



HIGHER EDUCATION EXPANSION IN PAKISTAN AND ISSUES OF QUALITY

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The emphasis on higher education is a global phenomenon. The inter-dependability between higher education and national development is emphasised by many international and national studies and research reports. Paulo Friere, the famous Brazilian educator and thinker argues that for developing countries this inter-relationship implies a stronger need to improve education for the purposes of multi-dimensional national development (1972). Education is construed as a significant factor in promoting an ambitious agenda of social and political change. The World Bank and UNESCO Task Force on Higher Education and Society that brought together experts from 13 countries to explore the future of higher education in the developing world, claimed that 'The quality of knowledge generated within Higher Education institutions, and its accessibility to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness' (UNESCO, 2000, p.9). Even in developed countries such as USA many national reports emphasise that deteriorating education places 'A Nation at Risk'. Brown and Lauder claim that the increasing importance attached to education in the global economy is not misplaced in the sense that nations will increasingly have to define the wealth of nations in terms of the quality of human resources among the population, and to develop those resources through education (1996, p.23). According to a UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills report 'A strong university system is essential to a country's economic success and the vibrancy and depth of its intellectual and cultural life' (BIS, 2009, p.18).

In the case of Pakistan, the policy documents and political statements of almost every leader, from *Quaid-a-Azam* up to the present day rulers stress the association and inter-dependability between education and national development. The World Bank reports (2000) further emphasise this correlation. This inter-relationship implies an intrinsic need to improve the quality of education for the purposes of multidimensional national development. The Boston Report emphasises that 'In the emerging 'knowledge economy', nations that fail at creating a decent learning environment will lag behind, and may end up becoming virtual colonies of those that do succeed in this regard' (2002, p.5). Higher education is increasingly being seen as a vehicle for developing human resources, thus defining the policy thrusts aiming towards its expansion. However, a significant issue underpinning these developments concerns the quality of the provision and the challenge of accommodating expansion with quality. Expansion in itself cannot be the answer to the needs if the quality is not assured.

Like many developing and developed countries, Pakistan has also been experiencing huge expansion in higher education in the recent years. The HEC has been a catalyst in promoting and expanding higher education. However, the issue that hasn't been taken up until very recently is the quality of education at this level. There have been expressions of concern regarding quality assurance linked to this drive for expansion. The important thing in this regard is that it is not just systems and processes that contribute to the quality of education but a change in the attitude and mind-sets of the people working in this field is essential to deliver quality. Senge (1990) argues that Organisations are products of the ways that people in them think and interact; to change organisations for the better, you must give people the opportunity to change the ways they think and interact and that is what also needs to be cultivated, facilitated and promoted in the higher education organisations. This paper discusses challenges of quality assurance in HE in Pakistan, particularly at the doctoral level, in the backdrop of expansion of HE. The debates and analysis are informed by wider international literature as well as by personal experiences of working in HE in Pakistan and the UK universities, and more recently, of working with doctoral students and visiting scholars from Pakistan, who are also faculty members in Pakistani universities studying in the UK.

Higher education is a vast field which is beyond the scope of a single paper. This paper will focus specifically on doctoral provision within HE, debating the issues of quality in the backdrop of the aims of doctoral education, followed by a discussion of the current higher education scenario in Pakistan and national priorities. It will attempt to highlight the quality indicators as well as the factors acting as potential challenges, and propose suggestions for quality assurance in higher education with specific focus on developing research/doctoral studies and the required infrastructures and procedures.

AIMS OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Aims of higher education are multi-dimensional including academic, economic, social, and personal aspects. Traditionally, doctoral degrees were more prestige-related, and well into the early modern period the universities tended to train socially and politically powerful elite in the arts of rhetoric, logic and semantics (Mahoney and Winterer, 2002, p. 518). Higher learning was an activity limited to elite (Taysum, 2007) and perceived as a symbol of their status which Bourdieu (2000) discusses as 'symbolic capital' accrued through social honour and status and transferred as social inheritance, thus reinforcing social reproduction and divisions. With the democratisation of education and widening of participation, aims of doctoral education have changed. There are pressures from governments for graduates to contribute directly to economic regeneration and growth. Doctoral programmes are now expected to play a vital role in the development of economic, political and cultural life of nations. Bologna Process ministerial summit in Berlin in 2003 defined European Higher Education Area and European Research Area as "two pillars of the knowledge based society".

