

Delivering Quality Higher Education through ODL: A Comparative Analysis of Quality Parameters and Framework of UGC vis-à-vis AAOU.

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1.0 Quality Issues and the General Quality Parameters in Open and Distance Learning

'Quality' is an ambiguous term, as we cannot define it with a universal acceptance. Even then, when we talk about quality in the ODL system of education, we have to settle down to a few parameters which are crucial to the administering of the programme delivery and which have the wider acceptance in the field of ODL as certain benchmarks to be measured and achieved. Again, there are many arguments, which should be seen as quality indicators in the ODL system of education. Chenney, et al. (2007) after reviewing a large amount of literature on the issue, arrived at fifteen quality indicators of ODL. These include:

1) Learner-teacher interaction: In the ODL mode of education, there are numerous types of interaction, viz., learner-learner interaction, learner-content interaction, teacher-content interaction, teacher-teacher interaction, content-content interaction, and learner-teacher interaction (Anderson as cited in Moore & Anderson. 2003. pp 129-144). However, among all these type of interactions, the most often cited mode of interaction as a quality indicator in the systematic literature ODL is the *learner-teacher interaction*.

2) Active learning techniques: Active learning techniques imply that the learners are being engaged in interactive activities that can lead to increased "enthusiasm for learning as well as increased achievement beyond course expectations" (Hannafin et. al., p. 250 as cited in Chenney, 2003. p. 4). This can be achieved by incorporating certain activities in the SLMs, or certain project-based or field-based activities.

3) Prompt feedback to learners: It has been argued that "communications from faculty that directly engages learners and offers timely feedback may contribute to interchanges and the learners' subsequent success in the course" (Sherry, 2003. p. 454 as cited in *Ibid*). Promptness, however, is a relative concept. In today's

digital age, a learner may consider a prompt reply if s/he receives an answer within seconds, or minutes. However, the teacher may consider promptness, if s/he could redress the query within days. On such accounts, it is necessary to define feedback time in the course outline itself.

4) *Respect diverse ways of learning:* The ODL system of education, as the name itself suggests, needs to remain open with respect to the diverse ways of learning adopted by its learners. Thus, it has been argued that while developing distance education courses and programmes, efforts should be made “to incorporate different distance education activities and opportunities, such as chat rooms, discussion boards, and Web search activities, to provide flexibility in approaches to learning” (Chennery et al., 2003).

5) *Learner Support Services (LSS):* LSS, including well-designed SLMs, have been argued to be the cornerstone of ODL. It has been argued that LSS, such as admission services, library access and services, financial aid, and advisement to meet the “cognitive, affective, and administrative needs of the student” (Daniel & Mackintosh as cited in Chenney, et. al. 2003. p. 5), are vital to the success of any distance education programme.

6) *Faculty support services:* Faculty support services become a crucial component of the ODL system of education, because compared to the conventional mode of education, a teacher in the distance mode has to confront with latest technological gadgets more often. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2000 as cited in *Ibid.* p. 5) has outlined four faculty support services, viz.,

- (a) the appropriate technical assistance for course development,
- (b) written resources to address any problems with learner access to electronic data for the course, c) continual instructor training opportunities, and
- (d) appropriate assistance in the transition from traditional to distance education instructional methods.

7) *Programme evaluation and assessment:* Evaluation and assessment studies of instructional techniques such as teaching via distance education are critical in improving and ensuring quality. Programme evaluation needs to be undertaken to assess if the programmes offered are achieving the desired outcome.

The findings from programme evaluation and assessment studies should be utilised in curriculum design and delivery, pedagogy and educational processes.

8) *Strong rationale for distance education that correlates to the mission of the institution:* Educators of the ODL institution must design and implement the distance education programmes in line with its overall vision and mission statements.

9) *Clear analysis of audience:* The design of a high-quality distance education programme should centre around the needs of the audience (including those of the institution, faculty, and learners). An effective delivery of distance education programmes necessitates that the profile of its audience are clearly understood prior to the design and development of the programmes.

10) *Appropriate tools and media:* We have already argued that with the advancement in information and communicative technologies, the paradigm of ODL has witnessed tremendous changes. However, amidst a whole range of technological gadgets and services, the proper selection and usage of technologies remain a critical issue. Thus, to choose the appropriate tools and media remains a critical element in the efficiency of delivery of academic programmes through the ODL mode of education.

