Quality Assurance in Practice: Insights from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India

Md. Mizanoor Rahman
Open School, Bangladesh Open University
E-mail: mizan2006@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research examines the development and quality improvement of educational programs at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), with a specific focus on peer review processes, curriculum design, governance, learner support, and resource management. The study highlights how NIOS employs a blended learning approach, combining face-to-face interactions with technology-driven learning, particularly for vocational courses. It also explores the impact of peer-to-peer (P2P) review processes on institutional performance and quality assurance, drawing on insights from a range of international educational standards and frameworks. The findings reveal that NIOS follows a comprehensive approach to curriculum development, incorporating needs assessments and feedback from stakeholders, and aligns its program evaluations with national educational standards. Additionally, the research investigates the infrastructure of NIOS, including its ICT facilities, library resources, and support systems for learners, which are crucial for enhancing educational outcomes. The study also emphasizes the importance of ongoing faculty development, research opportunities, and the integration of innovative practices, such as the on-demand examination system. Moreover, the governance structure of NIOS is reviewed, noting the institution's commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement. The research concludes with recommendations for NIOS, such as the introduction of ICT labs, improved curriculum design with clear learning outcomes, and enhanced co-curricular activities, to further strengthen its educational offerings. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into how peer review and institutional self-evaluation processes contribute to the sustainable development of open and distance learning programs.
Keywords: *Quality assurance, NIOS, inclusive education, TMA, OBE.*

Introduction

The new education agenda, known as *Education 2030*, is fully encapsulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): *"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"* (Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, 2015), along with its associated targets. In alignment with this, the World Education Forum 2015 adopted the Incheon Declaration, which calls for "meaningful education and training opportunities for the large population of out-of-school children and adolescents, who require immediate, targeted, and sustained action to ensure that all children are in school and are learning." In support of this global commitment, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)—an intergovernmental organization established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987—has played a key role in promoting the development and sharing of open and distance learning (ODL) knowledge, resources, and technologies. COL has a dedicated department focused on advancing open schooling and open basic education (OBE) across Commonwealth nations. One of its essential mandates includes facilitating peer-to-peer (P2P) quality reviews among regional open schools. In line with this mandate, COL initiated P2P activities in 2018 to develop common criteria for quality reviews between the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India, and the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (OS-BOU), Bangladesh. These efforts included organized visits, enabling the review teams to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and gain diverse perspectives on regional open schooling policy development in South Asia. The findings were compiled into a Peer Review Report (PRR). The two

institutions—NIOS and OS-BOU—agreed to implement quality assurance audits using an inter-institutional audit framework. Rahnuma (2020) emphasizes framework for internal self-assessment and external reviews of the pogrammes and finds that a strong internal quality assurance system is essential to accelerate programme accreditation. The review framework for open schooling was originally developed during the Institutional Peer-to-Peer Quality Assurance Workshop held from May 2–4, 2017, at NIOS, with participation from both institutions and support from COL. The framework was later approved by the Academic Council of Bangladesh Open University. A corresponding quality audit instrument was also developed, focusing on qualitative aspects rather than quantitative metrics. During the 2017 workshop, both institutions agreed to continue P2P activities and conduct internal self-assessments prior to external audits. Following this agreement, the NIOS team visited BOU from August 1–5, 2018, and reviewed the BOU Open School's quality assurance process using the jointly developed criteria. After reviewing BOU's self-assessment report, the audit team validated several parameters through on-site audits. In a reciprocal visit, the BOU team traveled to NIOS from February 28 to March 1, 2019, to evaluate the quality of NIOS's open schooling processes. They validated NIOS's self-assessment report and delivered an exit report summarizing their findings and recommendations. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the peer review process, including its objectives, structure, and practical implications, with a particular focus on the role of the review team members from the BOU Open School. Peer review is broadly understood as the evaluation of scholarly, academic, or institutional work by others within the same field (Raghunadharao, 2015). According to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC, 2018), self-evaluation forms the core of the peer review process, with external teams validating the findings and recommending areas for improvement. This paper specifically examines the quality audit process carried out at NIOS and concludes with recommendations based on the validated self-assessment report.

