategically orientated formula for quality assurance. The role of ARACIS was central in shaping the normative and methodological framework for this process, ensuring coherence between external evaluation requirements and the development of universities' internal capacity to manage and continuously improve the quality of DL provision.

IV. The role of eLearning platforms in the delivery of DL

The first distance-learning (DL) study programs in Romania started almost thirty years ago, yet the first QA standards on DL were developed by ARACIS only in 2008. For the first time, those standards required every DL study program to be supported by an e-learning platform through which course materials would be distributed, tutoring activities delivered, and data on student participation collected.

Initially, universities relied mainly on printed courses that were sometimes mailed to students by ordinary post or handed out to students at the first meeting on campus, while teaching activities included face-to-face meetings, usually scheduled at weekends. After 2000, as Internet access became widespread in the academic environment, several large university centres like Bucharest, Braşov, Cluj and Timișoara began to test videoconference systems and to use well-known e-learning platforms like Moodle or Blackboard. Even so, there were no uniform criteria for evaluating the quality of online learning and teaching activities, and the high infrastructure costs limited the rapid expansion of these platforms.

Once the first QA standards in DL had been published by ARACIS, institutions came under pressure to adopt, maintain and document the operation of a digital learning environment. Most universities gradually migrated to the Moodle platform, an open-source solution that offers flexibility and low implementation costs; a few institutions opted for proprietary platforms (Blackboard) or developed in-house systems. Between 2010 and 2019, Moodle became the preferred e-learning platform in the Romanian HE system, and its ecosystem of plug-ins simplified the introduction of self-graded tests, forums and statistical reports required for the internal quality assurance system.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a clear gap between universities that already ran DL programs and those working exclusively in the traditional format. The former managed an almost seamless transition to fully online teaching, whereas institutions without an e-learning platform experience had to improvise quickly, turning to commercial solutions such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom. Over time, the benefits of that pressure became apparent: it prompted investment in infrastructure and heightened the awareness of both staff and students concerning the advantages of a hybrid learning environment, such as adaptable learning spaces, the perpetual availability of digital materials, and asynchronous activities that can be undertaken at each student's pace.

Since 2021 most Romanian universities have been using a single e-learning platform—Moodle is by far the most common—for distributing educational content and managing assignments for all modes of study, not only for DL programs. Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and Zoom are widely used for synchronous meetings. In parallel,

institutions have focused on the continuous training of teaching staff in digital skills and on developing technical support centres.

There remains, however, a set of challenges to which the entire Romanian HE system must respond—challenges that can affect the quality of DL programs:

- ✓ Deficient digital infrastructure in certain regions, which hampers participation in synchronous activities;
- ✓ Digital-skills gaps between students (digital natives) and some lecturers whose experience is predominantly face-to-face delivery;
- ✓ Adoption of proctoring tools for detecting academic dishonesty, especially in examinations that include an online component.

Looking ahead, artificial intelligence will probably be the core technology influencing DL systems: virtual assistants will provide instant feedback, help detect similarity and enable personalized learning pathways. Secondly, gamification—already present in various forms—will be refined by integrating relevant tools into the heart of e-learning platforms rather than in peripheral plug-ins. Thirdly, virtual and augmented reality will gradually become financially accessible, making 3-D laboratories possible for technical, medical or creative disciplines. To exploit these opportunities, Romania needs a coherent national strategy and a periodic update of ARACIS standards.

Conclusions

This article contributes to the discussion on the changing Taxonomy of Education and develops learning models that engage students in deeper, more interactive, flexible, and social contexts. The blended learning model proposed by ARACIS through its External Quality Assurance provisions, provides supplementary support, flexible instructional design and reliable assessment processes for those with time and access opportunity disadvantages. It recommends strategies and migration objectives, from the traditional instructional model to more efficient, flexible and interactive learning models. QA standards for blended learning models have to incorporate the following attributes: engaging content that gets students interested and involved, chunking strategies to help students develop new skills, checks for understanding and assessments that align with learning outcomes.

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Promotion of Civic Engagement in Higher Education through Assessment and Accreditation of Tertiary Institutions-Lessons from India

*Prof. (Dr.) Ganesan Kannabiran,
Dr. Vinita Sahu*

National Assessment and
Accreditation Council India

director@naac.gov.in

director@naac.org.in /

Abstract: Civic engagement has increasingly become an integral part of the vision and strategies of higher education (HE) institutions globally. India, being a large and diverse country with a significant population living in rural and remote areas, has witnessed HE institutions actively engaging with communities in the past couple of decades. Civic engagement is now included as part of quality assurance of HE institutions. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), as the only national accrediting agency in India, has adopted indicators for measuring various aspects of civic engagement. The objective of this research is to capture the data related to the civic engagement indicators defined by NAAC and to demonstrate how Indian HE institutions have an integrated approach to civic engagement. Using content analysis, the indicators are analyzed based on areas and levels of initiatives to demonstrate how accreditation promotes civic engagement. The findings of the study may be useful to QA agencies in incorporating appropriate indicators in their framework, as well as exploring the scope for creating a maturity model for Civic engagement.

Keywords: Higher Education-Civic Engagement- Quality Assurance- Quality indicators- NEP 2020-Unnat Bharat Abhiyan-India

1. Introduction:

Civic engagement is the third mission of higher education institutions, enabling them to be morally accountable to society through scholarship, research and leadership in collaboration with the communities they serve (Cooper 2005). It is an institutional approach through which faculty and students come together to provide opportunities for students to serve the community through various means. Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference happen. It means promoting the quality of life within a community, through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich 2000). Community engagement, democratic engagement, Civic skills engagement and social justice engagement are the four categories of civic

engagement through Higher education (HE) institutions. Civic education, also known as citizenship education, facilitates the development of knowledge, understanding, social skills, disposition, virtues and values that personally fulfil individuals and enables them to become socially constructive citizens (Thelma, Chanda Chansa 2024).

Promoting civic engagement at the institutional level is of great importance and it can lead to better governance, social cohesion, and community relationships thereby contributing to the development of the country. The civic engagement in general aligns with the global and national priorities such as United Nations (UN) Sustained Development Goals, multi-country co-operations, national context and priorities, state-level variations, political motivations, etc (Akinsolu and Raji 2019; Davis and Babu 2024). It may also focus on short-term priorities arising out of many global challenges including pandemics (Schoon et al., 2025), natural disasters, etc. The first level of civic engagement happens through awareness and education. It extends beyond the campuses of the HE institutions to actively engage with communities, especially within their surroundings through several stages to create from short-term to long-term outcomes. HE institutions foster community relationships that support social change by involving industry, community groups, governments, and other partners. Butterfield & Soska, (2024) have presented a wide variety of civic engagement examples of universities from across the world. Considering the increasing importance, incorporating civic management into the quality assurance of higher education has gained significance. However, there are challenges in defining benchmarks and related measurement. Based on the experiences of South African universities Daniels and Adonis (2020), discuss the challenges faced in developing effective quality assurance mechanisms for community engagement, as well as the potential strategies and opportunities for overcoming these challenges.