Huge investments in higher education can be justified if these 'Highly trained researchers, and especially graduates of PhD programmes and other research-based doctorates, act as

major agents of creativity, innovation, knowledge transfer and problem solving' (LERU, 2007, p.4). Doctoral education has a significant role in producing and transforming knowledge (Taysum, 2007) by enabling human mind to not only meet the intellectual challenges of our time but also to procure responses to practical issues. League of European Research Universities emphasised training of world class researchers for developing a powerful base for knowledge economy, emphasising the requirement to meet high international standards of research quality, links to business and industry, and quality assurance (LERU, 2007, p.3). The aim of such programmes is 'not limited to developing academic researchers but highly skilled experts who can perform in diverse professions making outstanding contributions through capacity building and innovation which are 'conducive to social and economic welfare' (OECD, 2006, p.7).

In the advanced knowledge economies capacity building and innovation are defined as the tools that provide a competitive advantage to the growth potential through 'knowledge acceleration'. Doctoral programmes are expected to contribute to both by developing the ability to produce new knowledge for capacity building and innovation. In fact the expectation is not just to create new knowledge by engaging in research but, as emphasised in the UNESCO report (2000) the universities have also to select and absorb knowledge from all over the world to meet the present and the future challenges. Doctoral Education is increasingly being defined as the vehicle to meet the future challenges such as 'new technologies, global market for scholars, blurring boundaries that challenge traditional disciplinary definitions, growing pressures for accountability, and shrinking public investment' (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel and Hutchings, 2008). Golde and Walker (2006) argue that the aim of doctoral education is to produce 'stewards of the discipline'. They should become custodians of knowledge, not just to conserve knowledge but to generate new knowledge, to transform the existing knowledge, and to facilitate dissemination and application of knowledge through creative and critical abilities. Walker et al discuss four aspects of doctoral education (formation, integration, intellectual community and stewardship), and emphasise that 'doctoral programs today face fundamental questions of purpose, vision, and quality' (2008, p.2). The aim is no longer producing a social, political, or intellectual elite but to 'turn pedagogical experience into pedagogical expertise' (Walker et al, 2008, p.4) and to contribute to the economic, political and cultural development at national and even international levels. They argue that the purpose of doctoral education is developing 'professional identity in all its dimensions' (p.8) leading towards the creation of an intellectual community. These approaches demand redefining the aims of doctoral studies in relation to the present and future needs and the role of doctoral graduates/faculty in responding to those needs. A doctoral degree is not just an extension of Bachelor's or Master's degrees. It is a unique stage of learning and development, and:

The single aspect that makes the doctorate unique in the educational system is that, for the doctoral qualification to be affirmed, the learning of the student must change the very nature of the 'topic' that he/she has studied to gain such affirmation. The evidence that candidates present for examination is this 'change' and their ability to understand it to a level that indicates that

they can go on to make further such changes in an independent and creative way (Clarke and Powell, 2009, p.20).

There is increasing demand for professional development in further education and universities (Leithwood and Hallinger, 2002) and doctoral programmes have become an important channel for professional development within higher education. In view of the changing role of the faculty and their potential involvement in the economic arena, the educational leaders need to be well-developed to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Murphy, 2002). University leaders need to be efficient, and to continually foster the development and growth within their universities, to enable these organisations to sustain within the challenging environment in an era of globalisation and internationalisation (Alstete *et al.*, 2000). This changing perception of higher education, particularly of doctoral programmes requires that its aims and purposes should be carefully considered and defined in context.

DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: CURRENT SCENARIO

When Pakistan came into existence, there were three universities in the areas which constituted Pakistan in 1947. However, Pakistan has come a long way in expanding higher education since then and currently there are 128 universities (HEC, Online) in the areas that now constitute Pakistan after the cessation of East Pakistan in 1971. The spread of the universities, according to the HEC website is as below:

Region	Universities	Public	Private
AJK	4	2	2
Balochistan	8	6	2
Islamabad	17	14	3
Northern Areas	1	1	
NWFP	22	13	9
Punjab	38	21	17
Sindh	38	13	25
Total	128	70	58

Source: HEC, online: <http://app.hec.gov.pk/universityfinal2/RegionUniversity.aspx>

However, the quality of higher education in Pakistan falls short of international standards as is evident from the fact that till 2006, according to the then Chairman Higher Education Commission, 'no Pakistani university met international standards and none ranked among the top 1,000 universities of the world' (Rehman, 2006, p.1). Although, a recent QS World University Rankings (2009) lists four Pakistani universities in the top ranked 600 universities of the world, but this does not diminish perceptions and concerns about the quality of education in Pakistani universities in general. These concerns are linked to systems and procedures, human and financial resources, research facilities, accountability, and quality assurance among many others. Wide range of providers, huge differences in provision and serious limitations in quality add to the challenges as acknowledged by the studies conducted in Pakistan (Isani, 2001; Iqbal, 2004). Some issues listed by Iqbal (2004) are:

- Very low quality in the fields of academic, administration, research and equipment
- Faculty and staff need development in knowledge and skills
- Funds provided are inadequate and misappropriation is common
- No linkage between university and industry
- Faulty examination system
- Good governance non-existent
- Political interference
- Private sector expanding without merit

Furthermore, the number of doctoral students in Pakistani universities is extremely low as compared to international statistics. According to Iqbal (2004), the participation rate at higher education in Pakistan is about three percent of the age group (17-23) and this is 16.2 percent as world average of this age group. The advanced countries are achieving more than 40 percent participation rate in higher education. Essentially, this low participation in doctoral programmes in Pakistan and other developing countries is linked to the issues mentioned above, and as a consequence these universities are not effectively performing the role expected from institutions of higher education in today's highly competitive world regarding developing human capital, generating new knowledge and producing intellectual communities. Report by the World Bank and UNESCO Task Force on Higher Education and Society (UNESCO, 2000, p.9) discusses HE in developing countries including Pakistan and highlights systems/procedures, faculty quality, insufficient resources and autonomy, cultural traditions, infrastructure limitations, poor monitoring/review processes, unmanageable expansion, and problems of quality as some of the major barriers to delivering quality in higher education.

An important factor in planning HE is clarity regarding the aims of HE. Pakistan inherited the British legacy of preparation for the public services and that traditional view of preparing an elite class still holds in some ways acting as a barriers to adopt and absorb the more dynamic and developmental role of higher education in the national economy. People educated from Pakistani institutions engage actively in knowledge creation and knowledge acceleration in developed countries and economies but the HE institutions in Pakistan have yet not been successful in becoming hubs of knowledge. This indicates that the potential is certainly there but vision and planning as well as the attitudes and mind-sets of the people working in this field need to be improved (Senge, 1990).

Over the last decade, HEC has invested hugely in developing higher education in Pakistan by providing extensive funding and opportunities for professional development nationally and internationally among other things. The number of faculty receiving partial or full funding for doctoral studies nationally and abroad has been highest ever over the last few years. This is a significant development in providing international exposure to the staff and enhancing their awareness of the fields of knowledge. However, this also unveiled the weaknesses of the doctoral provision in some Pakistani universities. I have had the opportunity of knowing and working with many doctoral students from Pakistan who have either studied at Leicester as visiting doctoral scholars for six months or as full-time

doctoral students. These are generally faculty members from HEIs. Diagnostic reports about these scholars unveil serious limitations in doctoral level performance by any international standards as discussed above. I am not referring to English language proficiency but to the research skills, knowledge, and creative ability. Even basic knowledge of research philosophy, approaches to research, methodological issues, design and conduct of research and approaches to data analysis is often lacking which I am very confident is not due to lack of student potential but problems in the provision. The responsibility certainly goes to the HEIs where they work/study.

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The challenge with quality is that it is located in context. What quality means or how it can be determined cannot be defined in a vacuum. Accordingly, there is no universal consensus on how best to manage quality within higher education (Becket & Brookes, 2006). It is increasingly defined in terms of customer's needs rather than those of the supplier. Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham argue that 'Quality cannot be imposed from outside - from outside the institution, outside the team, outside the individual' (1994, p.75).

Multiple definitions of quality over time and across contexts indicate the range of its constructions. The traditional academic view defined quality as high academic standards (McKimm, 2003) while accountability approach explains quality as value for money (Biggs, 2003). Quality is also viewed in relation to achieving the proposed organisational outcomes or transforming the learners through learning outcomes. Quality approaches can be internally or externally driven. For example, inspection or accountability approaches are often externally driven which are frequently seen as burdensome and constraining rather than intellectually stimulating. There can be internally driven processes for quality enhancement aiming to improve the quality through good practice and team work involving individual teachers, departmental and course teams, and the institutional infrastructure (Biggs, 2003). The expectation is that the educational provision should satisfy all internal and external stakeholders. The sources of pressure to achieve or improve quality are multiple. Sallis identifies four quality imperatives:

- The moral imperative - the link with customers
- The professional imperative - the link with the professional role of educators
- The competitive imperative - the link with competitors
- The accountability imperative – the link with constituent groups

(Adapted from Sallis, 1996, pp. 4-5)

There are different processes and models for managing quality such as quality assurance, quality control, performance indicators, quality enhancement, total quality management and others which occur at different stages and use different frameworks. For example, quality assurance is a before and during the event process which aims at preventing faults occurring in the first place. The term 'quality assurance' refers to the policies, processes and actions through which quality is maintained and enhanced (Lim, 2001). The aim is producing defect and fault-free products, and therefore, measures are designed into the

process to ensure that the product is produced to a predetermined specification, getting things right the first time, and every time. Quality control involves the detection and the elimination of components or final products which are not up to standard. It is an after-the-event process concerned with detecting and rejecting defective items. As a method of managing quality it may involve a considerable amount of waste, scrap and reworking. Quality control is usually carried out by professionals and the most common methods of quality control widely used in education to determine whether standards are being met are testing and inspection.

