



PERIL, PROSPECT AND LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES' DILEMMA: QUANTITY OR QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

The higher education institutions in less developed countries (LDCs) are faced with twofold pressure; need to expand higher education and demand to enhance the quality. In the high time of global financial crises the question of going for quality in higher education has regained momentum. The stakeholders have a divided opinion over this question. In developing countries quality assurance agencies either do not exist at all or they are in very nascent stage with insufficient resources. Similarly many LDCs are not benefiting from regional and international quality networks; 5 out of 41 low income countries (12%) and 17 out of 55 lower middle income countries (30%) are using the platform of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The purpose of this study is to map the state of the quality of higher education by investigating: What these countries are doing for quality enhancement or/and assurance? Why quality is questionable in LDCs? How they can overcome this problem? Who should do?

Design/methodology/approach

This is an explanatory study based on macro level data on higher education and quality assurance in ninety eight countries; low income and lower middle income countries. The research design included multiple factors in order to study their effects on response variable which is *quality assurance*. Data for this research was accessed/ collected from multiple resources; The World Bank, UNESCO institute for statistics, INQAAHE and ministries of Education of the selected LDCs.

Findings

Higher education in the less developed countries is expanding at an unprecedented rate and low income countries are faced with financial constrains so the higher education is under-invested. The quality assurance system, in many countries, is in the developing stage or not fully functional, and these countries are under-represented on the platform of the international organizations working for quality assurance. There is a possibility that higher education institutions in many LDCs would be providing sub-standard education. In many LDCs under-developed human capital is resulting in under-utilization of economic and

human resources. It is also a major obstacle in the way of quality development and assurance in higher education institutions. So countries under study need to act and react according to their unique context and needs of higher education and quality assurance system by giving due importance to what is essential over what is ideal.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the existing pool of knowledge by mapping the state higher education and economic constrains in the less developed countries. It gave a detailed information and assessment of the present status, problems, prospects, potentials of quality in higher education. This research also provided lines of action for quality assurance and enhancement in higher education in the selected LDCs.

Keywords:

Higher education, quality assurance, less developed countries

Classifications:

Research paper

“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts” (Albert Einstein)

Peril, prospect and less developed countries’ dilemma: quantity or quality in higher education?

Should higher education institutions go for quality or quantity or both? This question might be ridiculous for economically well placed societies but very reasonable and important for the societies which have meager resources even to meet the basic needs of education, not to speak of quality and excellence. In low income countries (LICs) and lower middle income countries (LMCs) where education, at all levels, is under resourced, in these countries the question of going for quality assurance in higher education is being debated at all forums; from ministerial level to student union level and from education policies deliberations to media debates. The stakeholders, in the less developed countries, have a divided opinion over this question and this is evident from the education policies and budget set for education sector; small number of these countries keeps quality assurance (QA) on the list of priorities while very few of them set separate budget for QA. As a result the quality of the knowledge generated within higher education institutions, and its availability to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness in these countries (The world Bank, 2000). The higher education institutions (HEIs) in less developed countries (LDCs) are faced with a twofold pressure; need to expand higher education and demand to enhance the quality. In the high time of global financial crises the question of *quality or quantity* in higher education has regained momentum.

The selection of the countries, for this study, is based on the World Bank classification¹. The Bank has categorized the world countries into four groups on the basis of Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2008). According to this division there are 40 low income, 56 lower middle income, 48 upper middle and 69 high income member countries around the world. Here this study focus the low income (LI) and Lower middle income (LMI) countries which are also called less developed countries (LDCs) by some international organizations. So all three terms have been used in this article: low income countries (LICs), lower middle income countries (LMCs) and, when both combined, less developed countries (LDCs). Two groups of the countries, based on the World Bank classification, has been included in this study: 40 low income² and 56 lower middle income countries,³ in this way there are ninety six countries which are part of this macro level research.

All low income countries (LICs) and some lower middle income countries (LMCs) share the following commonalities: On economic side; a fragile economy, a small industrial base, high budget deficits, high inflation rate and low GDP per capita, as a result, low wages, high dependency on foreign assistance and loans. On socio-political side; a under-efficient and over burdened institutions, political tug war, a flimsy condition of law and order, heavy state control over resources and corruption are all resulting in little or no confidence in the state and country institutions, social unrest, anarchy, high frequency of crimes, and slow or no social development and progress. On human capital side; a gigantic pool of under-developed, under-skilled and low productive human resources result in low productivity and low income level. On natural resources side; under or over utilization, miss-utilization, deprivation of bio-resources, unchecked foreign involvement or control over natural resources result in low government revenue, high dependency on agriculture, slow industrial development and environmental hazards. On the education side; over-loaded, under-resourced and under-funded educational institutions, teacher-centered or book-centered institutions, under-developed faculty, inefficient management, favoritism, little or no use of modern technologies in the teaching and learning, small base of productive research, more stress on rote learning than competencies and limited societal role, all these factors lead to inefficiency and questionable quality of institutions, low market value of degrees, incompetence of degree and diploma holders, gender parity and low participation rate at higher education level.

Low middle income countries (LMCs) present a wide array and level of economic development: few of them are well placed economically but majority of them are under-developed with very small industrial base, high poverty rate and under-utilization of

¹ Country Income Groups 2010, The World Bank: *Income group*: Economies are divided according to 2008 GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank [Atlas method](#). The groups are: [low income](#), \$975 or less; [lower middle income](#), \$976 - \$3,855; [upper middle income](#), \$3,856 - \$11,905; and [high income](#), \$11,906 or more.