National Institute of Open Schooling

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is a state-owned autonomous institution under the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Established to serve the educational needs of disadvantaged populations unable to participate in the conventional schooling system due to various socio-economic constraints, NIOS delivers education through the open and distance learning (ODL) mode. It offers flexible and inclusive learning opportunities for a heterogeneous group of learners, extending up to the pre-university level (NIOS, 2019). Originally known as the National Open School (NOS), the institution was renamed NIOS in July 2002 to better reflect its expanded mandate. The mission of NIOS is to provide relevant and continuing education at the school stage up to the pre-tertiary level, particularly targeting marginalized and underserved populations. It aligns its objectives with national policy frameworks and responds to the evolving educational needs of its clienteles (MHRD, 2002). In pursuit of universalization of education, promotion of social equity and justice, and fostering a learning society, NIOS offers a variety of academic and vocational programs through open schooling. These include:

- Secondary Education Course
- Senior Secondary Education Course
- Vocational Education Courses and Programmes
- Teacher Education Programmes
- Life Enrichment Programmes
- Open Basic Education (OBE) Programme

NIOS operates through prime five academic departments, multiple regional centres, and over 7,000 Accredited Institutions (AIs) or study centres located across India and abroad. With an enrolment of over 3 million learners, NIOS is recognized as the largest open schooling system in the world (NIOS, 2019). A defining feature of NIOS is its emphasis on inclusion and flexibility. It reaches out to diverse learner groups including school dropouts, rural youth, urban poor, girls and women, differently abled learners, and other marginalized communities. These groups benefit from substantial fee concessions and learner support

mechanisms. Additionally, NIOS offers On-Demand Examinations (ODE) year-round at both Secondary and Senior Secondary levels, providing learners the flexibility to take exams at their own pace. NIOS has also been at the forefront of leveraging technology for education delivery. Through its multi-media learning packages—including audio/video lessons, self-instructional print materials, and Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs)—it aims to create a holistic and accessible learning environment. In line with the Government of India's Digital India Initiative, NIOS actively contributes to the Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM)—a national Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform. SWAYAM follows a four-quadrant approach consisting of tutorial videos, e-content, web-based learning tools, and self-assessment resources (MHRD, 2017).

To further strengthen open schooling in India, NIOS promotes the establishment of State Open Schools (SOSs) and conducts advocacy, capacity-building workshops, and consultancy services. As of now, 20 states have already established their respective SOSs with technical and policy support from NIOS. Moreover, the NIOS Online initiative supports learners through a dedicated Learner Support Centre (LSC) which handles student queries related to admissions, examinations, results, and Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs), thereby enhancing transparency and responsiveness. Through its innovative, inclusive, and technology-driven approaches, NIOS has significantly contributed to the educational empowerment of disadvantaged and diverse learners across India, standing out as a unique model of open schooling globally.

The Review Team

The Open School is one of the six academic schools under the Bangladesh Open University (BOU), offering two pre-university programmes: the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) for Grades 9–10, and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) for Grades 11–12. The school is led by a Dean and supported by over 30 faculty members, each responsible for specific subject areas. To ensure effective learner support and examination services, the school leverages BOU's extensive nationwide infrastructure, which includes Regional Centres (RCs) and Sub-Regional Centres (Sub-RCs). These centres provide tutorial support, coordinate learning activities, and facilitate proctored terminal examinations. The academic curriculum of the Open School is aligned with the National Curriculum and approved by the Ministry of Education, ensuring credibility and national recognition. Instructional materials are provided in the form of printed textbooks for each course. In addition, the school supplements its learning delivery through broadcasted educational programmes on BOU's YouTube channel (BOUTube) and web-based radio and television networks. While the Open School of BOU operates under university governance, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India functions under direct ministerial control. Despite these administrative differences, both institutions share a common mission of expanding access to education through open and distance learning and thus serve as ideal partners for a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) quality review initiative. To facilitate mutual learning and collaboration, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) organized a study visit for the BOU Open School team to NIOS from 24 February to 1 March 2019, enabling firsthand exposure to the practices and innovations adopted by NIOS.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this case study is to offer valuable insights into the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) quality assessment process based on the experiences of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India. The focus is on a range of quality assurance mechanisms and evaluation systems—particularly those initiated externally, such as by the Bangladesh Open University's Open School (BOU-OS) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) through its quality audit initiative. Although the insights drawn from this case may not represent a typical or comprehensive model, they nonetheless provide meaningful reflections on how quality assessment processes can support evidence-based decision-making for the development and strengthening of open schooling systems.