This paper presents ideas for refining and developing civic engagement indicators that can be integrated into quality assurance frameworks, thereby enabling higher education institutions to implement and disseminate them at multiple levels.

The objective of the proposed study is to share the best practices related to civic engagement adopted by higher education institutions in India.

The study initially captures the data related to the civic engagement indicators and demonstrates how Indian HE institutions have adopted an integrated approach to Civic engagement. Using content analysis, the indicators are then analyzed based on areas and initiatives that promote civic engagement within the HE institutions. The findings of the study may be useful to QA agencies for incorporating appropriate indicators in their framework. The research may also be useful in developing a maturity model in the future

to be shared with various countries and agencies for adoption according to their relevance and requirements.

2. Aim and Methodology:

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India measures the relevance of standards through a systematic evaluation process for higher education institutions using a set of criteria and standards. The standards and parameters of NAAC ensure that their educational programmes not only meet academic standards but also actively contribute to societal well-being. The indicators are aligned with the civic engagements envisaged in New Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020). The vision of NEP 2020 comprises promotion of values and citizenship as well as the importance of environmental and civic education. It encourages collaboration between educational institutions and local communities which in turn fosters a sense of social responsibility by promoting community engagement, addressing local needs, and building partnerships etc (Tandon, 2014).

The policy emphasizes the societal role and purpose of higher education which primarily includes enlightened and socially conscious citizens, building a knowledgeable and skilled nation, problem solvers and innovators, socially engaged and cooperative communities, within a cohesive, cultured, and progressive nation. Furthermore the policy aims to address various challenges in the education sector and aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which focuses on quality education. In line with this, NAAC has further redefined the assessment parameters in the accreditation framework by incorporating access, equity and inclusiveness in education, community engagement, values, ethics, global citizenship & civic education in order to nurture responsible citizenship by achieving SDG goals combining G20 declarations as well.

The aim of this paper is to capture the civic engagement initiatives of Indian HE institutions in terms of their relevance and context and through discussions evolve or redefine new civic engagement indicators that can be used by quality assurance agencies. The discussion held at INQAAHE 2024 Forum included the identification of various civic engagement indicators and their relevance within the quality assurance framework of a few other countries. It was also realised that the respective quality assurance agencies can use these indicators and suggest important recommendations to the policymakers to mainstream civic engagement in higher education and to ensure that quality assurance agencies are in alignment with ongoing developments.

A case in Point - Civic engagement of HE institutions in India

India is one of the largest democracies with a majority of its population living in rural areas. The rural communities are still lagging behind in many areas including education, health

and hygiene, access to economic activities and others (Kumar et al., 2020; Budhedeo, 2016; Kumar, 2016; Chintakula, 2020). It requires a multi-pronged strategy to bring about an inclusive society. India is among the fastest growing economies and there is a need to ensure that the wealth created is distributed in such a way that the large population living in India is mainstreamed. This involves not only government initiatives but also active participation of NGOs, local communities and higher education institutions. Universities and colleges can play an important role in promoting civic engagement, implementing it, ensuring that the development reaches the grassroot level. Higher education is likely to make a significant impact on society by reaching out to large sections of the society. The present and future scope of higher education largely revolves around this requirement. India has one of the largest and diverse education systems in the world. Privatization, widespread expansion, increased autonomy and introduction of new programmes in emerging areas have improved access to higher education. While higher education has been progressing, the policy makers, such as Ministry of Higher Education and regulators, have found the opportunity to make the higher education institutions to be part of the social and community development. The need for the alignment of civic engagement is described in Figure-1.

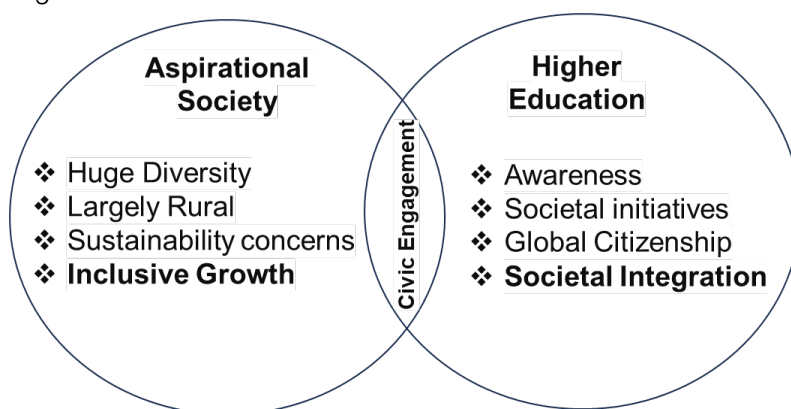


Figure-1. Civic Engagement Opportunity

NAAC has aligned its quality attribute framework with the changing context and with the NEP 2020 requirements. This was made possible due to continuous discussions with HE institutions and other related stakeholders. As part of the Assessment process, NAAC seeks data from higher education institutions on certain quantitative and qualitative indicators in the form of self-study reports (SSR). The data submitted by institutions is thoroughly reviewed and the indicators pertaining to the civic engagements are identified. The data and related documents collected through the SSRs with respect to chosen indicators were considered for the study. In the NAAC assessment, QnM (Quantitative Metrics) and QIM (Qualitative Metrics) together determine the Cumulative Grade Point

Average (CGPA) on a 0–4 Likert scale, reflecting institutional quality. The QnM scores are data-driven, while QIM scores are peer-evaluated based on qualitative metrics. Using content analysis, the best practices submitted by institutions in the SSR were grouped and prioritized for this study. The outcomes are structured and presented in Table-1.

Table 1. Civic engagement indicators captured in NAAC assessment covering data under indicated categories

S. No.	Metric	Category
1	3.6.1 (QIM)-Extension activities in the neighbourhood community terms of impact, sensitizing the students to social issues and holistic development (practices, awards and case studies)	Literacy (digital literacy), democracy and peace, sports promotion, hygiene and health, disabilities, skill and employability, gender equality, environmental sustainability
2	3.6.2 QnM-Number of extension and outreach programs with involvement of community-	Literacy (digital literacy), democracy and peace, sports promotion, hygiene and health, disabilities, skill and employability, gender equality, environmental sustainability
3	7.1.1 QIM-Gender audit and promotion of gender equity	Gender equality
4-8	7.1.2 QnM-Energy conservation measures 7.1.3 QIM-Management of degradable and non-degradable waste 7.1.4 QnM-Water conservation facilities 7.1.5 QIM- Green campus initiatives 7.1.6 QnM- Environment and Energy Initiatives for Sustainability	Environmental sustainability
9	7.1.7 QIM-Differently-abled (Divyangjan) friendly, barrier free environment	Disabilities
10	7.1.8 QIM-Institutional efforts/initiatives in providing an inclusive environment i.e., tolerance and harmony towards cultural, regional, linguistic, communal, socio-economic	Democracy and peace, disabilities and inclusion, gender equality
11	7.1.9 QIM-Sensitization towards constitutional obligations: values, rights, duties and responsibilities of citizens	Democracy and peace, gender equality etc.

