Contribution of multiple factors in the Quality of Higher education in Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan

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Abstract

The study was conducted to understand the factors including quality assurance practices, stakeholders' perceptions, institutional governance, and technological integration on the quality of higher education in Pakistan. The study used quantitative methodology and used a close-ended survey to collect the quantitative data and then the data was analyzed through SPSS. It is found ultimately that, there is a significant relationship between quality assurance practices and the quality of higher education in Pakistan as the p-value was found to be less than 0.05 through Pearson and Spearman correlation test. The strength of relationship was found to be moderate in nature. It is also estimated that, there is a positive but weak impact of stakeholder's perception on the quality of higher education in Pakistan. The nature of relationship is significant in nature. Moreover, there is a significant relationship between technological integration and quality of higher education in Pakistan as the p value was found to be less than 0.05 but, the strength of relationship was observed to be weak in nature as correlation coefficient was below 0.05. Subsequently, it is calculated at the end that, the institutional governance and policy has a significant but positive impact on the quality of higher education in Pakistan but, the impact is strong in moderate as the value of correlation coefficient is above 0.05. Conclusively, it can be asserted at the end that, quality assurance practices, stakeholder's perception, technological integration and institutional governance and policy, all have positive impact on the quality of higher education in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Higher Education Quality, Quality Assurance Practices, Institutional Governance, Quantitative, Technological integration*

Introduction

Universities and colleges hold a distinctive position in our society as they are entrusted with the responsibility of cultivating the future generation of specialists, pioneers, and leaders. The significance of educators in shaping the trajectories of nations is incalculable, and the educational experiences they impart have profound implications for both economic and social advancement. In the contemporary era of globalization, the evaluation of colleges has become increasingly rigorous due to the ease of accessing information from various global sources. The demand for effective quality assurance protocols in higher education has experienced a significant surge due to the worldwide competition among countries (Patel, 2020). In poor countries such as Pakistan, universities have a significant challenge due to the high demand for education coupled with limited financial resources. These educational institutions may encounter challenges in allocating resources towards acquiring state-of-the-art technology, attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty members, and maintaining well-equipped libraries and research facilities. Insufficient financial resources can significantly impact the quality of educational instruction accessible to students (Brown & Johnson, 2019).

The Current Situation Pakistan's higher education sector faces a multitude of challenges, encompassing financial constraints, political volatility, and regional disparities in accessibility. Despite the presence of these challenges, significant advancements have been achieved in recent times with the aim of augmenting the caliber of higher education. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan has emerged as a prominent authority in ensuring and maintaining standards of quality control in the realm of higher education. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has developed a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing Pakistan's higher education system (Higher Education Commission, 2020). These initiatives encompass various areas, including teacher development, accreditation, and research financing. Numerous educational establishments in Pakistan have also implemented methods aimed at enhancing educational standards. Certain educational institutions have established "centers for teaching and learning excellence," whereas others have formed collaborations with international universities to facilitate the exchange of research and instructional methodologies (Khan, 2021).

Industrialized nations have implemented comprehensive protocols, however Pakistan and other underdeveloped countries encounter unique challenges. The efforts made by Higher Education Commission (HEC) to enhance the higher education system in Pakistan are commendable

(Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2021). However, there exists potential for further development, particularly in the domains of public-private collaborations, integration of technology, alignment of educational programs, and faculty professional development. The efficacy of Pakistan's higher education system in fostering socioeconomic development and producing globally competitive graduates is contingent upon the country's capacity to address these challenges and adhere to established standards (Johnson, 2020). As a result, Pakistan will have the opportunity to bridge the existing disparity in knowledge and application within the realm of quality assurance in higher education.

There exists a symbiotic relationship between quality assurance methods and the attainment of learning outcomes in the context of higher education institutions. The quality assurance (QA) methods provide a framework for the evaluation and enhancement of quality. The assessment of educational provisioning encompasses various components, including the development of curricula and teaching methods, research findings, and the level of student engagement in their local communities. These elements collectively establish a framework for evaluating the entirety of educational provision. Organizations are able to align themselves with international standards and best practices by implementing quality assurance systems, which involve ongoing evaluation, feedback, and improvement (Harvey & Newton, 2004). This study hence examines the topic of quality assurance in higher education, focusing specifically on the challenges and effective techniques associated with this process. The emphasis of this investigation is placed on the context of Pakistan. Pakistan has demonstrated significant progress in the enhancement of higher education quality, mostly attributed to the concerted endeavors of the government, the Higher Education Commission, and various universities. Investment in higher education is of paramount importance for nations to sustain their competitiveness and address societal challenges in the contemporary globalized era. In order to adequately equip the upcoming generation to confront the complexities of an evolving global landscape, the concept of quality assurance transcends mere procedural measures (Khan, 2021). The objective of this study is to shed light on the challenges faced by universities in Pakistan and propose ideas for enhancing the quality of education to align with global standards.