This Peer Review (PR) seeks to offer an international perspective on key policy and operational issues related to the quality of open schooling in India, particularly in the context of broader regional Open and

Distance Learning (ODL) developments. The review integrates the team's observations and analyses of relevant background documents, with a focus on India-specific issues.

The PR aims to:

- Identify major quality-related concerns encountered during the field visit,
- Offer evidence-informed recommendations for improving the policies and practices of open schooling,
- Highlight innovative approaches undertaken by NIOS that may serve as models for good practice,
- Contribute to the final COL report on quality in open schooling, while also informing regional and international discussions on ODL quality assurance.

The specific objectives of the review are:

i) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of NIOS's existing programmes;
ii) To ascertain the challenges encountered in programme implementation and delivery;
iii) To evaluate the infrastructural facilities available to support programme operations;
iv) To propose guidelines and recommendations for enhancing the overall quality of NIOS's educational offerings.

Methodology

This paper is primarily based on documentary evidence, much of which pertains to meetings, observations, and activities in which the author directly participated. As such, this information is treated as primary data. In addition, a range of secondary sources—including formal institutional reports, academic literature, and online publications—were also consulted to enrich the analysis and provide broader contextual understanding. Mwila (2025) assesses the impact of the Inter-University Council for East Africa's quality assurance framework on Bachelor of Education programs in Tanzanian private universities, discussing the framework's effectiveness and areas for improvement. The study finds that while the framework offers valuable guidelines, its predictive power on program quality is limited, necessitating more holistic internal QA practices. In consistent with this, the compilation process involved a selective synthesis of a substantial volume of materials. To reduce the risk of authorial bias, feedback and validation were sought from colleagues on the interpretation of key events and findings presented in this report. The Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Review Team adopted a qualitative methodology, incorporating the following strategies:

- Discussion sessions with key stakeholders, including academic and administrative staff, students, tutors, coordinators, and community representatives;
- Site visits and physical verification of infrastructures at NIOS study centres, including classrooms, libraries, ICT labs, and learner support facilities;
- Direct observation of the effectiveness of the ODL approach, with special attention to vocational education and the inclusiveness of programmes for learners with disabilities;
- Review of institutional documents, such as programme regulations, curriculum frameworks, learner prospectuses, teaching-learning materials, and the NIOS institutional charter;
- Application of document analysis and content analysis techniques to identify patterns and themes relevant to quality assurance.

Prior to the field visit, the Review Team conducted an in-depth study of the Self-Evaluation Report submitted by NIOS. This report, along with other preparatory reading materials, was shared with the review team at least one month in advance. A summary briefing note was prepared by the team coordinator, outlining the key findings of the self-evaluation, logistical arrangements, the schedule of site visits, and the major issues to be addressed during the review. During the fieldwork, the team held daily coordination meetings, typically in the evenings, to reflect on findings, discuss the division of responsibilities, allocate thematic areas to specific members, and plan the next day's activities. These informal meetings ensured consistent alignment and collaborative synthesis of findings for the Peer Review (PR) report. As noted by the Open University Validation Service (OUVS), peer review is a critical

process in the context of validating educational submissions. It provides a panel-based approach that brings together diverse perspectives, enables a critical yet constructive analysis, and facilitates benchmarking against recognized standards and practices in the field of open and distance learning (OUVS, n.d.). Finally, the evaluator played a central role in shaping the methodology and ensuring that the review strategies were aligned with the overarching goal—the development of a comprehensive Peer Review report that not only reflects the findings but also contributes meaningfully to the discourse on quality assurance in open schooling.

Findings and Discussion

Professor C.B. Sharma, then Chairman of NIOS, described the genesis of the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) initiative in his inaugural address. Reflecting on the journey, he stated:

"I'm so happy to have been part of such an incredible event. I think my biggest achievement was to propose peer-to-peer review activities at PCF8 in Malaysia, and now inaugurating this event is such an incredible feeling."

He further emphasized the value of the review, noting:

"The BOU team shall visit various departments and regional centres for investigation so that they can provide critical analysis and constructive suggestions, identifying areas for improvement, if any."

This expression of institutional support from the highest level helped foster an environment of cooperation and earnest engagement throughout the review process.