Chart 1. Areas of civic engagement and levels of engagements Result and Discussion

Engagement levels Areas of Civic Engagement	Awareness and Education	Activities-specific area for a shorter period of time	Activities Sustained Engagement for longer period	Partnering with industry and NGOs for making it sustainable & Scalable	Comprehensive transformation of communities through sustained engagement
Literacy (Digital literacy)	Digital India				Advanced India Campaign (Unnat Bharat Abhiyan) Relevant initiatives along with partners based of profiling of Community .
Democracy and Peace	Voting Awareness				
Sports promotion	Promoting rural youth for participation in sports				
Hygiene and health	Hygiene and menstrual health of rural girls and women				
Disabilities	Encouraging and supporting physically challenged students on campus				
Skill & Employability			Employability skills for rural Engineering graduates		
Gender equality		Women Entrepreneurship Development			
Sustainable environment /Sustainability	Waste / Water Management, Biogas generation, Solar energy, etc				

It was observed that the areas of engagement are directly linked to socio-economic development. The identified civic engagement indicators were primarily grouped into broader categories of engagement such as literacy (digital literacy), democracy and peace, sports promotion, hygiene and health, disabilities, skill and employability, gender equality, environmental sustainability etc. (Refer Table 1). NAAC sought data from the institutions on certain qualitative and quantitative metrics related to civic engagement, as listed in Table 1, these metrics are grouped into various categories. Then the data collected from 57 universities was analysed and the results were consolidated. The table also shows how these indicators are linked to socioeconomic development. These indicators were then mapped across various engagement levels undertaken by higher education institutions, including awareness and education, activities conducted in specific areas over a short – term/long-term periods, partnerships with NGOs and Government etc. The data related to the comprehensive transformation of communities through sustained engagements were also captured for analysis.

Today, India is a leading country in adopting digital technologies in governance and public service delivery. However, digital literacy needed to benefit from access to such technologies in rural India was a challenge. HE institutions made a significant contribution

by encouraging students to create awareness and help the rural population to adopt the technologies. Increased digital literacy has hugely benefited farmers, fishermen, small business owners, rural schools and colleges, etc. These efforts have led India to become a model for the rest of the world in using digital technologies in governance and in reaching customers in rural markets. As India being the largest democracy in the world, there was a need to bring a large section of the population to participate in the democratic process by voting in the elections. Students have made a significant impact by reaching out to those sections that would otherwise not participate in the electoral process. The country witnessed a significant increase in the number of people voting in elections.

Although both democracy and digital literacy mainly aim to raise awareness among citizens, they have created a greater long-term impact on socio-economic development. While the immediate goal of such initiatives is to create awareness, their long-term impact extends far beyond engagement. For example Digital literacy bridges the gap between urban and rural populations, which facilitates empowerment and small-scale business, entrepreneurship etc. Similarly, awareness campaigns about voting rights, the electoral process, the importance of democracy etc. have a long-term impact on the socioeconomic structure of the society by creating aware and engaged citizens contributing in building an improved governance system, by tracking policies and providing feedback.

The next set of initiatives is related to active engagement through activities, in addition to creating awareness. India is said to have a very young population, and a large section of its youth live in the rural areas. There is a need to integrate this rural youth into a mainstream society by creating opportunities in areas including sports and other similar avenues. The youth don't have access to initial training and physical facilities for practicing. While the students went to the local neighborhoods and encouraged students to take up sports activities, HE institutions provided access to the sports facilities along with guidance. Similarly, Hygiene and health is another area in which HE institutions have found opportunities to engage. For example, menstrual health among rural girls and women was one of the identified areas of concern. Given the cultural context, girls do not really come out and discuss any issues they face. Through systematic communication and engagements, HE institutions are able to help girls and young women to avoid severe health issues. HE institutions also encourage physically challenged people to take up higher education and create an enabling environment that makes their life comfortable on campuses.

Table 2 highlights a few examples of engagements or interventions undertaken by the HE institutions to engage with local communities and contribute towards socioeconomic

development of society under various categories. The data is taken from NAAC self-study reports submitted by the HE institutions and consolidated.

Table 2: Examples of community Engagements initiatives/activities undertaken by institutions

S. No.	Few examples of Engagements undertaken by HEIs	Category	Linked to socioeconomic development
1	✓ Institutions are providing free tuitions and conducting personality development sessions for underprivileged children addressing SDG 4 and 10 ✓ Renovation of Anganwadi Centres promoting Early Childhood Education ✓ Contributing to the quality of Education and bridging the gap between university and rural students. <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Literacy (Digital Literacy) & Education	Employability, innovation, and productivity
2	Voting awareness by collaborating with the District Election Office or the Election Commission of India to run campaigns like Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) in local communities and schools <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Democracy & Peace	Good governance, social cohesion
3	Institutions are providing facilities to rural communities such as playground, equipment's etc. Organizing sports camps, tournaments, and coaching for rural youth	Sports promotion	Social inclusion, health awareness, employment
4	✓ Providing Health centre for the needs of the neighbouring villages ✓ Awareness programmes on health issues for young women conducted periodically ✓ Distribution of "Dignity and Hygiene Kit" to flood victim adolescent girls ✓ Women and child health care awareness ✓ Free health check-ups for community ✓ Volunteers from the NSS Unit who provided paramedical services to COVID-19 patients ✓ Conduct of health awareness programs and mobile health camps to educate rural communities ✓ Provided essential medical services such as checkups, emergency care, and specialized treatments ✓ Providing Affordable and Accessible Healthcare to Rural Inhabitants through institution Hospitals ✓ Ensuring access to quality healthcare for rural residents by reducing financial and logistical barriers ✓ Awareness programs for chronic diseases such as cancer, TB etc. from time to time ✓ Offering free OPD services to ensure healthcare is accessible to economically disadvantaged groups	Hygiene and Health	Health awareness, better healthcare, healthier population

