



QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS: A CASE OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The concept of quality is very elusive. The desire or enthusiasm to attend school in order to acquire knowledge, skills, and new tools of analysis is one thing; to actually succeed and be able to show evidence of having acquired these in concrete terms is quite another. The quality of the products of an institution or a programme is often evidenced in the quality of performance of the products. (Gyekye, 2002). Quality in education faces definitional problems. It becomes more problematic when quality is conceptualized in terms of a particular aspect of education because as Dare (2005) observes, that all the elements associated with educational quality are interrelated. A crucial problem in one of the elements is likely to have consequences for quality in others too. One might argue about quality in any important aspect of the educational system: infrastructure, school buildings, administration, leadership, management, teacher training, educational materials, teaching and student achievement etc.

The concept of quality in higher education has emerged in developed countries as well as countries like Pakistan. Our focus of study is *quality* education at the universities. According to our hypothesis, *a healthy educational environment is an indispensable condition for engendering quality in higher education* sector of Pakistan. For this basal survey based study, the primary data collection will be achieved by questionnaire containing both open ended and close-ended questions. Supporting data will come through analysis of different practices regarding quality in higher education and HEC guidelines as well as research in quality education. This study will support the claim that a proper education system will help to achieve quality results or, if that claim is not supported, it will help to develop model that will provide a possible direction for developing a quality culture in existing education systems of Pakistani universities. This study will also analyze group decision-making to see if it enhances the quality or not. Does teamwork has positive affects in implementing quality? How effective are some of the new total quality management tools such as affinity diagrams and process decision program charts (PDPC) in enhancing quality in higher education?

HYPOTHESIS

H₀: A healthy educational environment is an indispensable condition for engendering quality in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

“The desire or enthusiasm to access school education in order to acquire knowledge, skills, and new tools of analysis, is one thing; to actually succeed in acquiring them and showing evidence in having acquired them in concrete terms is quite another...The quality of the products of an institution or a programme is often evidenced in the quality of performance of the products” (Gyekye, 2002:28)

Education plays an important role for any nation. Someone once said, “If you want to destroy any nation, destroy its education.” The secret of all developed countries is the educational system. Education creates awareness; it opens new ways to learn. Pakistan is still far behind other developed countries in the education of its citizenry. Though our official literacy rate is 46%, it includes those who can only read a newspaper. The bar is set so low that it is not a satisfactory level that can help Pakistan prosper. A literate person contributes more to the development of any nation.

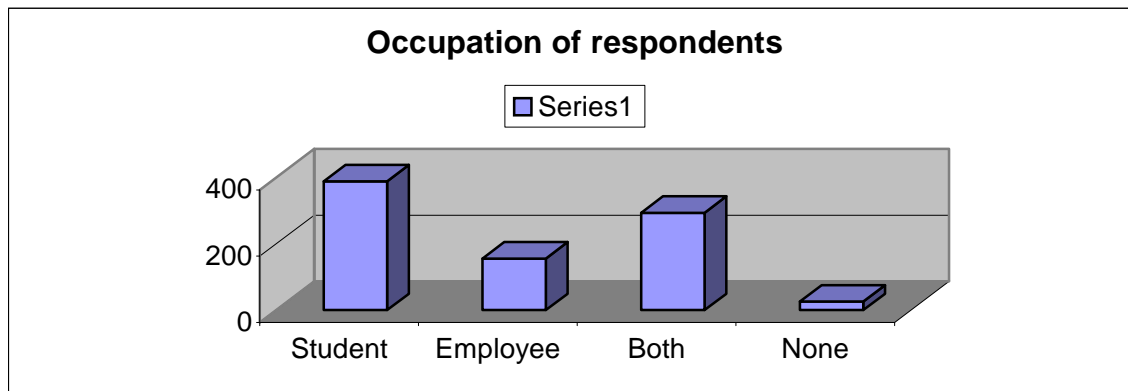
The main focus of this study is quality education at the level of higher education. The concept of quality education in higher education has emerged in the developed countries as well as in the under-developed countries like Pakistan. In the past few years many changes have taken place in the educational system in Pakistan, particularly in higher education. Since the establishment of the Higher Education Commission in 2002, new policies have been developed and reforms on a trial basis are being brought in the higher education system of the country. All of these efforts are hopefully steps towards the betterment of the educational institutions and towards the attainment of an international standard in the quality of education. In any educational institution it is necessary to provide an environment conducive to continual improvement so that the system can be simplified and structured to meet the problems of the students and employees. This is essential for enhancing the education and the working standard in such institutions. The focus of this paper will be to introduce an innovative model conducive to creating a healthy education environment. The hypothesis is that a healthy educational environment is an indispensable condition for engendering quality in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Enhancing and assuring quality is new to the Pakistani higher education system; therefore uncertainty is high concerning the understanding of the problem. An exhaustive research has been done through a market survey; furthermore other study materials have been considered. For this research, the primary data collection has been achieved by survey methodology in which a questionnaire was utilized containing both open end and close end questions. Different practices regarding quality in higher education and HEC guidelines/ research for quality education served as secondary data sources.