² Low Income Group:- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Dem. Rep., Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, The, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kenya, Korea, Dem Rep. , Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Rep. , Zambia, Zimbabwe

³ Lower Middle Income Group:- Albania, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, China, Congo, Rep. , Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Arab Rep. , El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kiribati, Kosovo, Lesotho, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Solomon Islands , Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Vanuatu, West Bank and Gaza

resources, high socio-economic disparities. Some of the LMI countries are considered as emerging economies, for example China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand etc.

These less developed countries (LDCs) are faced with the problem of under-developed human capital because, in these countries, a majority of the population is poorly educated, devoid of high order skills, lacking competencies to use technologies and have low quality which is resulting in low productivity. Therefore many of the LICs and the LMCs are economically very weak and are facing the difficulties in competing in global economic markets. According to the World Bank 2008 data, ninety six LDCs have a combined GDP (PPP) of thirteen trillion US dollar whereas twenty seven high income OECD countries have a pooled GDP (PPP) of thirty two trillion US dollar⁴. Likewise average annual per capita GDP (PPP) in LDCs is only 3000 USD whereas it is 36000 USD in high developed OECD countries which is twelve times higher than LDCs.

In terms of population size and land area low income and lower middle income countries have big part of the world. According to the World Bank (2008) data, more than 70% of the total world population and 75% of the tertiary school age population resides in the LICs and LMCs. But in these countries the average participation rate at tertiary level is merely 16.1% whereas in OECD high income countries this value is 66% while in the world mean participation rate at tertiary level is 25%.

Table 1

Comparison of different income groups (data 2008, in millions)				
Name of the indicator	Low income countries	Low middle income countries	High income OECD	World (Total)
Population, total	976.2	3701.2	952.9	6747.6
Population, tertiary, total	94.2	348.1	61.8	594.6
Enrollment, tertiary, total	6.3	65.0	40.5	147.3
Tertiary education, teachers	0.26	3.1	3.2	9.6

Table is based on the data from The World Bank

Due to low participation rate LDCs have 48% of the total university enrolled population. Likewise the condition of primary and secondary education is not so encouraging as the UNESCO data shows: adult literacy rate in LDCs ranges from 26% in Mali to 99.6% in Tajikistan and 99.7% in Ukraine: mean adult literacy rate in LICs is only 60% and it is 85% in LMCs whereas in OECD high income countries mean value of adult literacy rate is more higher than 98%. Similarly youth literacy rate also shows a great variation in LDCs: 36.5% in Niger, 50% in Ethiopia, 69% in Pakistan and 99.9% in Azerbaijan whereas Average youth literacy rate is 69% in LICs, 90% in LMCs and 99.4% in OECD high income countries. Survival rate, progression rate to secondary level and enrolment rate in vocational and technical institutions are also very low in LDCs as shown in the table.

⁴ Measured at current international US dollar

Table: 2
Comparison of important indicators 2008

Indicators	LICs	LMCs	OECD
Adult Literacy rate (Age 15+)	59.7	84.9	97.5
Youth Literacy rate (15-24)	68.7	90.2	99.4
Survival rate to grade 5, total	67.0	84.0	99.0
Progression to secondary level (%)	69.5	85.6	99.0
Pupil-teacher ratio, primary	43.8	27.0	13.9
Pupil-teacher ratio, secondary	27.5	19.7	11.4
Personal computers (per 100 people)	1.7	8.5	56.7
GDP per capita, PPP (current inter.\$)	1250.4	4471.5	36378.2
GNI per capita, PPP (current inter.\$)	1215.8	4443.9	34374.8
Public current edu. expenditure (% of current edu. expenditure), Primary	51.3	38.2	24.7
Public current edu. expenditure (% of current edu. expenditure), Secondary	24,0	36,0	41,2
Public current edu. expenditure (% of current edu. expenditure), Tertiary	18,0	15,6	23,7
Public current education expenditure, % of total education expenditure	83,0	86,3	93,6
Vocational and Technical enrollment (% of secondary enrollment), total	5,5	9,6	26,7

LICs= Low income countries

LMCs= Lower middle income countries

OECD = OECD High income countries

Table is based on the data from The World Bank

In the majority of LICs and many of LMCs educational institutions are under-resourced and over-burdened because the education in these countries is under-funded at all levels. Pupil teacher ratio is one of the indicators which can explain the lack of resources and the burden on the institutions: at primary level in the low, lower middle and high income countries the average value of pupil teacher ratio is 44, 27 and 14 respectively, at secondary level this ratio is 28, 20 and 12 in that order and at tertiary level it is 25, 21 and 15 correspondingly.

Table: 3
Tertiary education at a glance (in millions)

Low income countries	2000	2008
Population, total	824.7	976.2
Population, tertiary, total	78.4	94.2
Enrollment, tertiary, total	3.2	6.3
Tertiary education, teachers	0.14	0.26
Lower middle income countries		
Population, total	3359.8	3701.2
Population, tertiary, total	294.2	348.1
Enrollment, tertiary, total	30.3	65.0
Tertiary education, teachers	1.7	3.1
World (Total)		
Population, total	6113.1	6747.6
Population, tertiary, total	521.0	594.6
Enrollment, tertiary, total	97.0	147.3
Tertiary education, teachers	6.4	9.6

Table is based on the data from The World Bank

LDCs as compared to high developed countries invest very little in education particularly higher education as lion's share of the budget for education goes to primary and secondary education because, on the average, more than 80% of the total budget is sucked by primary and secondary education while higher education receives very less; 0.7% in Belize, 4% in Tajikistan, 8.3% in Azerbaijan, 9.9% in Niger, 13% in Thailand, 13.9% in Bangladesh, 20% in India, 25.9% in Congo republic. In LICs, on the average, higher education receives less than 17% of the total spending on education whereas in high income OECD countries higher gets more than 23% of the education expenditure, see table 2.