S. No.	Few examples of Engagements undertaken by HEIs	Category	Linked to socioeconomic development
	✓ Mobile Medical Camps: addressing geographical barriers <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>		
5	✓ Special Campaigns for Differently-Abled and Senior Citizens ✓ Organizing tailored voter awareness programs that focus on the needs of differently-abled individuals and senior citizens, ensuring they are aware of the facilities provided to them at polling stations ✓ Providing an inclusive environment i.e., tolerance and harmony towards cultural, regional, linguistic, communal, socio-economic ✓ Social outreach programmes like Service-Learning creating awareness among the students about socio-economic imbalances and possible action plans <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Disabilities and inclusion	Social inclusion
6	✓ Establishment of computer Center for community children and providing e-education, skill education to unemployed youths by conducting Skill Development Programmes, Swabalamban, programs etc. ✓ Conducted skill training programs in Digital Literacy ✓ Observing the International Women's Day by engaging with community women, Housekeeping and providing training on Digital Awareness Skills <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Skill and Employability	Job prospects, entrepreneurship, and income generation, strengthening the overall economy.
7	✓ Engaged with community women to promote participation and empowerment ✓ Conducting programs with focus on gender equality ✓ Interactive sessions on issues like Bachpan Bachao, Gender Equity, Empowering Girls, female foeticide, <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Gender equality	Equal access to education, employment, and decision-making
8	✓ Prevention of food wastage etc ✓ Green, energy, Gender and Environment audit ✓ Solid, Liquid, Biomedical and e-waste management ✓ Waste recycling system ✓ Clean and green campus initiatives ✓ Use and promotion of renewable resources of energy ✓ Green Campus Initiatives <i>Unnat Bharat Abhiyan</i>	Sustainable Environment/Sustainability	Environmental sustainability

At the next level, there are engagements which are sustained over a longer period of time and at the same time there is an increase in the number of beneficiaries. For example, it has been observed that very few rural students get admission to top technical and medical

institutions. Initially few HE institutions started helping the rural students in the neighbourhoods by providing preparation for competitive examinations which led to two changes. Firstly, the initial success led to intensive engagement both in terms of the number of students getting trained and longer engagement with students, thus leading to improved quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Secondly, it attracted the attention of NGOs that also wanted to be part of such initiatives of the HE institutions, leading to newer partnerships. Promoting gender equality, especially in rural areas, is one of the major social issues prevailing in India. Gender equality can be better achieved through economic empowerment of women. Encouraging women into self-employment and entrepreneurship by setting small businesses in local areas or motivating them to use online opportunities, was considered a strategy. The faculty and students were able to help women in all aspects related to identifying opportunities, developing a product or a service, formulating communication strategies, managing financials, etc. HE institutions have made a significant impact on promoting gender equality through sustained efforts and partnerships. These initiatives were not only maintained for a long period of time but also involved partnership and thus enabled development of an ecosystem.

A sustainable environment is the most important requirement of the world, and it is more for India due to various factors such as industrialization, urbanization, etc. It demands the participation of all the stakeholders to preserve the Earth for the next generations. Efforts are required to create awareness to implement initiatives in collaboration with multiple partners, in order to achieve the desired outcomes. HE institutions are better placed for spearheading the much-needed actions in most of the areas of promoting sustainable environment. Firstly, creating awareness among students along with demonstration of water conservation, waste management, use of alternative energies, etc on campuses go a long way to achieve larger and long-term goals. Secondly, creating awareness and educating the communities in the neighbourhood help to achieve immediate outcomes towards the objective of a sustainable environment. Thirdly, some of these initiatives sustained over a long period of time in partnership of NGOs and industries enable high impact results. HE institutions have been actively engaged in all three levels to showcase a high-level civic engagement.

NAAC indicators related to the above civic engagement initiatives effectively capture the outcomes of the HE institutions. It has also been observed that there is a significant improvement in the engagement levels demonstrating the urge to perform better as compared to their previous assessment cycles, and also in comparison with other institutions. Therefore, NAAC has promoted better civic engagement among the HE institutions.

We selected a total of 57 universities randomly and data related to civic engagement indicators were analysed. Table 3 shows the analysis of the CGPA averages of civic engagement indicators for the universities across four assessment cycles. The result shows a positive and progressive trend in institutional performance. The average CGPA increased from 3.31 in Cycle 1 to 3.58 in Cycle 4, despite a slight decrease to 3.22 in Cycle 2. This overall upward movement indicates a significant improvement in engagement levels among the institutions, demonstrating their collective commitment and determination to perform better compared to previous assessment cycles. The results also show that the institutions have addressed the gaps identified in previous cycles and subsequently improved. The SSR data period is from 2019-2024.

Table 3. CGPA averages of civic engagement indicators for 57 Universities

Assessment Cycles	cycle 1	cycle 2	cycle 3	cycle 4
CGPA Avg of 57 Universities	3.31	3.22	3.48	3.58

The success of the initiatives described above has encouraged governments and HE institutions to adopt a comprehensive and sustained engagement approach in order to create a high value ecosystem for all – encompassing development in the surrounding communities. The Advanced India Campaign (Unnat Bharat Abhiyan) is inspired by the vision of transformational change in rural development processes by leveraging the knowledge of HE institutions to help build the architecture of an inclusive India (Deore et al., 2022); (Anjali et.al, 2021); (Deore et al. 2024). This comprehensive vision for village development is paramount to realizing the potential economic leadership of the nation. Although 70% of India's population resides in rural areas and represents 51% of the total workforce, their contribution to the GDP is only 17%. Significant developmental disparities persist between rural and urban sectors, including health, education, incomes, basic amenities, and employment opportunities, leading to widespread discontent and substantial migration to urban centres. The imperative of sustainable development, increasingly acknowledged on a global level, necessitates the progress of rural areas. Several HE institutions have adopted villages under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA) scheme involving relevant stakeholders and financial support from the Government of India. Under UBA, the population in the villages is profiled based on the development priorities of the target groups such as children, youth, women, elderly, etc. The profiling also includes environmental sustainability requirements for designing and launching comprehensive engagements. Considering the developments in this shift, NAAC has developed quality indicators to measure these various civic engagement initiatives in order to capture and

recognize the initiatives under UBA. It has been found that many HE institutions have demonstrated achievements and seem to have huge future potential.

3. Conclusion

The study has attempted to map various civic engagement indicators with initiatives which are derived through institutional data and content analysis. It was observed that many HE institutions are engaging in these activities by involving communities and thereby bringing changes in the society. The level of engagement is found to be higher in those institutions which are accredited in higher cycles. The incorporation of relevant indicators has led the HE institutions to make sincere efforts in the area of civic engagement and helping the nation to achieve Viksit Bharat (Advanced India) vision. The lessons from India may be useful to other quality assurance agencies to define similar indicators suitably. In addition, it is desirable to develop a civic engagement maturity model as the civic engagement opportunities are increasing in many countries.