A structured questionnaire was designed to gather information on the culture of quality in higher education as well as on demographic and psychological aspects of behavior, trends, and the adaptability of the respondents to the culture of quality. The demographics included age, gender, educational level and field of study. The psychographics' variables included attitude towards adaptability of quality education cultures, tolerance for implementation of new systems and parameters, ethical and legal issues. In this study, 1000 respondents were asked to participate; 890 questionnaires were received. Eight were rejected as incomplete or fake and 882

questionnaires were ultimately analyzed. About 65% respondents were from Karachi; 23% from Islamabad; 1% from Lahore and the remaining 11% from the rest of Pakistan. Out of 882 respondents about 60% fall in 19 to 24-age bracket. About 400 of them were students; nearly 150 were employed persons and nearly 280 were both students and employed.



LITERATURE REVIEW

“Various ways of conceptualizing the impact of quality assessment can be found in the literature.”¹ “Much of literature on higher education emphasizes the autonomy of institutions and basic units within them and, in particular, the autonomy and power of tenured staff.”² “The whole of the academic enterprise depends on a reasonably clear collective understanding among academics in a given discipline on the standards and criteria for judging work done in that discipline. Without that collective understanding, the resulting intellectual anarchy could bring down the whole edifice, since there would be no reason at all why taxpayers educate the young, or why sponsors should pay us conduct research.”³ “Culture has a content and membership and within higher education, both features have tended to be defined in terms of subject communities. The values and organization have been related to the epistemological properties of the subject/discipline.”⁴ “The University must be a place where knowledge is produced in a way that helps the population establish themselves in present day life. University management methods must be of service and, what is more, one of public service, Administrators must be simultaneously actors, promoters and guarantors.”⁵ “One of the notable features of the impact of quality assessment has been within subject groups. In an institution where recent trends have been towards large programmes with modularity and a flexible approach to student choice, several participants in this study noted that working together within the subject group on quality assessment has emphasized the value of the ‘course team’ and of a collegiate culture, and that significant quality enhancement resulted from towards a common purpose.”⁶ “In terms of culture, the nature of the evaluation is a process during which the understanding of the university is created within discourse of assessment. The assessment discourse helped to define the functional problems of the university; it supported the creation of a managerial understanding of the university structure; it helped the faculty to see the problems in doctoral training more clearly than before; and finally, it promoted the use of concepts shared by the participants of the total evaluation process.”⁸ “There is tension also between what the institution views as important in terms of quality assurance and what may be imposed from outside. A somewhat cynical view is that TQA (the external quality system) shames departments into putting systems, processes and structures into place; pressure is being placed on the recalcitrant. The perceived danger is that a compliance culture develops, with the institution and its departments pursuing pathways determined by or suggested by external assessors and where compliance with the assessment