The importance of higher education has been accepted universally. Bloom (2006) has concluded that higher education can play a key role in accelerating the rate of growth in the developing countries' productivity. Because of the robust potential of higher education a huge boost in the student enrolment at all levels has been witnessed the world over since the mid of the twentieth century and an unprecedented increase in the student enrolment at higher education level, mainly in the less developed countries, has been recorded during this decade. UNESCO data shows that from 2000 to 2008 the enrolment at tertiary level has augmented many folds in the developing world; in LICs 97% increase (3.2 million to 6.3 million) and in LMCs 115% increase (30.3 million to 65 million in 2008). In the world the biggest increase in the student enrolment has been witnessed in LMCs; China, India, Iran, Indonesia, Ukraine, Pakistan and Thailand.

Table: 4

Tertiary Education data 2000 – 2008 (selected countries)				
Country	Number of Universities	Enrolment in 2000 (millions)	Enrolment in 2008 (millions)	Change in enrolment (millions)
China	651	7.36	26.69	+19.33
India	321	9.40	14.86	+5.46
Iran	116	1.57	3.39	+1.82
Indonesia	431	3.02	4.42	+1.40
Ukraine	211	1.81	2.85	+1.04
Pakistan	111	0.39	0.97	+0.59
Thailand	103	1.90	2.43	+0.53

Data from: IAU and the World Bank

Higher education, akin to other fields, is also facing strong competition at all levels and in all fields. This high competition is acting as a catalyst in defining the characteristics of programs and shaping the structure of the policies concerning to higher education. High competitive environment is resulting in the enhanced role of private sector and new trends in trans-national institutions and cross border higher education. As a result we see an unprecedented mobility of students, staff and resources within and across the borders. This all gives an evidence of high level of export and import of higher education. Contrast to the paradigm of competition a new trend of collaboration and networking of HEIs, at national, regional and international level is more common in LMCs as compared to LICs. This new drift is also pushing HEIs, in LDCs, to maintain and even to improve their quality. These and other factors and forces drive HEIs, as well in the less developed countries, to go for quality along with quantity.

Achieving quality in higher education is becoming a universal agenda since the advent of 21st century. Recently many universities in the developing countries have followed their counterparts in the developed countries by adopting the course of quality assurance to improve the quality of their activities (Lim, 2001). The higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing countries are faced with twofold pressure; need to expand higher education and demand to enhance the quality. In the high time of global financial crises the question of going for quality in higher education has regained momentum. The stakeholders have a divided opinion over this question. In developing countries quality assurance agencies either do not exist at all or they are in very nascent stage with insufficient resources. The purpose of this study is to map the state of the quality of higher education, in the less developed countries, by investigating: What are these countries doing for quality enhancement or/and assurance? Why is quality questionable in DCs? How can they overcome this problem? Who should do?

The term quality is not new to human society as it is in the use since ancient times and, interestingly, the concept of Quality exists in every society, since time immemorial, around the world. Many researchers like, (Stensaker & Harvey, 2006), (Billing, 2004), Hope (2002), (Maassen, 1997) maintained that the culture of quality assurance is not new in higher education also. Defining quality is more difficult than achieving it. There is no universal definition of quality because the word quality is a perceptual, conditional and somewhat subjective attribute and may be understood differently by different people (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). An acceptable and understandable definition of “quality” can only be possible when it is related to a specific function and/or object. Due to this reason quality has different explanations and interpretations that may vary from society to society and even profession to profession: for an artist it can be excellence, for an economist it can be zero deficit, for a manufacturer it can be zero defect, for a producer it can be consumer satisfaction, for a consumer it can be maximum level of utility, for a teacher it can be conformity to set goals and objectives and for a higher education institution it can be the market worth of its degrees.

As quality is not something in space or in vacuum so it is definable; Business Dictionary has defined it as “measure of excellence or state of being free from defects, deficiencies, and significant variations” (Business Dictionary, 2010). While International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines quality as *the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs*⁵. While according to the quality digest “Quality is an ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships by assessing, anticipating, and fulfilling stated and implied needs” (Quality digest). In simple words “desirable outcome of a process, program or service” is called quality.

The term *Quality Assurance (QA)* has different interpretations when it is viewed in different historical, cultural and political backgrounds. A limited and simple definition can be; “steps taken to make sure that a company's products or services are of sufficiently high quality”⁶ or “necessary precautions taken to ensure that entire production of goods or services is within specifications under wide conditions of operation.”⁷ In the light of these definitions one can say that *Quality Assurance (QA)* is “a well designed methodology to assess, improve and guarantee the quality of products or services.” Basically QA is a program for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project, services, or facilities in order to ensure that standards of quality are being met (Wikipedia, 2010). To achieve all this a six sigma approach is followed which includes two project methodologies; DMAIC⁸ and DMADV⁹ Where as within the “Six Sigma” there are many quality management tools to ensure total quality.¹⁰

⁵ International Organization for Standardization: <http://www.iso.org/iso/home.htm>

⁶ investorWords.com : http://www.investorwords.com/3995/quality_assurance.html

⁷ Visitask.com: <http://www.visitask.com/quality-assurance-g.asp>

⁸ DMAIC: it is a project methodology with five faces; Design, Measure, Analysis, Improve and Control.

⁹ DMADV project methodology goes for; Define, Measure, Analyze, Design and Verify.

¹⁰ Tools may include; Five (5) Whys, Analysis of variance, Regression analysis, Root cause analysis, Chi-square test, histogram etc.