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Much ado about something: traversing the Artificial Intelligence-Academic Integrity (AI-Ai) nexus using checklists in higher education

Fernando F. Padró

GCS Consulting and corresponding author.

Email: fpadro@msn.com,

fernando.padro@unisq.edu.au

Heejin Chang

University of Southern Queensland

Karen Trimmer

CRICOS Institution Code QLD 00244B / NSW

Yvonne Findlay

02225M, TEQSA PRV12081

Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) software such as large language models (LLMs) has created challenges to higher education sooner than anticipated and in unexpected ways when it comes to academic integrity (Ai – acronimele sunt cu majusculă în limba engleză. Ar fi indicat Alc. Nu am gasit o abreviere acceptată pentru acest termen.) concerns, forcing institutions to over- (fără cratimă: overreact)react to manage a substantial academic risk. This paper explains how the two have become a nexus, providing an overview of the dynamics at play within this nexus to meet the competing demands AI places on higher education skill development in many academic fields. Checklists (of which there are various types) are proposed as an instrument to work within the AI-Ai nexus. A development approach is proposed; however, when tested, what was found is that tacit thinking can be an obstacle to the creation of a simple, concise, and useful checklist(s) that should be paid attention to rather than downplayed.

Key words: Academic integrity, artificial intelligence, nexus, checklists

INTRODUCTION

Ai has been a concern within academia ever since student learning has had to be assessed. A good example of this has been the challenges brought about by the civil examination process in China over a 1400-year period (Blum, 2009). Another example is the concern over bribery of academic staff by students during the Middle Ages in Europe (Hastings Rashdall, 2010/1895). Over the years, until the present day, reasons for academic integrity violations can be understood in terms of [1] an emphasis on performance, [2] high stakes (relatively) riding on the outcome, [3] extrinsic motivation for success, and [4] a low expectation of success (Lang, 2013, p. 35). Risk for staff and students is based on regret of not attaining desired outcomes in terms of student performance and learning acquisition.

Based on long-standing concerns and how technological advances have aided and abetted different approaches to academic dishonesty (AD), it is fair to label Ai a wicked problem for higher education (Padró, Chang, and Parkes, 2023). Traditional processes utilized by universities do not work well. At best, they tame the problem because there is no right answer (Camillus, 2008). A reason for this is the cognitive dissonance of failure, its effects, and the context setting expectations when it comes to aspiration and valuation of course content and assessment type (Festinger, 1957; Respondek et al., 2017).

Concerns over AI are of a recent vintage. Early concepts shaping Large Language Models (LLMs) began with Saussure's theory of language as a system of signs. However, it was with the advent of ChatGPT 4.0 that the anticipated fear of change in teaching practice (Etter, Cramer, and Finn, 2006) unexpectedly came to life as Black Swan event, a shock higher education needs to explain and make predictable (Talib, 2007) to mitigate regarding the safeguarding of Ai. An issue that LLM technology has created for universities is the arms race between student use, AI-Ai detection technology, and how these technologies are utilized and marketed (Eaton, 2023). A second, as just as problematic issue for higher education institutions (HEIs) is the ability to assure the legitimacy of academic credentials in terms of recognition of achieved student learning. Academic credentials do not guarantee (assuring to meet consumer satisfaction); rather, they act as a warranty (assuring the reliability of the education), denoting potential success based on experience employers have had with graduates (Christensen 2014; Kaplin et al. 2019; Owen 2004; Priest, 1981). These two issues place Ai as a quality control (QC) issue alongside generally recognized quality assurance (QA) concerns and AI as a concern impacting both.

THE Ai-AI NEXUS

According to the British Academy (2022), a nexus refers to two activities that co-exist in symbiosis. A nexus represents a connection whose understanding is often an unproblematized concept. These connections are often insufficiently analysed to reflect the complexity of the interconnected activities these activities embody (McKinley et al. 2020). Scollon and Scollon (2004) treat a nexus as linkages making up a network. The network embodies "historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, and objects come together to enable some action" (p. viii).

Treating the confluence between the recent developments in AI and the ongoing challenges universities face pertaining Ai (for staff as well as students) is appropriate because of the uncertainty within both and the multitude of influences impacting them. The latter is often used as a proxy for a broader perspective of the clash of conduct and values of academics and students (Macfarlane, Zhang, and Pun 2012; Mazur 2021). It is

also the responsibility of many aspects of an institution to mitigate risk, ranging from individual academics to designated support staff to academic governance structures and management. Because the former is an external black swan event (shaped by external events), it is a novel risk (not fully thought about until too late) that universities need to manage (Kaplan, Leonard, and Mikes, 2020). Commercial and industrial interests in the benefits of LLM and their exploitation drive innovation and application. Synergies are being sought, but some conflicts and limitations are becoming apparent. Unfortunately, AI became collateral damage, even if there may be pedagogical and skill set development benefits for graduates entering the workforce.

Assessment, program, and institutional evaluation are the central points of the AI-Ai nexus. Trustworthiness of engagement, processes, and outcomes are the foundation, as this is the basis of the warranty supporting the viability of the academic credential and student learning capacity. Trustworthiness via QA itself is a wicked problem for higher education because of how choices are based on problematic preferences, unclear technology, and fluid participation (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972; Houston and Paewi, 2013). These affect HEI QC processes [1] memorialized through policies and procedures; [2] steered by regulatory framework benchmarks or standards, external program accreditation; and, at times, [3] institutional mediation of divergent disciplinary preferences and/or requirements based on content, pedagogical practices, and skill sets. Additionally, institutional culture influencing and influenced by governance and managerial practices also shape and bound policy and procedures, institutional planning, strategies, and responses to internal and external events. Then add, social normative preferences and individual student capability striving predicated on the socialization – connections with the surrounding environment – into the mix to help understand student behavior, in terms of prospects under what are competing interests (Kek and Huijser, 2017; Padró, 2022; Padró et al., 2023).

The AI network is a complex myriad constraining and enabling through communication and expectation management. Trustworthiness eventually combines with integration (as a form of attractiveness based on reward or benefit) based on wealth creation, knowledge production, and normative control driving research and development (R&D) in the technology sector (Blau, 1964; Leydesdorff, 2011). According to the OECD (2024), trustworthiness “is a key factor for the diffusion and adoption of AI ... [and] turning AI trustworthiness into a competitive parameter in the global marketplace” (p. 7). Integration of AI and other forms of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) conforms to alignment with cultural preferences, normative conformity with policy-based and broader social standards, ability to communicate and legitimize product and use, and success in usage

(Padró, 2023). Successfully navigating through this network is the minimization of the social integration paradox, when the attractiveness of a product or use becomes a threat to what, at times, are common or complementary interests and, in other circumstances, are conflicting interests (Blau, 1964).