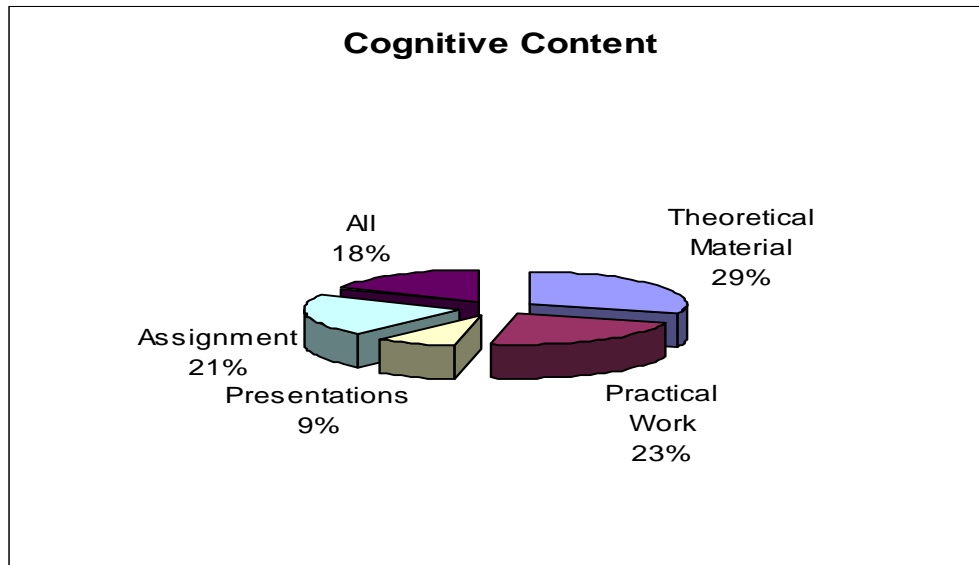
becomes objective.”⁹ “It should be pointed out that the quality movement is only one of the number of developments affecting management and decision making process in Australian universities. There has been much talk in recent years of corporatization of these institutes. Critics see such corporatization as an attack on traditional collegiate values; proponents, as a necessary injection of hard headed business thinking into organizations that have been hamstrung in their responses to change by cumbersome and reactionary procedures. A major review of management of universities of has just been announced by commonwealth government and placed firmly in its broader agenda of a national strategy for enhancing competitiveness and efficiency.”¹⁰ “A crisis within the faculty administration caused the negative educational assessment to fade into background”¹¹. “The accreditation, that is the first overall expert external evaluation, was a milestone in the life of the college. It was in fact a forced SWOT analysis of the quality of staff, courses, teaching, research, management, students and infrastructure.”¹² “Quantitative information on how students perceive the education and training they receive and on the setting in which it takes place. This approach tends to encourage pedagogical dialogue among teachers and to provide information to serve as the basis for improving the quality of teaching and the conditions under which students learn. It was in this perspective that the university undertook to develop its assessment tools in keeping with a growing worldwide trend”¹³ “The concept of quality was not defined or discussed in any detail by the either ministry of education or by the university. In a rather vague way it assumed that quality means anything and everything good.”¹⁴ “How did the great universities of the world come to be so productive in research and scholarship, in trained and educated people, and in services to their societies over the past century and half without much more or any formal external assessment of their quality?”¹⁵ “Governments are looking at what other governments are doing in the evaluation of the higher education system, and through various networks are establishing contracts, arranging seminars for policy makers and adapting well or poorly the foreign evaluation policies which interest them.”¹⁶ “Evaluation is a central tool to obtain necessary information for directing and improving all activities; it involves a built-in demand for change. In order to obtain objective information, external evaluation is of vital importance.”¹⁷ “There was another subtle way in which the importance of disciplinary values could be lessened in the assessment process. This was apparent from the study that we undertook of the impact of the quality assessment process in England.”¹⁸ “Through this industry of reciprocal visiting of world academics assessing each other that small, scarcely visible, incremental changes are being encouraged. Quality assessment invites academics to cross boundaries, to construct new bridges between institutions and among basic units within institutions.”¹⁹ “Evaluation plays a vital role that goes well beyond its practical success in affecting research, teaching or administrative activities in the university. It reassures the broader social and institutional audience that the university is undertaking an effort to be more rational, to make its output more transparent and to manage more efficiently its resources.”²⁰

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The parameters in this study were cognitive content, curriculum revision, the role of the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan (HEC), developing, maintaining and assessing a culture of quality, faculty qualifications and compensation, motivation factors, the role of unions, and government expenditures on the education sector.