QA is a much wider term and its connotation varies according to the field. Readers should not be confused with the term quality assurance and quality control because there is a big difference between control and assurance: quality control emphasizes testing of finished products to find out defects or shortcoming and reporting to management while quality assurance includes regulation of the quality of raw materials (inputs), production units (facilities), procedure (methodologies), processing (steps followed), production process, inspection scheme, feedback formula, improving mechanism and management model. Thus it is clear that the term *quality control* is not a contender but a component of QA.

Social institutions, in all societies, are not only weaved with each other but also stitched with social norms and socio-economic limitation as a result every society has knitted its own quality assurance structures. Therefore different countries have evolved different QA models for their higher education system necessitated by their unique social need. Although inter and intra society diversity exists even then there are commonalities shared by developing societies which provide sufficient ground to build common standards for excellence in the light of appropriate and reasonable purposes by answering “what”. In doing so it is logical to differentiate between, what is necessary, and what is ideal. At second step the question of “how” should be addressed by selecting appropriate and result oriented methodologies to achieve quality in higher education. Before going to explore for “What” and “How” it seems appropriate and timely to answer for “Why”.

Why should *higher education institutions* (HEIs), in LDCs, go for quality assurance? The answer is not free of disagreements. In the LDCs quality assurance in higher education is important because it:

- Enhances the acceptability and credibility of the institutions by increasing the worth and value of degrees and credentials. This brings repute and respect for institutions at national and international level and ultimately reduces the monopoly of foreign credentials holders
- Helps to make higher education and HEIs transparent and trustworthy for all (EU, 2009)
- Develops a congenial environment where institutions have an enhanced interaction with stakeholders and other institutions this promotes a culture of competition/ collaboration among the educational institutions.
- Promotes an environment which is, both, producer (service provider) and consumer friendly, consequently this builds the consumer confidence in institutions and programs
- Helps in protecting consumer rights by ensuring the provision of what had been promised
- Encourages adopting better approaches towards resource management which reduces or even eliminates the under-utilization, misuse and waste of tangible and intangible resources.
- Enhances the value and recognition of the qualifications outside the country because the need of international recognition of the degrees has augmented due to an

increased cross border mobility of academics, professionals, researchers and students.

- Prepare local higher education institutions, both in the public and private sector, to compete with the cross border higher education providers which are establishing institutions/campuses in the developing countries (Materu, 2007)
- Eliminates or reduces the substandard education that is being delivered to students in LDCs where the process of QA is not so mature.

Like more developed countries in the LDCs also there are many driving forces behind QA drive. There are several factors which play a crucial role in pushing forward higher education institutions (HEIs), in the LDCs, to take practical and feasible steps to assure and to enhance the quality of services and facilities provided by them. On the one hand the increasing demand of higher education, in terms of capacity, accessibility, equity, new disciplines and facilities, is pushing public and private sectors to go for assurance of quality in order to maximize the utility of limited available resources in the LDCs.

The mass expansion and elevated competition, in the field of higher education, are the major driving forces that push higher education institutions and other stakeholders to regulate the “quality” by meeting the set standards in order to ensure excellence in the product and services. According to UNESCO report “the rising demand for education reflects the growing recognition of its economic and social benefits, both for individuals and societies (UNESCO/OECD, 2005). Whilst, on the other hand, the enhanced public accessibility to information, through media, is making HEIs and quality assurance agencies (QAA) more open. This openness of institutions and awareness of society has resulted in the emergence of movements and organizations to protect consumers’ right (Bleakley, 2001). It has made HEIs more careful and cautious in all matters pertaining to students, teachers and programs. Ultimately these strides are adding to the quality of the institutions.

Trend and culture of quality assurance is increasing all around the world. A survey of education policies of the many LDCs, by the author, shows that a wind of change is blowing everywhere as quality of higher education and quality assurance mechanisms have been stressed in the education policies of all countries. According to the World Bank “nearly half of the countries, worldwide, have created quality assurance mechanisms, of one type or another, during the last decade or two” (IIEP, 2009). In the majority of developing countries quality assurance is sponsored and supported by the state to control, supervise, direct and to promote the conformity with the set standards. The emerging importance of QA in education can be gauged from the growth of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) agencies worldwide.

The concept of general and professional accreditation in various countries exists for more than one hundred years. However the idea of QAA in education sector, as compared to industrial sector, is very recent so for the major part of the world the scientific concept approach towards QA is also quite new. As a world-wide phenomenon, external quality assurance (in higher education) began in the 1980s (Woodhouse, 2004), during mid eighties changes in National Policy for Education in U.K. and Australia led to mass education and

increased transnational education, and during late eighties Malaysia and Japan invited education providers to augment higher education systems. Later on in the early nineties the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the *Center for Quality Assurance in International Education* (CQAIE) (1991) were established. In 1995 the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) paved the way for internationalization and smooth functioning of organization and enterprises related to services sector. All these developments led to major regional training programs in QA at national, regional and international level. In this scenario the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Union and other IGOs played an active role by extending technical and financial cooperation to make the provision of education with assurance of quality at all levels with a focus on the higher education (Lenn, 2009).