Another framework is 'performance indicators'. Clear and measurable performance indicators help ensuring quality. Fitz-Gibbon defines performance indicator as 'an item of information collected at regular intervals to track the performance of a system' (1996, p.5). She differentiates between performance indicators and compliance indicators explaining that 'compliance indicators are checks as to whether some *required* features have been implemented. ... Performance indicators, on the other hand, need to be designed to reflect our understanding of how a system works' (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996, p.5). Performance indicators are used in terms of regular reports including statistical and evaluative feedback from a range of stakeholders including students and employers as well as processes regarding staff appraisal and staff development. The drive is often towards total quality management (TQM), which is notoriously difficult to bring about and takes time to implement. 'TQM is a philosophy and a methodology that assists institutions to manage change and to set their own agendas for dealing with the plethora of new external pressures' (Sallis, 1996, p.3). It requires clear policy, precise operating procedures, explicit quality criteria and transparent processes/systems for monitoring and review. It requires a change of culture and change in attitudes and working methods. Staff in institutions need to understand and live the message if TQM is to make an impact. However, culture change is not only about changing the behaviour of staff. It also requires a change in the way in which institutions are managed and led, underpinned by 'an understanding that people produce quality' (Sallis, 1996, p.30).

MANAGING QUALITY OF DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

With increasing significance being attached to research degrees with regard to their role in national economies and sustainable development, all governments are actively engaged in improving doctoral programmes through multiple measures with a focus on quality enhancement and quality assurance. The requirement is not just current quality assurance. An integral aspect of any quality system is ongoing efforts 'to raise, in a progressive way, the threshold standard' (Clarke and Powell, 2009, p.30) and keep working towards enhancement. The emphasis is on the need to integrate sustainability (environmental, social, and economic/financial) in higher education (Sustainable Higher Education) so that appropriate and strategic choices can be made (Rusinko, 2010). This clearly lays the responsibility with individual institutions. Third Annual Meeting of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education held in Berlin (4 – 5 June 2010) concluded that ultimate responsibility for quality assurance should remain with the individual institution, which should develop clear guidelines and QA mechanisms (Bologna Seminar Briefing, 2010, p.8). Bologna

Seminar Briefing (2010. p.8) lists some mechanisms for quality assurance used by HEIs across Europe, including:

- The introduction of internal regulations and codes of practice;
- Signed agreements between the doctoral candidate, the supervisor and the institution;
- Improvements in the standards of access, recruitment and selection;
- The introduction of new supervision models and the provision of professional development for supervisors;
- Regular monitoring of each doctoral candidate's progress;
- Support for internationalisation and mobility;
- Ensuring high standards in the process of the thesis defence; and
- Setting time to degree and completion rates

Clarke and Powell (2009) mention selection and briefing of examiners, research training, monitoring and assessing, generic skills, and criteria for the award as further areas for attention to ensure quality. Quality and Standards of Postgraduate Research Degrees published by the UK Council for Graduate Education (Clarke and Powell, 2009) emphasises that for the quality of postgraduate research provision HEIs need systems of access and admission that ensure 'fairness, transparency and objectivity' (p.8), as well as the ability 'to make judgments about what students need to learn and how best they may be taught and supervised in terms of the characteristics of those students' (p.9). The consideration is also to be given to the needs of industry and commerce and the potential contributions to the general economy.

Diverse mechanisms for quality assurance have a generic value and need to be considered in national and institutional context for applicability. Pervaiz (2009, p.162) lists the quality assurance procedures adopted by HEC for the fully funded PhD Indigenous Program as:

- 1) Well defined admission criteria
- 2) Internationally adopted rigorous research based course work
- 3) Impact Factor requirements for research supervisors
- 4) Access of scholars and supervisors to Digital Library
- 5) Bi-Annual performance reports of scholars
- 6) Supply of Plagiarism Software (iThenticate) to detect plagiarism in PhD Thesis
- 7) Funds for seminars, workshops and conferences
- 8) HEC approved journals
- 9) External evaluation of PhD Thesis
- 10) Public oral defence of research

These have many similarities with the mechanisms suggested by Bologna Seminar Briefing (2010. p.8). However, the outcomes are determined by the inputs, processes and outputs, and most institutions of higher education in Pakistan fall short on all these fronts. Clarke and Powell (2009, p.28) present a three dimensional frame to understand the quality regime of an institution:

- The kinds of **inputs** that an institution makes to the research degree process - the appropriateness of the human and physical resources that are applied within the research degree context.
- The kinds of **processes** that are in place within an institution - for example the characteristics of supervisory arrangements, assessment etc.
- The **outputs** of research degree study, for example the number and rate of success of doctoral submissions and the destinations of research degree students.