11) *Documented technology plans to ensure quality:* Institutional benchmarks, such as documented technology plans, have also been identified as quality indicators for distance education. According to Institute for Higher Education Policy (as cited in *Ibid*, p. 8), “a documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (i.e. password protection, encryption, back-up systems) [should be] in place and operational to ensure both quality standards and the integrity and validity of information.”

12) *Reliability of technology:* Another quality indicator in ODL is the reliability of technologies used in teaching-learning and overall process of administration. The technologies used should be reliable and least prone to technological failures.

13) *Institutional support and institutional resources:* This quality parameter of ODL is particularly relevant for the distance education wings of a dual-mode university. Most of the distance education wings of dual mode universities suffer from operational autonomy,

which adversely affect the cause of ODL.

14) Implementation of guidelines for course development and review of instructional materials: Detailed guidelines on course development and review of instructional materials are necessary for delivery of quality course and programmes. The treatment of the matter with regard to the academic standard of the programme, writing style, presentation style, and use of graphs, tables, self-check exercise, activities, and model questions all should have a proper format. Similar guidelines should also be underlined for periodic review of instructional materials.

15) Course structure guideline: The Institute for Higher Education Policy (as cited in *Ibid*) observes that before the start of a distance education course, the learners should be informed, and “advised about the programme to determine (1) if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn at a distance, and (2) if they have access to the minimal technology required by the course design.”

However, in addition to the above fifteen quality parameters, three more quality parameters are equally necessary in the system of ODL.

The *first* is a formal quality assurance mechanism. An all-encompassing quality mechanism is crucial both for delivering quality course materials to the learners and for long-term sustainability of the institution. Without a formal quality, assurance mechanism and detailed guidelines to operate the same, quality assurance may only become a distant dream to be achieved.

The *second* one is an efficient mechanism for evaluation of learners. After all, the learners, at the end of their study, have to be evaluated. The UGC (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017 mentions:

[Learning outcomes are the specifications of what a Learner shall learn and demonstrate on successful completion of the course or the programme. It can also be seen as the desired outcome of the learning process in terms of acquisition of the skills and knowledge. They are embedded in the curriculum. Achieving Learning Outcomes needs specific experiences to be provided to the Learner and evaluation of their attainment. The Institution needs to ensure that the purposes of assessment are clearly described in the course materials, and the learners are able to access some of the assignments.] (p. 55)

The *third* one is research and community services. The institution should encourage research, especially in the field of ODL. This would help in capacity building of the faculty members, as well as would serve the overall cause of ODL. The ODL institution should also follow a community service agenda, which would bring the institution closer to the communities. The need-based community services would help the institution to serve towards greater social causes. The AAOU framework mentions:

[The ODL institution should also ensure that community service could be performed by academic staff. The institution should increase social contribution by promoting lifelong education among the people and providing quality education opportunities to local communities and alienated areas and class at an affordable cost. Regional campuses should play the role of lifelong education center in each region.]

2.0 Quality Framework of UGC vs AAOU—The Basic Structure:

This section deals with the basic framework of the UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 and the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) of Asian Association of Open Universities.

2.1 University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017

The UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 was published on 23 June 2017 in *The Gazette of India (Extraordinary)*. These regulations have been brought out under the aegis of University Grants Commission, the regulatory body of higher education in India.

Following are its important features:

- a. The regulations have been divided into six major parts, viz.,
 - Part I: Preliminary.
 - Part II: Recognition of higher educational institution for open and distance learning programmes.
 - Part III: Maintenance of infrastructural, academic and other quality standards by higher educational institutions.
 - Part IV: Admissions, examinations and learner support.
 - Part V: Assessment, accreditation, audit, inspection and monitoring.

- Part VI: Miscellaneous.
- b. There are a total of eleven annexure detailing activities/guidelines of the respective areas. These are:
 - Annexure I: Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA).
 - Annexure II: Quality-monitoring mechanism.
 - Annexure III: Minimum standards to be maintained at examination centres.
 - Annexure IV: Courses or study centres or off campuses and territorial jurisdiction of universities.
 - Annexure V: Competencies of counselor in a learner support centre.
 - Annexure VI: Academic and infrastructural requirements.
 - Annexure VII: Quality assurance guidelines of learning material in multiple media, human Resource, curriculum and pedagogy.
 - Annexure VIII: Guidelines on preparation of self-learning material.
 - Annexure IX: Guidelines on Programme Project Report (PPR).
 - Annexure X: Learner support centre.
 - Annexure XI: Grievance redressal mechanism.