Figure 1



Source: *Quality assurance in Latin America* Maria Jose Lemaitre 2010 CHEA

QA systems and agencies have multiplied rapidly over the past 20 years.¹¹ Since the advent of new millennium networks of quality assurance bodies have multiplied at regional levels¹² particularly in the high income and middle income world; The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in 2000, Central and Eastern European Network of QA agencies in higher education (CEEN) in 2002, European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) in 2003, Nordic QA network in higher education (NOQA), Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in 2003, Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) in 2004, Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) in 2007, European Quality Assurance Register for higher education

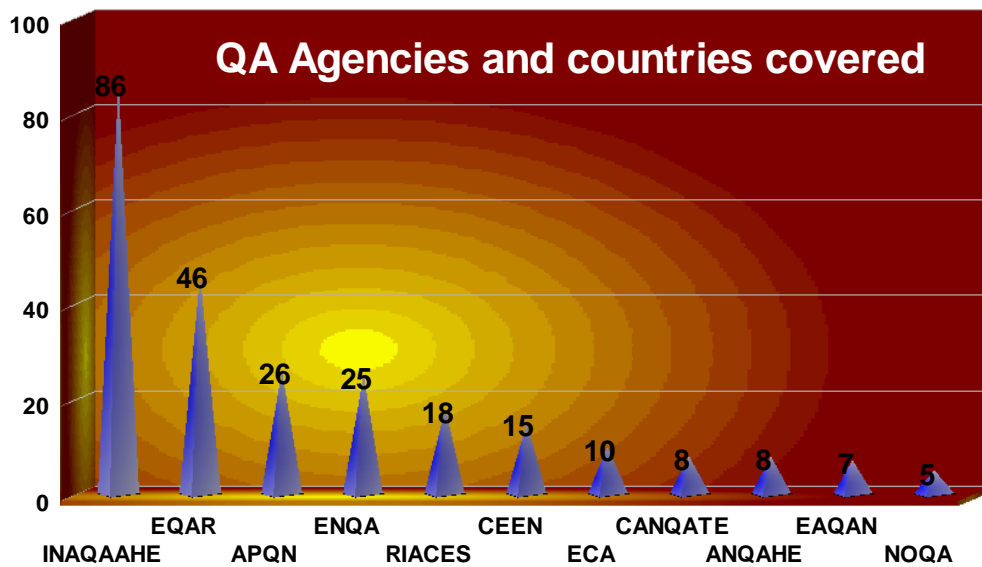
¹¹ The World Bank broacher (2006): http://www.ciep.fr/en/confint/conf_2006/doc/programme_conf_gb.pdf

¹² The World Bank broacher (2006): http://www.ciep.fr/en/confint/conf_2006/doc/programme_conf_gb.pdf

(EQAR) in 2008, Quality Assurance Network for African Higher Education (AfriQAN) in 2009. From the rate of expansion and demand of QA it is evident that in time to come it will further develop and expand on swift pace.

But, at the same time, the growth of private accreditation and quality assurance agencies makes it important to examine thoroughly the potential consequences of accreditation, both in its public and its private species (Bjorn & Lee, 2006) not only in the developed but in less developed countries also.

Figure 2

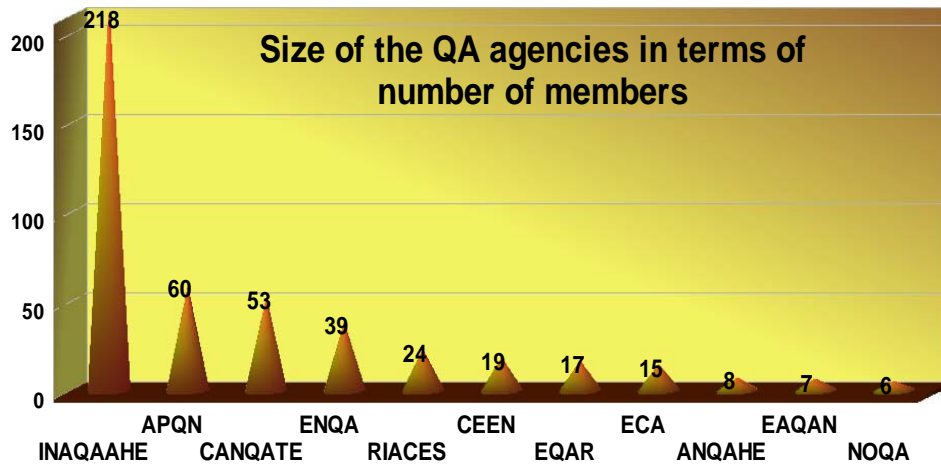


All regional agencies involved in QA have many things in common; more focus on quality assurance in higher education institutions rather than accreditation only (except of ECA); registered as non-profit, non-governmental organizations (except NOQA, ECA, EAQAN and AfriQan); formal organizational structure (except NOQA); partly funded by members and partly by international organizations (except NOQA, EAQAN); have a presence at INQAAHE platform; interconnected with each other as many of them sharing information and cooperating in capacity building.

In majority of the LDCs the structured QA processes in higher education have been started after 2000 so QA is in nascent stage and still many LDCs have not established or make fully functional national QA agencies. In Africa only 16 countries had functioning national QA agencies in 2007 (Materu, 2007). To assess the level of quality assurance development, in the less developed countries, different indicators can be used; the presence of quality assurance agencies, internal or external, is one of them. In order to estimate how LDCs are benefiting from international experiences here we have use data on “The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)” members. The INQAAHE member data explain “QA-readiness” of the member countries, to certain degree, as they are in better position to use this platform for implementing and improving the quality of higher

education in their countries. The Network or *INQAAHE*, established in 1991, is an association of more than 200 organizations from 130 countries all around the world. Its Secretariat is located in the Netherlands. *INQAAHE* members include HEIs, QA and accreditation agencies and organization linked with higher education.

Figure 3



All members are categorized into four groups; full, associate, institutional members and affiliates. *INQAAHE* works for quality in higher education, collects and disseminates information, promotes good practices, facilitates research, provides advice and expertise in the field of higher education (*INQAAHE*), the term “Network” is also used for *INQAAHE*. There are other QA agencies also but the *INQAAHE* or the Network has highest member population where as Asia pacific quality network (*APQN*) has 60 members in 26 countries, Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (*CANQATE*) has 53 members 8 countries, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*ENQA*) 39 members in 25 countries, the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*ANQAHE*) has only eight members in eight countries.