Infrastructure

Qurrat ul & Mehmood (2024 has investigated the current state of institutional quality assurance practices in public and private universities in Islamabad, Pakistan, and found infrastructure is one of the challenges in quality enhancement. In line with this, the review team conducted on-site visits to several facilities, including academic departments, staff and faculty rooms, libraries, and examination halls. NIOS's infrastructure is notably well-equipped with ICT facilities such as Wi-Fi connectivity, smart boards, projectors, and digital tools to facilitate teaching and learning across its programmes. The institution leverages its Regional Centres (RCs) to conduct on-demand examinations, with these centres similarly equipped with necessary ICT resources. NIOS has embraced vertical expansion to address increasing demand and is operating in an almost paperless environment, signaling a progressive move toward administrative efficiency and environmental sustainability. NIOS also possesses a fully operational video production studio equipped with an auto-cue system, allowing for extemporaneous delivery with minimal error. This enhances the quality of content broadcast through online platforms and national TV channels, ensuring wide accessibility for learners. To address the challenge of training its vast network of tutors, NIOS has developed a virtual training platform, which has proven both scalable and cost-effective. Additionally, the institution runs a fully operational call center that provides toll-free telephonic support—a popular and effective support system for learners. Though NIOS does not have in-house Vocational Education and Training (VET) facilities, it partners with external VET centers to deliver such programs. It has also developed the necessary infrastructure for SWAYAM MOOCs and is building an Open Educational Resources (OER) repository, currently offering materials for 2–3 courses.

A notable feature is NIOS's full-fledged computer division, responsible for developing custom software and automating administrative functions. This division supports a semi-paperless ecosystem and connects all functional units, providing one-stop services for learners. Importantly, NIOS collaborates with partners to serve learners with disabilities and disadvantaged children through Open Basic Education programmes. The increasing demand for on-demand exams has also prompted plans for vertical extension of its RC buildings to accommodate future growth.

Human Resource Development and Financial Management

NIOS recruits academic and support staff in alignment with central government policies, following rigorous, multi-stage selection processes that include demonstration-based evaluations. Staff development is actively supported through participation in research projects, enabling faculty to build competencies in academic writing, presentation, and research skills. Staff are regularly exposed to national and international conferences, seminars, and workshops, particularly those focused on open and distance learning (ODL). NIOS also recruits Part-Time Counsellors (PCPs) from study centres and provides them with both virtual and in-person training. Permanent employees receive regular in-house training for continuous professional development. Referencing Bruce (1997), peer review is described as a collegial self-improvement process, wherein peers act as 'critical friends' offering constructive feedback. This model has proven effective for institutional collaboration and professional development between BOU and NIOS. In terms of financial management, NIOS operates within a centralized financial system consistent with government regulations. However, it has also introduced partial decentralization—particularly at the RC level—for disbursements such as payments to PCP facilitators. The system is highly automated, with learners already familiar with the digital platforms used for processing their financial transactions. A well-defined Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) governs financial operations, ensuring consistency, efficiency, and transparency. The centralized accounting system has improved both accuracy and efficiency in financial reporting, strengthened internal controls, and streamlined information sharing across different units. The result is a more accountable and standardized cost center structure.

Programmes, Materials, and Evaluation

The review team conducted a detailed assessment of NIOS's programme administration, learning materials, and learner evaluation mechanisms. The key observations are summarized below:

- Programme Selection: NIOS designs and launches its programmes based on comprehensive needs assessments. In certain cases, programmes are introduced following directives from relevant ministries.
- Learning Materials: The learning materials are well-structured and adhere to a consistent in-house style, aligned with international standards. The material development process is comparable to those of leading ODL institutions such as IGNOU (India), The Open University (UK), and in accordance with guidelines issued by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). The development process includes the selection of quality authors, editors, and validators, strictly following internal policies.
- Evaluation Mechanisms:
  a. Academic programmes are evaluated through public examinations, in line with government regulations.
  b. Vocational courses are assessed using a combination of school-based assessment (SBA) and public examinations.
  c. Courses offered at disability centres are evaluated through SBA methods tailored to learners' needs.
  d. Open Basic Education (OBE) evaluations are also conducted through SBA.
- During classroom visits, the audit team observed high levels of compliance at the on-demand examination centres located within the Regional Centres (RCs). Self-assessment reports echoed this finding. The team concluded that full compliance with standards could be achieved with the vertical expansion of existing RC buildings or through the rental of additional premises.