Cognitive content

The majority of respondents liked theoretical concepts to be defined. Their second priority was that they wanted to be given practical examples. The survey showed about 8% preferred presentations; 21%, assignments; and 11% preferred all. More than 50% respondents considered an institute brilliant when it has good culture, qualified teachers and state of the art technology. Consider the following graphic depiction:



Curriculum Revision

About 62% respondents suggested that students could also be aid in creating a culture of quality. Students can contribute by providing suggestions regarding course design through teacher evaluations. Regarding course design, more than 60% suggested that both international standard and Pakistani condition should be considered.

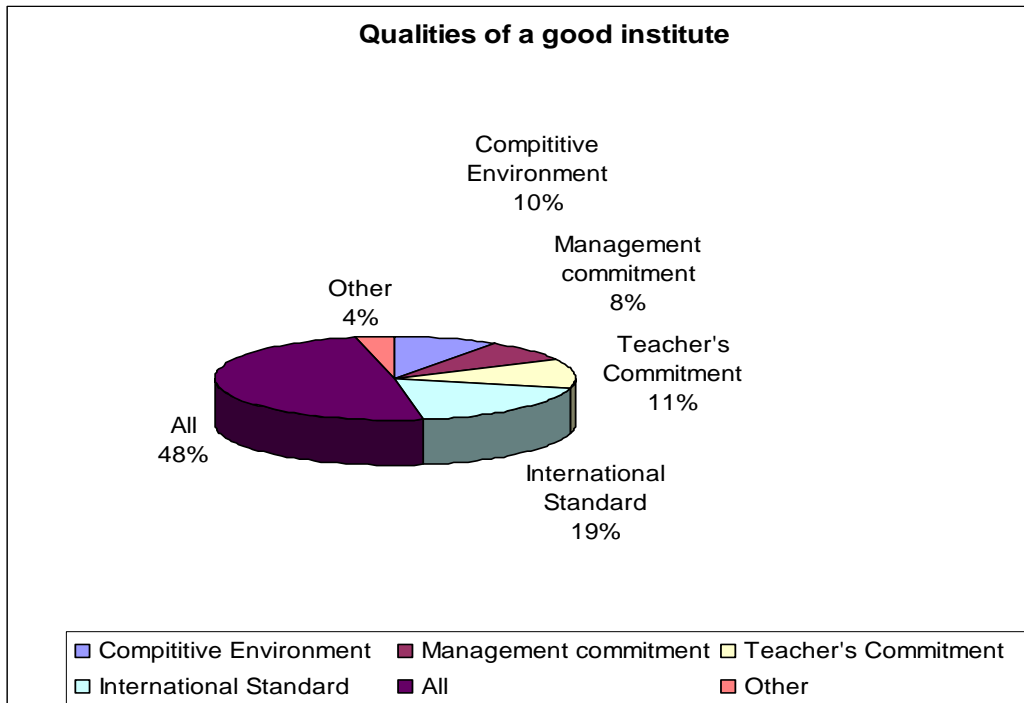
The Role of Higher Education Commission (HEC)

More than 60% respondents emphasized that the HEC continued to play a vital and significant role in contributing towards quality higher education. They emphasized that HEC should revise policies and curriculum for enhancing a culture of quality by regularly reviewing Pakistani higher education and by encouraging the adoption of international standards.

Developing, Maintaining and Assessing a Culture of Quality

In response of a question concerning the current higher education system's producing quality graduates, 21% responded yes; 38%, no; 33%, sometimes; and 7%, often. About 66% respondents responded positively that an organized and good system is conducive to producing quality graduates. To the question concerning the definition of a culture of quality about 49% replied that a quality culture should possess a competitive environment, management commitment, teacher's commitment and international standards followed. More than 66% respondents noted that top management's commitment is necessary in producing a culture of quality in any organization. They also added that top management must include concerned

stakeholders in the decision-making process. For developing a culture of quality, all of top management should play its role by establishing good organizational structure, processes and procedures, motivation, commitment, proper leadership and appropriate strategy. HEC should revise its policies, procedures and rules and take into consideration international educational standards. Thirdly Faculty must be committed, dedicated, and enthusiastic towards learning and teaching activities. They must keep up to date in their fields and be aware of the latest practices that result in the improvement of quality in the classroom.