Figure 4

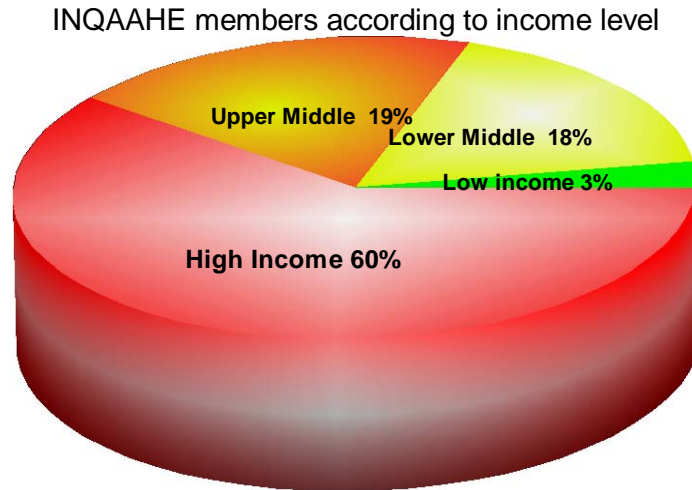
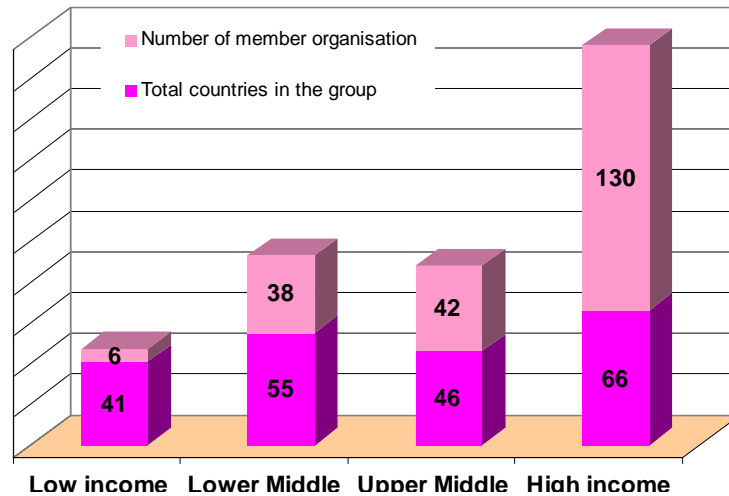


Figure 5
Number of member organization according to income group at INQAHE



The Network member data shows that in April 2010 there were 216 member organizations; 3% of them were from low income countries, 18% from lower middle countries, 19% from upper middle economies, and 60% of the Network members were from high income countries. Only five¹³ low income countries and seventeen¹⁴ lower middle income countries, in the world, were using the Network platform. In the other words among 98 low developed countries only 21 are benefiting from international experiences for the development of quality in higher education. This low presence of LDCs at INQAHE platform demonstrates the state, level and activeness of the quality assurance agencies in these countries whereas most developed countries have already established well-designed

¹³ Ethiopia , Ghana , Kenya , Rwanda, Vietnam

¹⁴ Albania , Azerbaijan, China, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nigeria, **Pakistan**, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste

mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education (Ross, 2002) at national level and these countries are fully benefiting from the international experiences also.

Figure 6

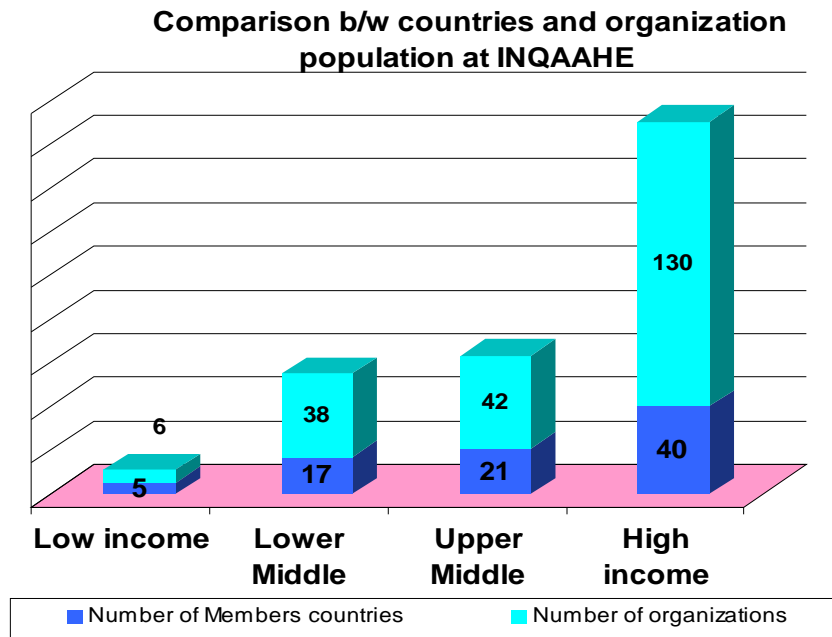
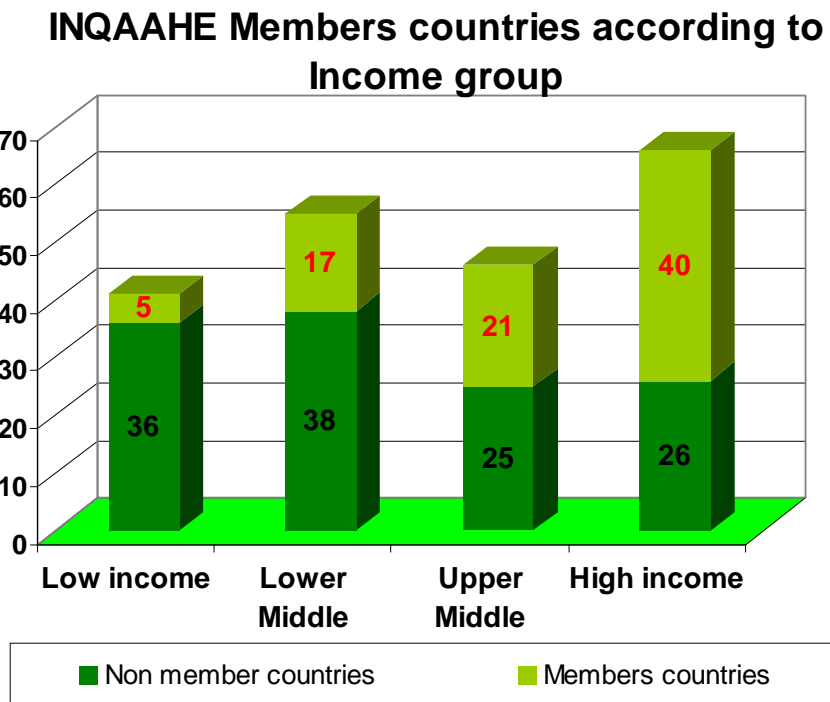