This AI-Ai nexus can be seen at least in terms of the Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1995) triple-helix between universities, industry, and government, or more realistically from the Kek, Padró, and Huijser (2022) quadruple-helix, where the university purpose is the connecting point between universities, industry, governments, and society/community. From the higher education perspective, the nexus shapes “impact on how, what, where, when, and for whom the university manages and approaches education” (p. 875). The framing of actions from the entities reflects neoliberal economics, politics, and perspectives on personal and social benefits influencing accountability and government resourcing policy steering through adoption of New Public Management techniques and Total Quality Management practices (Mirowski, 2009; Padró et al. 2024).

Acknowledging the quadruple-helix contextualises the triple-helix through social dynamics shaping culture and its underlying values and moral imperatives (Carayannis and Campbell, 2011). This is an important part of the AI-Ai nexus for two reasons. First, it recognizes the role that the cultural clash between traditional academic values and current social mores regarding the importance and purpose of academic credentials, course content, and assessments (Padró, 2022; Padró, Chang and Parkes, 2023). Second, it frames the type of learning that can come from managing the nexus – single-loop (correction without altering values), double-loop (changing the governing variables), and/or triple-loop (forming new processes to reframe problems from in-depth knowledge and understanding of issues faced) (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Hoe, 2007).

CHECKLISTS

Checklists are prevalent in the aviation, healthcare, and other high reliability organisations. Simple in approach, yet they build on experience, existing knowledge, legal and regulatory frameworks (as applicable), valuational preferences of what often is a complex environment, and procedural tasks (Gawande, 2011). However, checklists need to be suitable and usable, clear, simple, relevant, comprehensive, their logic easy to understand and remember, and, above all else, useful (Flottorp et al., 2013). Their benefit is that checklists are cognitive aids assisting the mental capacity involved in highly critical activities (Thomassen et al., 2011).

They are instruments reminding academic and professional staff what must be included and avoided to ensure Ai and documentation of student learning. There are four types of

checklists: [1] static parallel (completed by one person involved in an operation of something, performed as a check and a set of tasks), [2] static sequential with verification (based on a challenge and response approach, i.e., second person verification), [3] static sequential with verification and confirmation (more typical in team-based settings when tasks are done by different members of the team), and [4] dynamic (uses flowcharts to guide complex decision-making) (Winters et al. 2009). There can be more than one in use based on preference and purpose as defined by policy and procedures. Regardless of type, checklist development, according to Winters and colleagues (2009, p. 215), begins by identifying local beliefs (views) and experiences, and scanning the environment (literature reviews, benchmarking, workshops, etc.) for external beliefs and experiences on the subject at hand. At the same time, there needs to be an analysis of institutional data and collection, analysis, and contextualization of the broader scientific evidence. From these, a pilot checklist is developed and fine-tuned before use, and then periodically evaluated for fitness for purpose. “The checklist should provide unambiguous guidance on what, when, how, and who should do a particular intervention and should be logistically efficient and easily performed” (Winters et al., 2009, p. 215).

CHECKLIST ACTIVITY

Figure 1 illustrates the four-step approach we recommend in forming a checklist. This approach is based on checklist methodology and the first author’s professional experience in higher education QA, government regulations, and sociolinguistics. Note the type of loop learning that can occur in the treatment of assessments in relation to curricular approaches (aims, values, and goals) and identified learning outcomes (Figure 2).

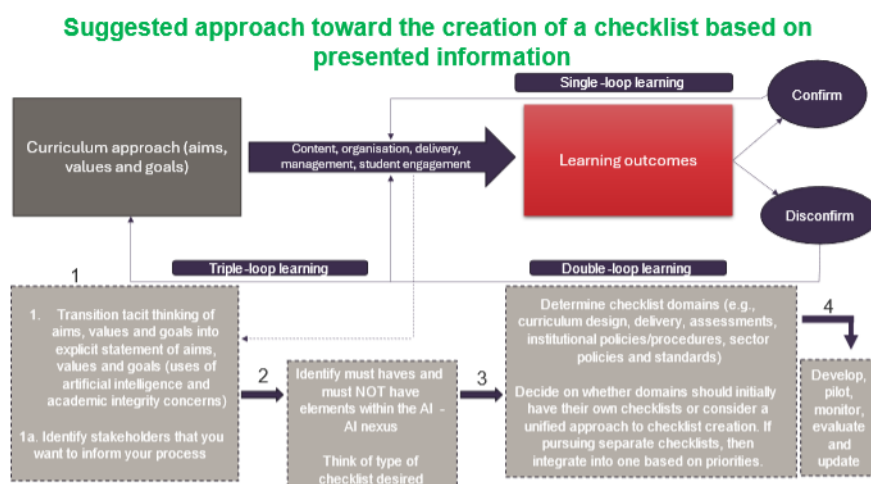


Figure 1: Checklist making approach

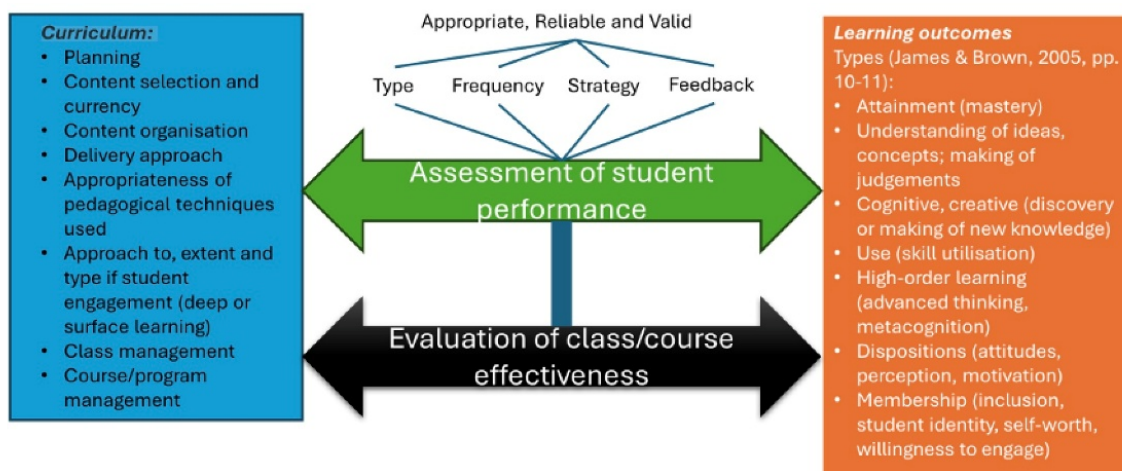


Figure 2: Assessment as a bridge to understanding curriculum elements and linkage to learning outcomes

Step 1 (identifying aims, values, and goals) can be done formally and informally; however, to initiate a process, a Delphi Technique or Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is preferable (McMillan et al, 2016). A must-have and must-NOT-have step (step 2) was added to clearly articulate requirements in a manner reminiscent to a Kano analysis (Al-Makssoossi 2022). These act as reference points that are principles steering choices made vis à vis preferences, priorities, and values undergirding decisions and subsequent actions (Schwartz, 1994). This is the critical step in the process. Step 3 is to establish checklist domains, i.e., framing parameters for priorities and checklist items, and the extent of checklist types preferred. Step 4 is an evaluation phase typical of a Shewhart cycle: Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA).