Examination System

NIOS's Examination Department operates with full legal authority to conduct public examinations under Indian law. Leveraging its autonomy, the department has developed its own standards and systems, culminating in a well-established and robust examination framework. The department engages in research and development (R&D) to continuously improve its examination processes. A notable

innovation is the successful implementation of the On-Demand Examination System (ODES), which offers learners flexibility in scheduling their exams.

Library and Learning Resources

The review team visited the NIOS Library at its Head Office and Regional Centres, confirming the availability of prescribed textbooks and reference materials aligned with the current academic offerings.

- The Library's mission is to support both teaching and research at NIOS. It houses a substantial collection of:
    a. Textbooks and instructional materials
    b. Research reports (largely produced internally)
    c. Academic journals
    d. Multimedia resources (DVDs, audiobooks, videotapes, etc.)
    e. Digital collections spanning various programme areas
- Faculty and learners also have virtual access to reputed international journals and full access to the centralized NIOS Library system.

Learner Support

The review team explored the teaching-learning practices and assessment procedures employed by NIOS, particularly through discussions with the Personal Contact Program (PCP) staff. It was reported that NIOS adopts a blended learning approach to create a supportive and engaging learning environment, which has proven especially effective for vocational courses. Face-to-face (F2F) interactions are conducted at designated study centres. This practice was verified during classroom observations, where students also expressed satisfaction with the current support system. The PCP staff demonstrated competence in utilizing educational technology effectively within the classroom. The Regional Centres (RCs) have built strong networks with retired professionals, who are engaged on a contractual basis, especially for examination-related support — a valuable human resource asset for the Institute.

Research and Extension

NIOS has substantial scope for engaging in research and extension activities, both independently and in collaboration with national and international partners. The team found that faculty members are actively involved in various in-house and externally funded research projects, particularly in areas related to open schooling and inclusive education for learners with disabilities. Several of these projects are supported by donor agencies or commissioned by NIOS itself. Research and Development (R&D) efforts are especially evident in the area of examination systems, where innovative practices like the On-Demand Examination System (ODES) have already been successfully implemented.

Curriculum Review

The Institute follows a systematic and participatory process in curriculum development, beginning with needs assessments based on data collection from stakeholders and expert feedback. Curriculum specialists from reputed universities are also invited to contribute to the process, ensuring academic rigor and relevance. The review team examined the curriculum documents, which include general objectives aligned with the national curriculum framework. The curriculum is regularly reviewed to incorporate emerging ideas, educational innovations, and sectoral needs. Each course profile clearly outlines the overall goals, teaching-learning strategies, assessment criteria, and a list of recommended reading materials, reflecting a structured and outcome-oriented approach to curriculum design.

Review on Governance

The review team had a constructive meeting with the Honourable Chairman of NIOS to discuss key governance aspects related to the institution's programs. The Chairman expressed a strong commitment to maintaining and enhancing the quality of NIOS programs and reaffirmed his full support for future development initiatives. He commended the ongoing activities of NIOS and welcomed proposals from the Institute to further strengthen its academic and operational systems. The team noted that counseling and guidance services are readily available to students, primarily through a fully functional call centre, which

serves as an effective platform for learner support. Additionally, NIOS demonstrates a learner-centric governance approach by offering tuition waivers for high-achieving students, promoting both access and excellence. In certain cases, the Institute also facilitates student placement in the job market, further illustrating its commitment to not only academic development but also employability and life-long learning outcomes for its learners.

Recommendations, conclusion and impacts

Based on the above evaluation, Peer Review Team from BOU recommends following suggestions for further improvement of the programs:

- NIOS should create more opportunity for capacity enhancement of the faculties/officials in pursuing higher studies in ODL aspects;
- The Institute could consider redistributing job responsibilities to balance the workload more effectively, allowing faculty and staff to dedicate more time to writing journal articles.
- The system of assessment should be redesigned to ensure uniformity across all courses, ensuring consistency in evaluation standards.
- Faculties should update the curriculum to include unit-wise learning outcomes, in line with government guidelines, to ensure clarity and alignment with educational standards.
- NIOS should introduce additional facilities such as ICT labs, micro-teaching spaces, play-labs, canteens, common rooms, and a spacious library on its premises for the teacher education programme.
- Emphasis should be placed on engaging communities in co-curricular activities at the Study Centres, fostering a more holistic learning environment.
- NIOS should update its website and include a portal for an Open Educational Resources (OER) repository, offering learning materials in various formats (e.g., print, video, and PowerPoint presentations).
- The Institute should assess the impact of programs attended by reputed government officials to gauge the relevance and effectiveness of the initiatives.
- It is recommended that PCPs (Programme Coordinators and Tutors) receive face-to-face training, along with a well-structured training module for tutors and lead tutors to enhance instructional quality.
- There should be a stronger emphasis on the use of social networking platforms for learning engagement, as well as the production of concept videos to complement teaching materials.
- Academic staff should not be transferred to administrative roles upon promotion, as academic activities are continuous, requiring sustained focus and engagement.
- Academics should be provided with more free time to focus on developing study materials and producing high-quality audio and video programs.
- Academic staff should maintain regular contact with study centres and learners, seeking feedback on Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) and incorporating insights for improvements.
- More research is needed into the on-demand examination system, particularly to evaluate its effectiveness and scalability.

Alam (2020) explores the underdeveloped quality assurance mechanisms and regulatory gaps uniquely impact on governance on quality. In consistent to this the NIOS has already made substantial strides in seeking quality improvements, addressing several key areas. However, there are still quality improvement needs that need to be fully addressed. The P2P team's findings suggest that while progress has been made, certain aspects of NIOS's decision-making, management style, and organizational culture still need further attention. The organizational culture should align with the Institute's mission statement, which emphasizes the core values of openness in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). This culture of openness should extend to people, places, methods, and ideas, which are essential for the continuous development of quality programs. As Harvey (2002) notes, peer reviewers are encouraged to ask questions, but they

are not trained investigators. The peer review process could benefit from more structured training, focusing on areas that need to be examined and the aspects that peer reviewers should focus on. Silva et al. (1997) highlight that the prior experience of peer reviewers can influence the outcomes of reviews. Therefore, incorporating short training sessions for the peer review team is recommended to ensure more effective and objective assessments.

References

i.   ACCJC (The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges). (2018). *Guide to institutional self-evaluation, improvement, and peer review*. https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-Institutional-Self-Evaluation-Improvement-and-Peer-Review.pdf

ii.   Alam, G. M. (2020). Quality assurance for private universities in Bangladesh: A quest for specialised institutional governance, management and regulatory mechanism. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, *22*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-01-2019-0006

iii.   Bruce, C. (1997). *Peer review: A handbook*. Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

iv.   Harvey, L. (2002). Evaluation for what? *Teaching in Higher Education, 7*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510220145493

v.   Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). (2002). *Annual report*. Government of India.

vi.   Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). (2017). *SWAYAM: Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds*. Retrieved from https://swayam.gov.in/

vii.   Mwila, P. M. (2025). Influence of quality assurance framework on quality of education programmes offered in private universities in Tanzania. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *33*(1), 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-06-2024-0114

viii. NIOS. (2019). *Website*. https://www.nios.ac.in

ix.   Open University Validation Service (OUVS). (n.d.). *Guidelines for peer review panels*. The Open University.

x.   Commonwealth of Learning (COL). (2016). *Quality assurance toolkit for open schools*. COL. NIOS. (2019). *About NIOS*. https://www.nios.ac.in

xi.   Qurrat ul Ain, & Mehmood, S. (2024). Challenges and strategies in institutional quality assurance: Insights from Islamabad's universities. *Policy Research Journal*, 2(4), 275–287.

xii.   Raghunadharao, D., Ravi Kannan, R., Hingnekar, V. D. K., Mani, C. S., Ghosh-Laskar, S., Gujral, S., Chaudhari, S., Nayak, S., Dikshit, R., Badwe, R. A., & Pramesh, C. S. (2015). Institutional external peer review: A unique National Cancer Grid initiative. *Indian Journal of Medical and Paediatric Oncology*. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4743180/

xiii. Rahnuma, N. (2020). The Bangladeshi higher education quality assurance framework: a pathway for transformation. *Quality in Higher Education*, *26*(1), 14–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2020.1729309

xiv.   The Open University Validation Service (OUVS). (n.d.). *Validation services: Information pack*. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

xv.   United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2015). *Statistical yearbook for Asia and the Pacific: Sustainable development goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. https://www.unescap.org/resources/statistical-yearbook-asia-and-pacific-2015

xvi.   World Education Forum (WEF). (2015). *World Education Forum 2015 final report*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243724