Figure 7



Today the major challenges faced by LDCs are low motivation, high cost and limited human capacity. These three are the major barriers in the way of new development and progress in LDCs. A good motivation at all levels, political, administrative and managerial, is a prerequisite for a rapid change but in many LDCs particularly in Africa, middle East and south Asia very weak political will and low motivation is shown by the countries which is obvious from the commitment that is shown with the quality assurance in the education, particularly higher education in these regions.

Cost of higher education, due to socio-economic factors, is very high in many LDCs. According to OECD report 2005 as a result of explosion in tertiary enrolment very few countries are able to financially keep pace with the increase in student enrolment (OECD-UNESCO, 2005). Investment in higher education in terms of total expenditure neither enable us to make cross countries comparison nor explain the difficulties and hardships faced by that country to bear the cost. But per student public expenditure, at tertiary level, as percent of per capita GDP tells us the internal story. According to the World Bank data, in the high income OECD countries, at tertiary level, per student average spending is 31.3% of the per capita GDP and it ranges between 55% in Denmark and 8% in Japan. While in LDCs the average per student expenditure as percent share of per capita GDP is 160% and it ranges between more than 1150% in Eritrea and Lesotho and 9% in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. This shows that how difficult it is for LDCs with low income to provide higher education to their nationals. As EL-Khawas (1998) found “the developing countries (LDCs) are hard hit by the crisis in higher education because the fiscal constraints faced by many countries, coupled with increasing demand, has led to overcrowding, deteriorating infrastructure and ultimately a decline in the quality” as a result these poor countries have no option except to go for quantity in order to cope with high demand of university education.

Education in the less developed countries is faced with economic constrains and higher education is no exception. Despite of higher demand of tertiary education the LDCs are still spending far less on tertiary education as compared to high income OECD countries: LDCs spend on average 17.4% of the education budget on tertiary education while in OECD high income countries 23.7% of total education expenditure goes to tertiary education. High student teacher ratio is prevalent, at tertiary level, in LICs and LMCs: 24:1 and 21:1 respectively, while in the world this 15:1. Likewise, according to IAU 2008 data, in LICs there are less than seven hundred universities for 6.3 million enrolled students at tertiary level, similarly in 56 LMCs there are four thousand universities for more than 65 million tertiary level students while in the rest of the world there are more than 13000 universities for 76 million students. These facts speak of the limited resources and pressure on education facilities.

Table: 5

Low and High developed countries selected data

Name of the indicator	High income OECD	LMCs and LICs
Gross enrollment rate (%), tertiary, total	65.5	16.1
Enrollment, tertiary, Total (in Millions)	40.5	71.3
Public education expenditure as % of GDP	5.3	4.7
Share of expenditure for tertiary education (% of total education expenditure)	23.7	17.4
Expenditure on Teachers compensation in public institutions (% of current education expenditure)	59.0	63.8
GDP, PPP (current international \$) (Trillions)	32.0	12.9
GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$)	36378.2	2944.4

Table is based on the data from The World Bank 2010

Human capacity is a basic component for growth, development, or accomplishment based upon knowledge and competencies (TF_Dictionary). The process of human Capacity building includes all those activities and investment which helps make a system fully functional and effective. Unfortunately, in many developing countries there are very few people with the advanced technical training that is required to undertake large-scale scientific studies on the quality of education (Ross, 2002). Capacity Building measures in LDCs a possibility to bring an effective and rapid change in QA. It's true that lake of economic and human resources in less developed countries (LDCs) has become a big problem but due to low capacity to manage the available resources has given birth to corruption which has led to uneven and unjust distribution of resources. The mismatch between resources needed and resources allocated is one of the major causes of the failure to achieve quality in all institutions including higher education institutions. To achieve, assure and ensure quality in higher education institutions, in these countries, it is imperative to ensure and assure balance between *need and allocations*. To overcome these challenges the following measures can be taken as it is high time to bailout QA in LDCs countries:

- Training of those persons who are in a better position to implement, replicate and sustain the process of quality assurance according to their capacity. Such trainings can be organized by ministries of education with the help of NGOs which have capacity to do this.
- Association and collaboration, at national and international level, can be the viable approach to benefit from the knowledge, experiences and resources of HEIs working for the assurance of quality and QA agencies successfully achieved the objectives.