Problem Statement

The primary objective of this study revolves around examining the intricacies associated with quality assurance in higher education. The significance of quality assurance procedures is

increasingly recognized within contemporary higher education institutions. Although these procedures are widely accepted, their implementation may be challenging due to variations across different regions. Given the coexistence of public and private schools within Pakistan's diversified educational environment, it is important to acknowledge that the effectiveness and perception of various educational approaches can vary significantly depending on the specific situation. Qureshi et al., (2016) propose that many factors, including institutional autonomy, government rules, resource restrictions, and socio-cultural dynamics, can influence the perceived success of these strategies. The public perception of universities and schools, both domestically and internationally, is closely intertwined with their validity and reputation. Numerous quality assurance methodologies have been implemented in nations across the globe in response to the increasing recognition of the imperative to ensure a robust education system of superior quality. Nevertheless, the efficacy and challenges associated with these approaches can significantly differ based on the specific regional and national contexts. The quality assurance practices in higher education inside Pakistan are confronted with a distinctive amalgamation of challenges and prospects, stemming from the nation's dynamic cultural, economic, and political milieu (Smith, 2018; Johnson, 2019).

Research Objectives

1. To explore assess and analyze the quality assurance practices encompassing a range of procedures and policies designed to enhance educational quality
2. To explore the perceptions and opinions of various stakeholders, such as students, parents, and the community, influencing the quality of higher education
3. To understand the role and importance of technology in shaping the quality of education and how its integration can improve the overall educational experience in the context of Pakistan
4. Various researchers on the topic suggest that institutional governance and policy significantly impact the quality of higher education. One of the objectives of this research is to explore the role of governance structures and policies in shaping educational quality.

Research Hypothesis

H1: Quality Assurance Practices have a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

H2: Stakeholder Perceptions have a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

H3: Technological Integration has a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

H4: Institutional Governance and Policy have a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

Literature Review

The significance of quality in higher education has been increasingly prominent in the contemporary era characterized by rapid technological advancements and growing internationalization. In response to the growing demands placed on educational institutions, the utilization of quality assurance (QA) methodologies has become increasingly crucial. The approaches discussed, which have been integrated into educational systems worldwide (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007), serve as the fundamental basis for the development of higher education. The quality assurance process in higher education is not merely an administrative duty, but rather a critical component for the institution's achievement of its academic, social, and economic objectives. As globalization continues to advance, there is an increasing demand for educational outcomes that exhibit a combination of practicality and rigor. In order to meet this imperative, it is essential to employ efficacious quality assurance methodologies that can evaluate, authenticate, and enhance quality of services given to the education industry (Harvey & Newton, 2004). The growing trend of globalization in higher education institutions has added complexity to the discourse around the assurance of academic excellence. The need for a consistent approach to quality control is becoming evident as universities and colleges collaborate internationally, offer global programs, and admit students from varied backgrounds. Institutions encounter a dual challenge whereby they are required to adhere to domestic regulations while simultaneously striving to meet global standards. This requires the implementation of quality assurance processes that are suitable for the specific context and widely recognized by the academic community (Knight, 2013).

In addition to that, evaluation of an institution by external stakeholders, such as employers, is influenced by the caliber of graduates it generates. According to Harvey (2005), the organization's recruitment strategies and collaborations with educational institutions may be influenced by their perceptions of the graduates' aptitude for employment, technical proficiency, and overall competence. When formulating policies, awarding funds, and accrediting institutions, policymakers and regulatory authorities must take into account crucial elements such as institutional performance, governance, and compliance with established criteria (Jongbloed, et al., 2008). The perspectives of diverse constituencies play a crucial role in shaping the reputation

of an organization. It encapsulates the public perception, trustworthiness, and standing of an institution. A school that possesses an exceptional reputation is more inclined to attract high-achieving students, distinguished faculty members, and significant financial resources for research purposes. Conversely, a tarnished public image can have the adverse effect of dissuading stakeholders, leading to a decrease in student enrollment, faculty attrition, and reduced allocation of resources (Marginson, 2006).