The different provisions made in the UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 are applicable to whole of India with immediate effect from the date of its publication.

2.2 Quality Assurance Framework of Asian Association of Open Universities

Founded in 1987, the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) is a non-profit organization of higher learning institutions. AAOU is primarily concerned with open and distance education. It strives to widen the educational opportunities available to all people in Asia and to improve the quality of the institutions in terms of their educational management, teaching and research. It promotes education by distance teaching systems, as well as professional and ethical standards; develops potentialities of open and distance education; cooperates with official bodies and others directly or indirectly interested in education at a distance; and facilitates cooperation with other similar regional and international bodies.

The QAF of AAOU, designed by the AAOU in 2010 (Darojat et. al., 2015) has been divided into ten major components, 5 sub-components, and have listed 120 best practices. These have been summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1: List of Components and number of sub-components and best practices in QAF of AAOU

Title of Components	Number of Sub-components	Number of best practices
Policy and Planning	7	13
Internal Management.	7	21
Learners and Learners' Profiles	11	14
Infrastructure, Media, and Learning Resources	3	10
Learner Assessment and Evaluation.	5	15
Research and Community Services	6	14
Human Resources	5	12
Learner Support	2	14
Program Design and Curriculum Development	2	5
Course Design and Development	6	12

The different provisions made in the QAF of AAOU though have no legal validity, yet seeks to improve the quality of ODL mode of education among its member countries. The provisions have been expressed as best 'statement of best practices', which means that its member countries should ideally practice to deliver quality education to their fellow citizens.

2.3 Framework of UGC vs AAOU: Quality Parameter-wise Analysis

In this section, we shall try to examine the different provisions that been made in both the UGC and the AAOU frameworks with regard to the eighteen quality parameters that we have already shortlisted in the first section.

Quality Parameter 1: Learner–teacher interaction

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online interaction should be provided. • Counselling at study centres should be provided by a regular teacher and other counselors. • Programme-wise faculty details should be provided in programme brochure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face or mediated tutorial support is provided to minimize stress, frustration, failure and dropout. • Formal and informal communications and other face-to-face provisions are facilitated to maintain a close link with its learners.

Quality Parameter 2: Active learning techniques

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Emphasis has been laid on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocational guidance • hands on experiences • laboratory for experimental work • field experiences, and • project work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No explicit guidelines have been made.

Quality Parameter 3: Prompt feedback to learners

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Emphasis has been laid on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on assignments. • Feedback mechanism on design, development, delivery and continuous evaluation of learner's performance should be put into place. • Self Learning Material (SLM) should facilitate learners' feedback on their understanding of the subject. • On-line support should be provided for interactive learning with learner feedback. • There should be proper channels for collecting learners' feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutors give constructive feedbacks about the learners' learning progress to the learners and the institution. • Assessment and feedbacks on the assignments are promptly and fairly administered.

Quality Parameter 4: Respect diverse ways of learning

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There shall be detail-learning map in SLM for the learner so that s/he will be self-directed throughout his/her studies. • SLM should follow the principle of flexible learning. • Academic flexibility should be offered to promote the freedom in the use of the time, vertical mobility. Inter-disciplinary options should also be facilitated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The varied and different interests of the learners about learning orientation, duration of study, and learning purposes are accommodated.

Quality Parameter 5: Learner support services

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Emphasis has been laid on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-admission counselling. • Support in admission related matters. • Details of study material. • Delivery of study material to learners within a fortnight of admission. • A full time dedicated help desk. • The UGC (Grievance Redressal) Regulations, 2012 should be followed. • On-line guidance and counseling to be provided. • An 'on-line' discussion forum for learners. • Additional learning resources other than print SLM, e.g., on-line mode, CDs etc. should be provided. • Learners should be able to access the LSS including library services electronically. • Virtual facilities should be established so that blended learning can be facilitated. • LSS to be provided through the campus-wide portal and e-Learning platform. • Information and Communication Technology and expertise in e-learning would be utilized to the learners a seamless learner-centred environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear tutorial guidelines to tutors and learners exist. Tutors are properly trained. • Orientation sessions for learners are conducted prior to the tutorial activities. • An effective monitoring mechanism exists for the diagnosing learner problems. • Individual counseling needs of the learners are fulfilled. • Both synchronous and asynchronous channels of communication between the counselors and learners are facilitated. • Effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating learner learning support services is established. • Media and technologies used as LSS should match the course content in order to enhance and expand learning. • ICT technologies are adopted according to the learners' particulars, learning needs, and their circumstances. • The institution should utilise media and technologies that are accessible, equitable and practical. • The institution should inform learners of the potential impacts of media choices on learner access, and develop alternative measures for those learners who are unable to make effective use of the media chosen.