REALITY CHECK AND RECOMMENDATION

When implementing this process with mainly expert regulators and senior academics, what was found was that a clear identification of aims, values, and goals was more difficult than anticipated due to tacit thinking. Most discussions focused on procedural points rather than values. According to Schwartz (2012), values transcend specific actions and situations, set importance and priorities, and serve as criteria for action, referring to desirable goals based on belief. As can be seen, the randomly assigned four groups of academics and regulators in the exercise

did not exhibit these attributes. One group of experts talked about assessing understanding, learning outcomes, skills needed, stakeholder identification, limits and balancing interests. A second group came up with various forms of communication of expectations and intent, plus the establishment of trust with students through

communication. The third group only discussed detection tools, misconduct warnings, and ethical use of AI. The final group emphasized the need for transparent AI usage policies; differentiation between assessment, teaching, and studying; training academics to recognize AI-generated student work; and inclusion of AI lectures within the curriculum.

Tacit knowledge is often un verbalized, and it is not explicit (Polanyi, 1966; Wagner and Sternberg, 1985). The ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity of the knowledge in question can make it difficult, even for experts, to clearly express what the parsed elements that constitute their value judgments (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005; Law, 2014). It is tempting to focus on the immediate, parsing the different loops when dealing with the AI-AI nexus. Yet, given the foundational aspect of personal and institutional values, it is essential to come to grips with the fundamental points of key academic values, particularly as these are now often at odds with broader social values and attitudes toward higher education, as already noted. As Gawande (2011, p. 11) observed: “Failures of ignorance we can forgive... [but] if the knowledge exists and is not applied correctly, it is difficult not to be infuriated.”

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Bridging HEIs and the Society for Promoting the Lifelong Learning: A Case in Japan

Akinori Matsuzaka

Associate Director of the Research and
Planning Division, Japan University
Accreditation Association, Japan
a_matsuzaka@juaa.or.jp

Miharu Kato

Assistant Director of the Research and
Planning Division, Japan University
Accreditation Association, Japan
<https://www.juaa.or.jp/en/>

Abstract: Given the ongoing birth-rates decline, and the increasing need for lifelong learning, a shift to adult education is one of the most realistic ways for many HEIs in Japan. However, when it comes to the present situation, there is an unignorable gap in the understanding between HEIs and society, and this might be an obstacle to successful lifelong learning. This paper will describe the landscape in Japan and focus on the efforts by the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) to bridge HEIs and society. In its conclusion, this paper will review the results of the efforts and some remaining issues.

Keywords: lifelong learning, recurrent learning, reskilling, intermediation, Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)

1. Introduction

Traditionally, Japanese higher education institutions (HEIs) have primarily enrolled 18-year-old students. However, due to the ongoing decline in birth rates, an increasing number of HEIs are finding it challenging to maintain enrolment levels, leading to financial difficulties for some institutions. Consequently, closures or mergers among HEIs have become a prominent issue on the national policy agenda (the Central Council for Education, 2024, pp.34, 37–38). To avoid closure, HEIs must implement reforms to enhance their attractiveness to prospective students.

Along with this, enhancing the learning opportunities for adults is becoming a key issue in Japan. For economic prosperity and individual well-being, lifelong learning, including recurrent learning and reskilling, is seen as crucial today, and the Japanese government now sets a policy target to it so that more educational programs are offered, especially in

graduate schools. Although what is described here is a facet of the landscape, making a shift to adult education is one of the most realistic ways for many HEIs.

2. The Needs of Bridging HEIs and the Society

Making such a shift successfully requires many efforts for HEIs, including sharing an understanding of education with society. Without matching the needs in society, any educational program will not attract people. In this sense, building a communicative relationship between HEIs and society is necessary. However, when it comes to Japan, the communicative relationship is not well formed so far. This is obvious, for example, in the survey by the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA).

The JUAA is one of the external quality assurance (EQA) bodies in Japan, having more than 70 years of history. As an EQA body, the JUAA is engaged in accreditation, but its working area is not limited to that. To support qualitative enhancement by each HEI, the JUAA also works in, for example, research. The above-mentioned survey was done under the research institute of the JUAA (RIQAHE) to understand the learning contents or competencies needed today ⁽¹⁾. Table 1 shows the details of the survey.

Table 1

Survey Date	<HEIs> From April 22 to June 3, 2022 <Labour market> From 13 to 16, 2022
Methodologies and Process	<HEIs> JUAA sent the questionnaire data sheet to all HEIs and collected online. The sheet consisted of the close-ended questions as well as the open – ended questions. <Labour market> JUAA collected the answers through a panel survey company, targeting the workers for the personnel affairs. The workers at both small and large companies as well as non-profit sector were invited. The questionnaire included only the close-ended questions.
Number of the Valid Answers	<HEIs> 374 (47,5%) <Labour market> 750 (each 250 from smaller companies, larger companies non-profit sectors)

Source: <https://www.juaa.or.jp/en/research/>

The survey brought some noteworthy results. One of these is an unignorable gap in the understanding between HEIs and society (the labour market). Whereas the emphasis on the data sciences and its related competencies is common, the interdisciplinary education

⁽¹⁾ The Survey on Developing Skills in Bachelor's Degree Education to Meet the Challenges of Contemporary Society. The English version of its report will be available on the JUAA's website (<https://www.juaa.or.jp/en/research/>).

which HEIs offer does not fully meet the interests of the respondents from the labour market. These respondents do not see the importance of it to the same extent as HEIs (Figures 1 and 2). This gap suggests that not all educational programs might fully match the needs of society, or at least, there is a necessity to encourage both HEIs and society to communicate for better mutual understanding.