Furthermore, the advent of digital technology and the proliferation of online education have brought about significant changes to the conventional methods of ensuring quality control. The conventional question-answering (QA) systems, commonly reliant on face-to-face teaching methods and tangible infrastructures, are now compelled to adjust to the digital realm. This requires the implementation of innovative quality assurance protocols that can assess the quality of online offers and ensure their comparability to traditional services (Jung & Latchem, 2007). Moreover, the concept of "technological integration" encompasses a diverse array of resources and methodologies employed within the realm of academia. The field of education is transforming due to the introduction of technologies such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle and Blackboard, which enable the delivery of online courses, and advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms, which personalize students' educational experiences (Garrison, 2011). According to Johnson et al., (2015), educators have the opportunity to enhance their understanding of students' academic progress, preferences, and potential risks through the utilization of big data analytics and immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

Interestingly, the intricate fabric of higher education is intricately intertwined with governance, policymaking, and the ongoing pursuit of quality. The significance of institutional governance and policy in influencing and safeguarding the quality of education has become apparent as the international higher education environment has transformed. This research examines the interconnectedness and importance of institutional governance, policymaking, and the overall quality of higher education. The concept of "institutional governance" refers to the strategies and practices employed in the leadership and administration of a higher education institution, such as a university or college. The stakeholder theory, as proposed by Birnbaum (1988), provides a conceptual framework that facilitates the comprehension of the dynamic interactions between internal and external entities during the processes of decision-making and strategic planning.

The fundamental characteristics of effective governance encompass transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness. Consequently, organizations are more inclined to adhere to their initial purpose and accomplish their overarching goals. Furthermore, the level of governance has a substantial impact on the allocation of resources, management of risks, and involvement of stakeholders (Middlehurst, 1993). Effective leadership and sound policies are important for ensuring quality assurance. However, achieving this objective is a formidable task that presents significant challenges. The field of higher education is continuously evolving as a result of various causes, including the rapid advancement of new technology, the changing socioeconomic landscape, and the increasing trend of globalization (De Boer et al, 2009). Hence, drawing from an extensive body of research and theoretical frameworks, this review has enabled us to formulate a set of hypotheses that underpin our investigation into the impact of these variables on the quality of higher education.

Research Methodology

According to Goundar (2012), research methodology may be described as a systematic approach that outlines the procedures and techniques to be applied in a study, to address the research issues at hand. Typically, two distinct research approaches are employed in academic studies: quantitative and qualitative. This study is grounded on the post-positivist worldview, and as such, a quantitative research approach has been employed. According to Chu & Ke (2017), the quantitative research design is a methodological approach employed to gather and examine numerical data to address research inquiries using testing ideas, frequently grounded in theoretical foundations. This study is correlational in nature as Lau (2017) stated, a correlational study is a research method employed to examine potential associations between two or more variables. Its purpose is to analyze how several predictors are utilized to comprehend a singular phenomenon, without establishing causality.

The major participants for this investigation consisted of educators, academics, and policymakers in Pakistan. Due to the considerable challenges encountered in compiling an exhaustive roster of this particular cohort, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach was employed. Despite the presence of certain limitations, this particular strategy proved to be the most feasible given the prevailing circumstances, effectively facilitating the attainment of the required sample size. The data was collected from the sample size of 162 participants with a research instrument employed with Cronbach’s alpha value of more than 0.70.

Results Analysis

Table 1
Hypothesis 1

H1: Quality Assurance Practices have a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

Pearson Correlation (H-1)

		Quality Assurance	**Quality Education**
Quality. Assurance	Pearson Correlation	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	162	162
Quality Education	Pearson Correlation	.501 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Spearman Correlations (H-1)

			Quality Assurance	Quality Education
Spearman's rho	Quality Assurance.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.652**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
		N	162	162
	Quality Education	Correlation Coefficient	.652**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
		N	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Analysis: The hypothesis is accepted as the p-value is less than 0.05 but, the impact of quality assurance practices on higher education quality is moderate in nature.

Table 2

Hypothesis 2

H2: Stakeholder Perceptions have a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

Pearson Correlations

		Stakeholder Perceptions	Quality. Education
Stakeholders.	Pearson Correlation	1	.415**
Perceptions	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	162	162
Quality	Pearson Correlation	.415 **	1
Education	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Spearman Correlations

			Stakeholder. Perceptions	Quality Education
Spearman's rho	Stakeholder Perception	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.185**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.005
		N	162	162
	Quality Education	Correlation Coefficient	.185**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
		N	162	162

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analysis: The hypothesis has been deemed acceptable, as the p-value is lower than the threshold of 0.05. However, it's important to note that the influence of stakeholder perceptions on the quality of higher education is relatively weak in nature.