Quality Parameter 6: Faculty support services

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIQA should undertake activities to cultivate creativity and innovation in the faculty and staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The institution should have clear guidelines for selecting, recruiting, and retaining qualified staff members. • The compositions of academic staff members and their qualifications are reviewed regularly. • A well-defined career development plan as well as a performance management system is followed, which would motivate the staff to develop their skills and knowledge. Appropriate recognition and reward system exists. • Training for academic staff is provided so that they are able to effectively handle the different tools of LSS. • Non-academic should receive regular training to update their job skills. • Human resource development programmes are based on the specific needs of the staff members.

Quality Parameter 7: Programme evaluation and assessment

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme monitoring review system should be established for annual programme reviews, external benchmarking, collecting learner feedback, and development of improvement plans and actions. • Periodic internal reviews should be conducted to maintain and improve academic quality consistently. For such reviews, the achievements of learning outcomes of the learners should be taken into account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective system for evaluating the course materials regularly for future improvement is available.

Quality Parameter 8: Strong rationale for distance education that correlates to the mission of the institution

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes should be aligned to the overall mission and goals of the Higher Educational Institutions (HEI). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-defined vision and mission statement has been adopted, which incorporates the internal and external educational environment, its potential, national development agenda, and international trend in education. The institution's vision and mission cascade down to the strategic plan, which defines its specific objectives and goals.

Quality Parameter 9: Clear analysis of audience

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Prior to the development of SLMs, the HEI should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learner Profile: This includes literacy level (including level of language proficiency), age group, ICT skills, aim of study, personal background and home situation, prior knowledge, prior skills, learning situations, etc. Background: In the ODL system, the learners study at own pace and time. Most of them may be working professionals having very limited time to study. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the accessibility of course resources and references at the place of learning. While providing online learning materials, the needs of the learners with disabilities should be taken into consideration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interests and needs of the learners and staff members are considered during the decision making process. Adequate training is provided to the learners for handling different media. The institution should design programmes and courses based on assessments of learners' specific needs. The institution should also consider the capability of individual learners in the curriculum development.

Quality Parameter 10: Appropriate tools and media

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Apart from SLMs in print form, emphases have been laid on providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-video materials. • Up to twenty percent of the total courses, being offered in a particular programme in a semester may be offered through the Online Learning courses/MOOCs. • Computer-based materials may be provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate media and technologies that match the course content are used to enhance and expand learning. • Media and technologies should suit learners' particulars, learning needs, and their circumstances. • Media and technologies are accessible, equitable and practical. • Costs and benefits to the institution and the learners are assessed while selecting the media and technologies. • Adequate training for staff and learners regarding the use of media is provided. • Systematic research and development on integrating new technologies into the academic and administrative services are undertaken.

Quality Parameter 11: Documented technology plans to ensure quality

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aadhaar (biometric) details or other Government identifiers of learners should be recorded. • Data on the entire process of selection of candidates should be preserved for a minimum period of five years. • Such records should be exhibited on the website. • Records shall have to produced, whenever needed by any statutory authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An efficient and secure learner record system should be maintained for helping towards academic and administrative decision-making.

Quality Parameter 12: Reliability of technology

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">No explicit guideline has been made.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The institution has an effective system for managing and maintaining its equipment and facilities.

Quality Parameter 13: Institutional support and institutional resources

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>In case of dual mode universities, clear cut requirements for the wing of the distance education has been laid down with regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">requirement of human resources (both teaching and non-teaching),Physical infrastructural facilities. Detail specifications with regard to academics, administrative, academic support services and others have been made.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Since the provisions of AAOU framework have been specifically designed for the open universities, no explicit mention for institutional support (from a parent institution) has been made.</i>

Quality Parameter 14: Implementation of guidelines for course development and review of instructional materials

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">SLM should have clearly stated objectives, intended learning outcomes, study guidance and advice on how to best use the material. List of related reference material and linkages with other media (for digital SLM) should be clearly indicated.SLM should be self-explanatory, self-contained, illustrative, easily comprehensible, and manageable.SLM should facilitate learners' feedback on their understanding of the subject.Periodic revision should be undertaken to improve the quality and learner support.A detailed guideline for the preparation of course materials should be laid down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Courses are designed only after thorough planning.The design courses are based on learners' needs.A systematic schedule for course design and development is followed.An effective system for evaluating the course materials regularly for future improvement has been established.