These best practices can be guiding principles for those HEIs and QA agencies which are planning to do the same.

- Organizing conferences, seminars and workshops as these are good source of innovative knowledge and ideal forums for sharing of information, and acquisition of competencies. Such activities are important for all those who are involved in the process of quality assurance. Similarly information on good practices in QA, countries reports on QA and case studies can also be very helpful for aspirant countries faced with limitation of resources. Similarly study visits or professional visits of other institutions to witness their action to promote and assure quality are good sources to gain knowledge from others achievements and failures.
- Using the platforms of regional organizations can helpful to establish regional QA bodies which can serve the purpose of inter-countries collaboration by providing a forum to benefit from the resources, to share the experiences, to make working groups and to enhance between and among countries interaction. This platform can also be used to create a pool of human resources, comprised of expertise, at regional level.
- There are many Inter-governmental Organization at which can be accessed for assistance: for technical assistance; UNESCO, European union etc. for financial assistance; the World Bank and many donor agencies
- At sub-national, national, regional and international level establishment of databases, comprised of both micro and macro data of all institutions, will give an opportunity to all stakeholders to observe, analyze, compare and rank the institutions on the basis of different indicators.

Quality can be achieved and assured in the higher education institution in the LDCs by following the approach of “think local and go global” because each country has a unique context for quality assurance due to multiple factors; geography, population size, demography, economic level, human capacity, education system and quality assurance needs. So LDCs must at first step know their local needs, at second step learn from the international experiences and at third and final stage create and carve their own QA system. To achieve this all there is need to do some ground work by eliminating unnecessary boundaries. Whereas limitations and red tape culture in the name of standards setting is strangling the creativity and innovation. Autonomy of higher education institutions promotes sense of duty and dignity which ultimately results in efficiency and quality. So no compromise should be made on autonomy and it must be protected, practiced and perpetuated.

To overcome these problems Lim (1999) proposed that QA approaches followed in the developing countries need to modify according to the conditions and national needs of these countries, by designing QA simple models according to national requirements and expectations. The idea that the *whole is greater than sum of parts* is usually not caught because an attempt to achieve and assure quality in parts and pieces is the most common mistake committed by most of the countries. To ensure quality of an institution it is necessary to consider a system as a whole along with all its parts, sub-parts and complementary elements. Possibly missing quality of one component may render whole system inadequate.

Imagine there is a brand new car with state of art aerodynamic design, ultra light but very strong body frame, auto-adjustable comfortable seats, all purpose efficient tyres and a powerful, highly efficient but silent engine. Above of all it uses green fuel. It is here to serve its purpose of fast, comfortable and safe journey. If this car's only "one" component, *the steering*, is missing! Then what level of efficiency can be expected from this machine? Is this car suitable to serve the purpose? A purpose of fast, comfortable and safe journey! Similarly in HE system every part has its own importance thus low or missing quality of one part may reduce the efficiency, quality and ultimately usefulness of the whole system.

Quality assurance is not a magic wand that solves every problem overnight and it is impossible to devise a quality assurance system that can automatically maximize the efficiency of an individual or institution to the highest point with perfection. But these are the human efforts based on scientific approach that help improve, evaluate and guarantee the quality of products or services. To achieve this one need to set priorities and always prefer what is an essential over what is an ideal level; the question "what minimum can be done to achieve this objective" is a guiding principle. This approach will help institutions to adhere to the basic principles, purposes and objectives of their existence. Total mobilization and exploitation of resources are as necessary for quality assurance as proper provision of resources. Resources are never sufficient, so Total Quality Management (TQM) is a viable option to make sure better utilization of resources, even maximum utilization of available resources and to overcome underutilization and miss-utilization of both human and material resources. In this regard smart estimation, competent administration, continuous supervision, effective training, good guidance, capable counseling and transparent evaluation will be helpful achieving the goals.

QA is a borrowed idea from industrial sector so educational institution should not be considered as producing units and classes as "assembly line". A pragmatic and result oriented approach gives due importance to diversity and ever changing societal demand in social, cultural, political, and economic context. Students are the end users and consumers of the facilities and services provided by higher education institutions, as the objective of QA is consumer satisfaction so it is necessary to involve students also at every stage of QA process; designing, developing, implementing, evaluating, improving and guaranteeing. Evidently this approach will lead to Sustainable Quality Assurance (SQA). Likewise involving system insiders, faculty and management, participate and play their role to assure quality because they know well that system than any other person does. So involvement of all stakeholders in the process of QA is important. As awareness promotes understanding so dissemination of information to keep all stakeholders informed about the present process and new developments is also very crucial. This will help in promoting Quality culture at all levels. Usually in QA process little or no importance is given to this essential element.

CONCLUSION

Higher education in the less developed countries is expanding at an unprecedented rate and low income countries are faced with financial constraints to meet these demands, at this point, the question of *quality or quantity* is very important and timely. As the quality assurance system, in the majority of these countries, is in the developing stage or not fully functional so there is a possibility that quality is being sacrificed at the altar of quantity. That can result in the provision of sub-standard higher education which is not in the national interest because this may lead to the wastage of time and energies of all stakeholders at higher education level. The idea of *whole is greater than sum of parts* must be followed at every cost and quantity should go hand in hand with quality. In these countries there is an urgent need to improve human capacity because under-utilization of economic and human resources is a major obstacle in the way of quality development in higher education institutions. Human capacity can be developed and improved through association and collaboration with other institutions and organization at sub-regional, regional and international level and can work as seeding support. Learning from international experiences is good but, at the same time, LDCs need to act and react according to their unique context and need of higher education and quality assurance system so an importance must be given to what is essential over what is ideal.

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