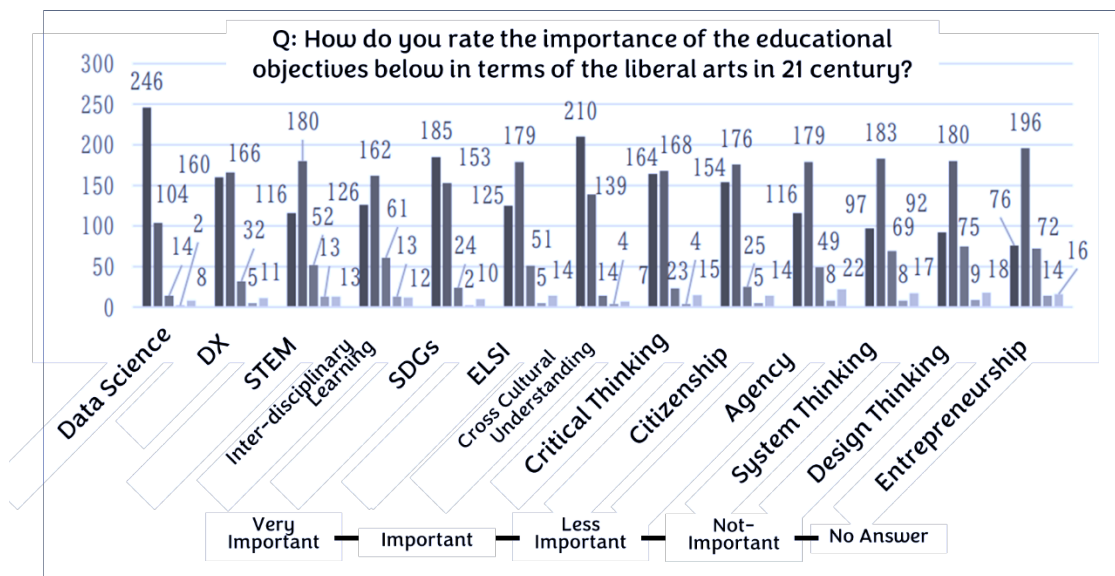


Figure 1. Opinion of HEIs

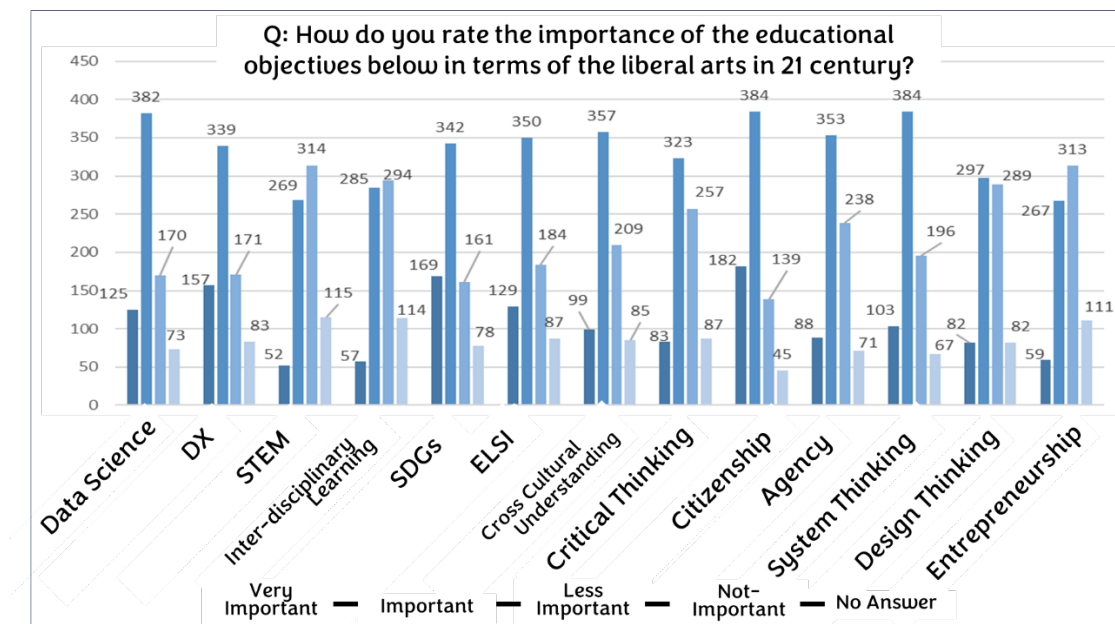


Figure 2. Opinion of Labour Market

3. The Actions taken by the JUAA

Based on the survey results, the JUAA has taken several actions to bridge HEIs and society. Of course, the JUAA involves some evaluators from the industrial sector and other related parties besides the peers from HEIs and makes public the accreditation results so that the society can get a better understanding of HEIs. The JUAA even has a website where anyone can easily get information on the notable points of each accredited HEI and programs. But the JUAA is sure that these are not enough, because ultimate responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement exists in HEIs themselves, and this is the case with enhancing the adult education too. HEIs themselves should take action to close the gap, and the JUAA as an EQA body should support them by giving advice and even intermediating between HEIs and the society. Therefore, the JUAA decided to take some actions.

Among these actions, this paper sheds light on the seminars. The JUAA has held the seminars twice so far which concerned the dialogue between HEIs and society. The first seminar was held online on December 20, 2022, with the name “RIQAHE’s open seminar,” and the second one was on July 28, 2023, with the same name and delivery style. Table 2 shows the details of the two seminars. Each of the two seminars had speakers from both the industrial sector and HEIs, and also invited participants from both sides as well. In each case, the participants were encouraged to exchange opinions and discuss.

Table 2

	1 st seminar	2 nd seminar
Date	Dec. 20, 2022	Jul. 28, 2023
Topic	How does the Society See the Educational Outcomes of HEIs?	Liberal Arts for the 21 st Century and the Possibilities of the Dialogue between HEIs and the Labour Market
Agenda	1. Speeches on the topics (one speaker from HEI & one from a global company) 2. Panel Discussion 3. Discussion among All Participants	1. Speeches on the topics (one speaker from HEI) 2. Panel Discussion (incl. short presentation by two panels from a global company & smaller company) 3. Discussion among All Participants
Number of Participants	HEISs: 171 Labour market: 3	HEISs: 160 Labour market: 4

Source: <https://www.juaa.or.jp/en/research/>

4. Conclusion

The paper concludes with a review of the results and a discussion of some remaining issues.

On the positive side, many participants found the seminars to be good opportunities to learn what the other parties think. The feedback questionnaire received numerous positive comments. The comment “Good opportunities” implies that the seminars could potentially complement the efforts of individual HEIs. Today, many HEIs have dialogues with some companies and other related parties, and sometimes cooperate with them. But it is only a one-to-one relationship. Thus, the seminar might serve HEIs to meet a wider range of parties outside HEIs.

On the other side, there remain some issues. First, the number of participants. The number of participants from outside HEIs was small. This was partly the result of the current ties that the JUAA has with the relevant parties of society. While the JUAA regularly contacts some major economic organizations or other bodies, ties are still not close enough to fully involve them. This means that to the JUAA, the necessity of strengthening the ties is the first step.

Second, mutual communication was not yet so active. This is partly because of the aforementioned fewer participants from outside HEIs, and partly because of the seminars agenda. Thus, continuous efforts are needed to get a wider range of participants and improve the content of the seminars.

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