Quality Parameter 15: Course structure guidelines

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<p>Before offering any programme, a Programme Project Report (PPR) has to be prepared, which needs approval from the UGC. The relevant components in the PPR are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional design which shall include programme duration, faculty and support staff requirements, instructional delivery mechanisms, identification of media – print, audio or video, online, computer aided, and other support services. • Procedure for admissions, curriculum transaction and evaluation should be clearly spelt out. • Details of laboratory support requirement, library resources should be specified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential learners and the wider community are made aware of its courses and programmes on offer, its operational systems and the advantages of the ODL system.

Quality Parameter 16: Formal quality assurance mechanism

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework: The Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of CIQA (Centre for Internal Quality Assurance) has been made mandatory. • Details guidelines of CIQA on the various administrative tasks relating to SLM and LSS, human resources development and management, curriculum and pedagogy have been provided. • Training for counsellors of the study centres should be undertaken at regular intervals. • It should be ensured that the quality of programmes offered through the ODL mode are at par with the standards in the conventional mode. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective system for soliciting regular feedbacks from the stakeholders is available. • An integrated quality assurance system for its programmes and implementation units has been established. • Self-assessments are undertaken regularly to improve its operations and programmes.

Quality Parameter 17: Efficient mechanism for evaluation of learners

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two types of evaluation, viz., continuous or formative assessment (assignments), and summative assessment (term end examination: TEE) should be followed. The weightage for TEE shall not be less than 70%. A rigorous process should be followed in the development of question papers, question banks, assignments, and conduct of examination, evaluation of answer scripts and their moderation, and result declaration. No part of the syllabus should be left out of study by a learner. No TEE shall be held in a subject unless at least 75% of the programme of the stipulated study has been actually conducted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is ensured that assessment is timely, fair and of the right amount. All academic staff members are made conversant with formative and summative assessment procedures and their importance in the learning process. The purposes of the assessment are clearly described in the course materials, and the learners are able to self-assess some of their assignments. Assessments are valid and reliable. The schedule and media of assessment are flexible. Staff members responsible for assessment are properly trained. Guidelines are framed for processing assessment results. Assessment results are delivered to learners on time. Learners are able to provide feedbacks on the assessment results, which are used for future improvements.

Quality Parameter 18: Research and community services

Provisions in UGC Regulations	Provisions in AAOU Framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CIQA should conduct or encourage system-based research to bring about qualitative change in the entire system. The workload of a teacher shall also take into account research and extension activities among others. <i>No explicit statement on community services has been made.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clearly defined policy for research with a focus of research on ODL methodologies exists. Research findings are widely disseminated through various media. Staff members are encouraged to put research results into practical use. The institution promotes its ODL programmes are regularly promoted among the public and communities. Sufficient need-based mission-related activities for the community are undertaken. Active involvement of the community members are sought after in its community service activities. Clear guidelines for planning, implementing, and monitoring community service activities exist.

3. An Overall Comparative Analysis

The major points of similarities and dissimilarities between the UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017 and the QAF of AAOU have been summarised in the following discussion:

3.1 Relative Merits of the QAF of AAOU

- As a means to facilitating learner-teaching interaction, the QAF of AAOU framework has laid emphasis on both formal and informal modes of communication, while the UGC Regulations has not specifically promoted the informal channel.
- The QAF of AAOU has laid emphasis on conducting orientation to the learners prior to the tutorial activities.
- The QAF of AAOU also has advocated for the establishment of an effective monitoring mechanism for the diagnosing learner problems, and undertaking individual counseling sessions to meet the learner's specific needs. Such provisions have not been spelt out in the UGC Regulations.
- In the provisions of different ICT-based LSS, the QAF of AAOU has put deeper emphasis on learners' needs and circumstances. It has also been suggested that the media and technologies should be accessible, equitable and practical.
- Emphasis has also been laid on informing the learners of the potential impacts of media choices, with respect to the learner's access of them. It has been suggested that the institution should develop alternative measures for those learners who are unable to make effective use of the media chosen.
- The QAF also call for providing adequate training to the learners for handling different media and technologies.
- With regard to use of media and technologies, the QAF of AAOU also has laid emphasis on systematic research on it.
- The QAF also has laid greater emphasis on faculty support services. Specific suggestions for training and development for the teachers have been made. Suggestions also include following a career development plan with performance and reward based system.
- With regard to the evaluation of learners' learning outcome, the QAF of AAOU has suggested making provisions for self-assessment of some of their assignments. This is quite proactive thinking.

