The Perceptions of Quality Assurance in Educational Institutions of Pakistan

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Abstract: This paper was based on the review of literature about the perceptions of the quality assurance mechanism and quality services in educational institutions in Pakistan. Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is strongly emphasizing on the revamping of quality education at all level. For serving this purpose “Quality Assurance Cells (QAC) has been established in public sector universities. This paper explored the perception about the quality of service, dimension of quality assurance in corporate view point and comparison with educational sector and finally he quality of service in education in Pakistan. This paper would provide an insight in national literature about planning and what measures are being taken for assuring quality of education in different institutions with reference to Pakistan.

Key words: Evaluation - Quality Assurance - Stakeholders - Decision-making - Perception

INTRODUCTION

This paper chiefly established the theoretical framework about the quality assurance measures in educational sector of Pakistan while comparing the national and international perspectives available in literature.

The Perception of Service Quality: Ameen [1] referred to Merry Webster’s online dictionary for defining the Quality Assurance (QA) as: “A program for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspect of a project, service, or facility to ensure that standard of quality are being met”.

The majority of the researchers and practitioners are firmly agreed on the importance and the significance of service quality for organizations to achieve higher customer satisfactions [2-6]. Aldridge and Rowley [7] explained that good quality education provides better learning opportunities and the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction which strongly affects the student’s success or failure of learning in the circle of academics, Perceptions of quality of education have found to be an important influence on students’ post enrolment gossip communications [8-12]. Furthermore, Service quality perception can be measured but how to measure it still pose a question for various academic communities [13-17]. Athiyaman [18] noted down that service quality perception is an approach derived from an evaluation of a product or service after the consumption experience. However, Macukow [19] believed that the perception of quality even more difficult to define. Some researchers believe that quality cannot be defined in any simple way. This is the main reason that most of the researchers have avoided to define the perception service in some precise words [20-21].

Definitions of Quality Assurance in Education: International literature provided wide domain and diverse perspectives for defining the quality assurance in education. Harvey [22] have noted that education quality can be defined in many ways and that definition f quality must be “Stakeholder Relative”. According to Becher [23] “Knowledge is the totality of quality education”. Cheng [24] mentioned quality assurance in education as “the achievement of planned goals”. On other hand Jalalzai [25] has defined quality of education as: “Estimates of college quality are essentially faith-based”. Mai [26] said quality assurance is “associated with elitism and the perceived excellence of education”. A growing debate on the definition of quality in education has led to the suggestions that service quality should be defined based on student perceptions [27-28]. Involvement of community of academia and satisfaction of parents and the community exist outside the premises of an institution [29]. National literature, on the other hand, viewed the concept of QA quite differently. The concept of QA assurance has arrived late after establishing of HEC in...
Pakistan. Jan and Adeel [30] highlighted the issue of quality of education with especial reference to Pakistan as:

“The whole matter of significance of education can be put slightly different as well, good education is no longer a luxury offered to the select few in a nation. It is required as a mean of survival by all members of a society. There should be no doubt in our mind that societies failing to impart good education to their citizens will be relegated to backwaters of history and will survive, if as all, as intellectual, cultural and financial slaves of competent nations”.

However, Azam [31] indicates the dimension of QA in educational setup of Pakistan as:

“Quality Assurance in higher education is the responsibility of the institution / organization and is supposed to be inbuilt in the system rather than to be imposed from the outside by a supervising body. This has been realized in the higher education sector in Pakistan recently.”

I can be inferred that the concept of QA is specific to higher education only and avoid the mainstreaming of primary and secondary education [32-33] has raised the issue of QA as “A means for controlling QA issues of an educational program is accreditation by some outsider accreditation body” while comparing the international and national perspective about QA in education, it can be inferred that the local problems related to the QA in Pakistan are quite different. The local literature is still aiming to target the national interest in QA in the domain of education.

Quality Assurance Education: A View Point of Stakeholders in Pakistan: QA is being considered as the most important element in imparting education at educational institutes all over the world. It has been recognized and accepted as a critical factor for the success and failure of any educational institution [34]. In Pakistan, both private and public universities are striving to provide quality services to its students in order to develop and maintain their reputation. Parent satisfaction, meeting with the demand of local job-market while keeping the view of globalization and increasing demand of knowledge [35] are those factors which are dictated by the different stakeholders.

Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) under the guidance of Dr. Atta-ur-Rehman had initiated some drastic initiatives to upgrade and improve the quality of services by introducing various policies and plans using inside-out approach. [36]

The HEC has undertaken a systematic process of implementation of an agenda for reform outlined in the HEC Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF), in which access, Quality and Relevance has been identified as the key challenge faced by the (educational) sector. To address these challenges, a comprehensive strategy was defined that identified the core Strategic aim for reform as:

- Faculty Development
- Improving Access
- Excellence in Learning and Research
- Relevance of National Priorities

However, many researchers have found that the implementation of QA program should be emerged from the students, parents, teachers and local job-market stakeholders rather than from the government body. Berry [37] stated that quality is conformance to students, teachers, parents and society specifications; it should be the students’ definition of quality, not the government body or institutional management’s that counts. Sander [38] has highlighted the importance of using students as the base to measure the service quality provided by the school, college or university. The literature have caution the use of “inside-out” approach, as discussed earlier, to classify the deficiencies in the service quality [39]. Inside-out approach uses the academic insiders’ viewpoints to improve the quality of services in the institutions. This approach of evaluation may lead to miss judgment of the whole quality standings of the institutions thus contributing to poor service quality. Another primary concern with this approach, it relies too strongly on the input of academics rather than from the students, parents other stakeholders of community [40]. Zeithaml [41] noted that successful service industries have been shown to think “outside-in”. These firms conduct research to identify the perceptions and expectation of their customers before implementing the service activities as a consequence meeting those customer’s expectations. Perceived service quality to be satisfactory if the customer’s expectations are met [42]. Gronroos [43] stated that perceptions minus expectations are the foundation of the “gap-theory” which refers to disconfirmation. The discussion poses important question that how QA program with respect to corporate viewpoint can be
designed for educational institution in Pakistan.