Parameters for Assessing the Quality Culture

For quality assurance, the ratio of teachers to students has also significant effect. About 66% respondents say that a 1:30 teacher to student ratio is suitable in achieving quality results. Approximately 46% suggested 30-class size is better. Most of the respondents focused on group decision making as a means of enhancing quality. When students are engaged in setting learning goals, they are more apt to achieve them. Also, it is found that organizations that use group-decision-making are more successful than those who do not.

Faculty Qualifications and Compensation

47% of respondents suggested that at the level of higher education, faculty should have PhDs; 30% recommended the M Phil; more than 30% felt that having 5-10 years teaching as well as research and development experience was essential. Most of the respondents suggested that the starting salary package should be Rs.30, 000 to 40,000.

Master	20.23%
M. Phil	29.94%
PhD	46.67%
Post doctorate	3.16%

Motivation Factors

About 58% suggested that revising scales of teachers motivate them and it will have good impact in producing quality culture because teacher has major role in building the nation. More than 50% also suggested that they must be included in decision-making process because when teacher will himself select any goal he will try to achieve it. Furthermore, HEC's expenditure on Faculty development (FDP), research grants, grants for conferences and Seminars also enthusiast the quality education culture in truly competitive environment.

Role of Teachers/ Students Union

About 56% respondents condemned student and teacher unions. They saw them as not contributing any positive factor regarding quality culture development instead they lead education towards destruction. According to respondents, in an open-ended question, teacher and student unions were blamed for spoiling the academic and research and development culture.

Government Expenditures on the Education Sector

In response to questions concerning government expenditure in education sector, about 41% suggested it should spend 5 to 10% of GDP in quality education promotion; about 31% suggested that government should spend more than 10% of GDP. This is substantially more than the 2.42% currently in 2007-2008 budget.

3%	3.1%
3%-5%	22.85%
5%-10%	41.45%
More than 10%	32.65%

CONCLUSION

This research confirms the acceptance of the hypothesis that a quality culture plays an essential role in a quality educational system. In the development of a quality culture, the HEC, faculty and students play vital roles, but the critical role is that of top management for without its commitment a culture of quality is not achievable. HEC should continuously revise its policies, procedures and rules in accordance with Pakistani conditions and international educational standards. An organized system and structure are also mandatory for developing a quality culture. For improving education, qualified and experience faculty must be appointed. Recommended qualifications for faculty at the higher education level are a PhD and 5-10 years experience both in teaching and research and development. Group decision-making is a key component and an effective tool in developing a quality culture. When faculty, staff and students are involved appropriately in setting goals, there will be less resistance in implementation of those goals. Students' and teachers' unions contribute nothing to quality culture development; they lead more to the destruction of education. The teacher/student ratio also has a significant effect in achieving good results of education. The ratio is recommended 1:30.

For the implementation of all these necessities required for quality culture in academia, strong, diversified quality measures, quality control and assessment tools are needed such as

management and planning tools by Brassard, 1989. A list of these tools with their utilization is shown in following table:

Tool Name	Utilization
<i>Affinity Diagram</i>	Used to organize abstract thinking about problem.
<i>Relations Diagram</i>	Used for determining causalities among parts of Problem
<i>Systematic Diagram</i>	Planning tool.
<i>Matrix Diagram (Many Types) Includes Inter Cell Relationships.</i>	Used to organize knowledge in matrix format.
<i>Matrix data analysis method</i>	Principle components technique is performed on matrix data
<i>Process Decision program Chart (PDPC)</i>	Determining which processes to use by evaluating events and prospective outcomes
<i>Arrow Diagram</i>	Used to do “What if finf: on flow of process

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of above analysis, we recommend that first HEC should improve our education system by focusing on measures and parameters that will help in producing a quality culture at the higher education level. Top management should not be promoted on the basis of seniority; promotion criteria should be modified and commitment, leadership, analytical skills, motivation level factors should be considered in any promotion. Strategic goals should be set by HEC and each institution of higher education should be directed to set their policy, rules, regulations and procedures in accordance with those goals. A quality culture development factor should be given key importance while setting strategic goals. All the top authorities of institutions should be included in this process.

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