- The QAF of AAOU also has laid greater emphasis on research and community services. It has suggested for prioritizing system-based research on ODL methodologies. The AAOU framework also has put thrust on wider dissemination of result findings and implementing research findings on practical uses. The AAOU framework has given due importance to community services, which does not find any mention in the UGC Regulations.

3.2 Relative Merits of the UGC (ODL) Regulations, 2017

- UGC Regulations have laid more emphasis on the online interaction between teachers and learners.
- In the context of active learning techniques, the UGC Regulations have laid emphases on vocational guidance, hands on hands on experiences, laboratory for experimental work, field experiences and project work. The QAF of AAOU does not make any explicit statement on active learning techniques.
- Compared to the QAF of AAOU, the UGC Regulations have spelt out more detail on providing prompt feedback to learners. The UGC Regulations has called for a systematic and more formal mechanism for collecting learner's feedback.
- Compared to the QAF of AAOU, the UGC Regulations are also more explicit with regard to the diverse ways of learning. It has called for more offering more flexibility to the learners.
- In case of the use of ICT, the UGC Regulations, as compared to the QAF of AAOU are more proactive on the use of online platform, MOOCs, OER etc. The UGC Regulations also has called a blended learning approach.
- With regard to programme evaluation and assessment, the UGC Regulations are more explicit suggesting a periodic review of programmes.
- On the issue of understanding the learners' needs, the UGC Regulations are more proactive, especially with regard to the needs of the learners with disabilities.
- The UGC Regulations also have more detail discussion on various aspects of SLM development.
- The UGC Regulations also have more detail discussion on the formal quality assurance mechanism. It has laid more detail discussion on the various administrative aspects of CIQA.

4. Relevance of State Open Universities in India:

Both the quality assurance frameworks, though were brought out at different points of time by different agencies, have an Asian relevance, and both seek to improve quality of open and distance learning. It seems that the QAF of AAOU is more visionary and philosophical in the sense that it lists 120 best practices. The UGC Regulations, on the other hand, seem to be operational in nature. The Indonesia Open University (IOU) is one of the founding members of AAOU and it played a major part in the formulation of the QAF of AAOU. The initial draft of the QAF of AAOU was brought out in 2007. However, the IOU tried to implement the provision of the draft QAF since the very early stage. An early study undertaken by Belawati & Juhari (2007) came up with the following finding:

[...only people can make QA happen. UT staff sign agreed-upon work contracts and evaluated throughout the year to monitor their performance. At the end of the year, individual and unit performance is assessed in terms of actual achievement vis-à-vis established benchmarks. If any person or unit is found to fall short of their performance goals, then systems and procedures are examined carefully to ensure they have the skills, tools, and knowledge they need to improve. Performance is directly linked to incentives and compensation, with high performers being rewarded for the effort, innovation and abilities.]

World known ODL expert, former Vice Chancellor of UK Open University and former Chairperson, Commonwealth of Learning, Sir John Daniel also has outlined the effectiveness of the QAF of AAOU in delivering quality distance education (Uvalić-Trumbić & Daniel n.d.). Our State Open Universities in India, e.g., Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) should formulate a comprehensive Quality assurance policy by taking the QAF of AAOU as a guideline and then a detail operation framework should be drawn keeping in view the UGC (ODL), Regulations, 2017.

5. Summing up the Study:

Quality assurance is not an overnight affair. It would require a well thought out, well planned and fully integrated strategy. As the experience of the Indonesia Open University suggests, QA requires a rock solid supervision and guidance from the top-most authority of the University. It must touch upon every process, every unit, every person and every job. To be successful, QA must flow across the length and breadth of the organization.

State Open Universities in India like KKHSOU should start the QA endeavour with an inward look. Already, the University completed the QA exercise under the framework of Commonwealth of Learning: Review and Implementation (COLRIM). It should now work on designing its own QA Policy and Operational Framework by considering the overall philosophy of QAF of AAOU and the UGC Regulations of 2017. For an effective delivery of quality distance education, we need both a philosophical as well as practical approach. As was once said by Theodore Roosevelt: “Be practical as well as generous in your ideals. Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground.”

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