**Dimensions of Qa in Education in Pakistan:** In Pakistan, in the context of education the measurement of QA program is crucial to provide favorable learning environment to the students. Many public and private institutions in Pakistan have adopted “Quality” as a theme as they either compete with each other or have been compelled by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) to introduce the polity [44]. Traditionally, the teaching activity perceives as the determinant of quality [45]; however, many authors analyze the overall experience of the students with the totality of services that institution offers as quality of education [46, 47].

As mentioned earlier, most definitions of QA were developed by the understanding of corporate viewpoint [48]. Therefore, with students and other stakeholder’s satisfaction QA is being seen as a function of perceived quality Anderson and Sullivan [49] or service quality involves a comparison of what they feel about the service should be with their judgment of the services they received in educational institutions. [50-53]. Thus, institutions should address the issue of quality, not only through the traditional routes of accreditation and course review, student feedback questionnaires on the quality of course delivery and teaching, but also through evaluating what students themselves consider being elements in service quality [54]. Evidence suggested that listening to and facilitating people to participate in decision-making is more likely to assist positive outcomes [55-57].

Beacher [58] presented following dimensions of QA: quality of the lecture, student engagement with learning, social/ emotional support systems, resources of library and IT. While Shaney [59] has tested the service quality in higher education using competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability. These dimensions are very close with the dimensions introduced by Lagrosen [60] who examined the dimensions of quality in education which includes corporate collaboration, information and responsiveness, courses offered internal evaluations computer facilities, collaboration and comparisons and library resources. Shami [61] has argued that “Pakistani educational setup has now targeted its dimensions…” and implementation phase is quite far-away.

**Implementation of Quality Assurance Program by Pakistan:** Without quality education, Pakistan finds difficulty to benefit from the global-based economy. Quality Education, Range of academic discipline in Pakistan. In Aril 2001, the Federal Minister of Education appointed a task force for improving the quality of education in Pakistan. The Task Force consisted of 17 members and World Bank financed the work of Task Force. The Task Force, held various consultative workshops in provincial capitals and the federal areas for the purpose of gathering inputs from the faculty and academic leadership of universities and college for seeking bold and concrete recommendations. The stakeholders acknowledged the following as the most distressing areas in education in Pakistan [62].

- Ineffective governance and management structures ad practices.
- Inefficient use of available resources in educational institutions.
- Inadequate funding for the education.
- Poor recruitment practices and insufficient development of faulty and non-academic staff.
- Poor research support facilities.
- Politicization of faculty, staff and students.

**Recommendation by the Task Force:** The suggestions of the Task Force [63] centered primarily on the following:

- Separation of governance from the management in educational setup.
- For facilitating quality assurance of higher education and for linking funding by the Federal Government for public universities to the quality of performance, a central body of Higher Education will served by the Federal Government.
- Improvement in financial management of public sector and private sector universities.
- Marked increase in allocation of funds to the Higher Education sector by the Federal Government.
- To recruit and retain good quality faculty and staff, emoluments should be de-linked from government’s basic pay scales.
- Research must be assigned high priority by making a major annual allocation of funds, creation of endowments for long-tem sustainability and above all, an enabling environment.
- Linkages with business and industry should be accorded high priority not only for employment of graduates but also for relevance of curricula and research.
- For international compatibility universities should aim for awarding a bachelor’s degree after 13 years of education.
The full cost of the academic program should be stated in the student’s bill.

The Task Force recommended appointment of a Steering committee with the aim of developing a plan for implementation in line with its recommendations.

**Steering Committee of Higher Education:** The recommendations for Task Force were presented to the then President of Pakistan in January 2002 [64] and led to the setting up of the Steering Committee of Higher Education which developed modalities for implementing the recommendations of the Task Force.

Implementation plan of Steering Committee on Higher Education [65] has highlighted the following indicators important in maintaining the quality of education.

- Professional development of faculty members across the public educational sector has been recommended.
- The aspect of student-teacher ratio inside the classroom should be given due consideration.
- Up-gradation of existing infrastructure (laboratories, libraries, computers).
- Increase in Human Resource is suggested.
- Enhancing the capacity of graduates to hunt employment in information based economy.
- Evaluations by the employers of graduates.
- Number of quality of research publications and products and their rating on the basis of National and International criteria.
- Financial transparency for the utilization of funds allocated for education.
- Merit-based procedures for recruitment, promotion and admission.
- Adoption of an explicit code of conduct.

The ranking of public sector universities across the Pakistan ay the Higher Education Commission based on the criteria developed by its Quality Assurance Committee [66]. It is good initiative in right direction in terms of nurturing quality and promoting healthy competition among the institutions for the pursuance of quality in education.

**CONCLUSION**

Education provides the foundation for reducing poverty and enhancing social development. An education system of poor quality may be one of the most important reason that why a poor nation does not grow in term of financial resources. In Pakistan, many institutions are competing with each other to provide quality services to its students. However, the objective of providing Quality education to the students will not be achieved without measuring the perception of the parents, teachers and community. It needs no emphasis that without quality education, Pakistan will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based economy. Full benefits of any reform initiatives in education sector take a long time to become evident.

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