When viewed against these dimensions, a high majority of Pakistani higher education institutions don't come up to the international standards. Admittedly, the quality assurance procedures put in place by HEC are very similar to international procedures but achieving quality only through the efforts of a regulatory body is not possible. It is collective and consensual efforts of teams and all stake-holders, the main actors and factors involved in the quality of doctorate courses as identified by the EU Workshop on Quality in Doctoral Studies (Perelló, 2002, p.2):

- The teachers, researchers and students: their level, their dedication, their working conditions, their technical and administrative backing, their opportunities for mobility and interaction
- Legislation, regulations and methodologies.
- Funding and equipment: laboratories, libraries, economic facilities for carrying out their work.
- Cultural and technological level of the social environment.
- Inter-university communication and relations.

Effective plans and practices in any field are linked to accuracy, completeness and reliability of information. Dearth of reliable research and absence of a research culture in most Pakistani universities are serious impediments to improving the quality of doctoral programmes in Pakistan. It is important to conduct research in HEIs to evaluate practices and performance in these areas, and to develop action for working towards quality and for that an aptitude for research and a research culture must be promoted. The areas of weakness need to be identified followed by targeted efforts and actions to improve the situation in each specific context. There are certainly some generic challenges in enhancing and maintaining quality in HE across the countries, such as:

- Supervision arrangements and lack of supervisor training;
- Inadequate training and monitoring of students engaged in teaching;
- Weaknesses in methods used to select and brief external examiners;
- Variable completion rates for postgraduate doctoral students;
- Inadequate training for students in 'research techniques and quantitative methods';
- Absence of effective rules and procedures regarding appeals;
- Variations in the mechanisms for transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD.

(Clarke and Powell, 2009, p.14)

Nevertheless, specific issues need to be indentified in each country context for effective measures. UKCGE (1996) recommended appropriate library facilities, deployment of research-active staff, graduate level facilities, development of institutional induction programmes for research students, improved monitoring of research student performance, development of operational codes of practice and a market led higher education sector among others, and these contributed immensely in enhancing the quality of doctoral programmes in the UK. In the case of Pakistan the Boston Report (2002) offered recommendations in five areas:

- 1) Design Principles for Reform
- 2) Institutional Reform
- 3) Curricular Reform
- 4) Fiscal Reform
- 5) Implementation

A paper presented at the previous conference (Reid, 2009) suggested:

- a) Develop a clear and shared vision of the desired goals;
- b) Look for exemplars of good practice;
- c) Avoid 'importing' answers;
- d) Formal staff training achieves little;
- e) The apprenticeship model is best
- f) Ensure quality assurance does not distort the best practice.

It is evident that the problems are not at the recommendations level – recommendations are around in plenty. It is the implementation level where problems arise. The important thing is to investigate as to what extent these recommendations/suggestions/policy guidelines are implemented and if not, then to identify the barriers to implementation. It is ground work that is needed and not the policy rhetoric. Some essential actions that can contribute to the quality of doctoral programmes would include:

- Learning resources
- Faculty development
- Appropriate infrastructure
- Transparent processes and procedures
- Organisational culture conducive to research
- Effective internal quality assurance structures and mechanisms
- High quality learning experience for students through quality of teaching and learning

The emphasis needs to be on developing core transferable skills, student transformation and empowerment, and high academic standards. Students' engagement with the learning process through the tutors' ability to motivate students' interest, facilitate subject knowledge, stimulate thought and develop transferable skills are critical issues in

managing quality. This is clearly linked to changing the attitudes and mind sets of the people concerned, as emphasised by Senge (1990) and discussed above. There is no doubt that in this age of high economic competitiveness self-sustained/profit-making organizations capable of generating resources, enhancing capacity development, alternate funding sources, strategic alliances and networking and many other factors are better positioned to work towards quality. Admittedly, policy, vision and funds are essentials for enhancing quality of provision but the point to remember is that this can happen only through the people involved in delivering the provision. Therefore, commitment, capacity and calibre of people managing, delivering and supporting the doctoral programmes is pivotal for enhancing quality of doctoral programmes.

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