Table 3

Hypothesis 3

H3: Technological Integration has a significant impact on the Quality of Higher Education

Pearson Correlations

		Technological Integration	Quality Education
Technological Integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.232**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	162	162
Quality.Education	Pearson Correlation	.232 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Spearman Correlations

			Technological Integration	Quality Education
Spearman's rho	Technological integration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.447**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
		N	252	252
	Quality.Education	Correlation Coefficient	.447**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
		N	252	252

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Analysis: The results of the analysis show that the hypothesis is accepted, as the calculated p value is found to be less than the standard threshold of 0.05. However, it is important to note that the impact of technological integration on the quality of higher education is found to be weak in nature, as indicated by the effect size measures obtained from the analysis. This suggests that although there may be some positive effects of incorporating technology in higher education, it may not be significant enough to bring about a substantial improvement in the overall quality of education.

Table 4

Hypothesis 4

H4: Institutional Governance and Policy Have A Significant Impact On The Quality Of Higher Education

Pearson correlations

		Institutional Governance	Quality Education
Institutional Governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	162	162
Quality Education	Pearson Correlation	.543 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Spearman Correlations

			Institutional Governance	Quality Education
Spearman's rho	Institutional Governance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.625**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.032
		N	162	162
	Quality.Education	Correlation Coefficient	.625**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.032	.
		N	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Analysis: The hypothesis is accepted as the p-value is less than 0.05 but, the impact of institutional governance and policy on higher education quality is moderate in nature.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Integrating and optimizing quality assurance processes is crucial for HEIs to achieve their goals of academic excellence. As institutions struggle to maintain high standards of education, they must develop quality assurance systems that are both flexible and responsive to changes in their

local context. This study set out to investigate the nitty-gritty of quality assurance in higher education, with a focus on Pakistan's distinctive cultural, economic, and educational setting. Although quality assurance is crucial, it can be difficult to implement in Pakistan's higher education institutions. A subtle link (R^2 = 0.501 and 0.652) was found using SPSS analysis, in particular looking at the quality assurance practices interact with quality of education. Although both resources and assurance techniques are crucial, their combined effect is less noticeable. This points to obstacles that may be preventing the techniques from being seamlessly integrated, such as a lack of resources, bureaucratic red tape, or cultural differences (Johnstone, 1999). Quality assurance measures, such as accreditation, assessment, curriculum design, and feedback mechanisms, serve as the custodians of academic excellence in higher education. According to Stensaker (2007), the implementation of these strategies fosters a culture characterized by accountability, transparency, and ongoing enhancement within businesses, hence increasing the likelihood of achieving predetermined standards of quality. The practices of quality assurance have consistently been intertwined with financial resources. The implementation of effective quality assurance methodologies requires a significant allocation of financial resources towards educational initiatives, as well as the acquisition of necessary technology and software. As an illustration, certification systems necessitate comprehensive self-assessments, external evaluations, and ongoing monitoring, all of which can incur significant time and financial expenses (Eaton, 2011). Our findings show the critical role that stakeholder perception play in determining educational quality (R^2 = 0.415 and 0.185). A school's trajectory can be profoundly impacted by the many different groups of people who have a stake in it. Their actions can either improve or harm a company's reputation, depending on what they say about it online and to others (Jongbloed et al., 2008). Understanding the intricacies, expectations, and concerns of stakeholders is crucial for HEIs seeking to improve their quality assurance procedures given the significant impact of stakeholder perceptions. Technological development, increased globalization, and shifting academic fashions are all hallmarks of modern education. The impact of technological integration on quality of higher education is analyzed through our SPSS results (R^2 = 0.232 and 0.447). The need of adjusting to international pedagogical trends is further emphasized by research showing that the incorporation of technology improves student outcomes and, in turn, the quality of education (Altbach et al., 2009). Given Pakistan's specific geographical and cultural setting, these extraneous factors take on a greater degree of

significance. The design and delivery of higher education are influenced by the sociocultural setting in a reciprocal manner. In collectivist societies, there is a tendency to place greater emphasis on collaborative learning, collective projects, and active engagement within the local community. In contrast, communities that prioritize individualism tend to highly value attributes such as personal inquisitiveness, critical examination, and achievement (Hofstede, 1986). The evaluation of higher education quality is heavily influenced by the sociocultural context in which it takes place. The educational system is perceived differently by many stakeholders within the society, including students, instructors, school administrators, and lawmakers, each of whom possesses their own distinct set of expectations, beliefs, and values (Shah, 2012).). Our study highlighted that, the institutional governance is linked with quality of education and it is analyzed through SPSS (R^2 = 0.543, 0.625).This finding is consistent with the scholarly consensus that strong quality assurance methods are crucial to the academic and administrative success of HEIs (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

Conclusion

Universities and colleges hold a distinctive position in our society as they are entrusted with the responsibility of cultivating the future generation of specialists, pioneers, and leaders. The significance of educators in shaping the trajectories of nations is incalculable, and the educational experiences they impart have profound implications for both economic and social advancement. In the contemporary era of globalization, the evaluation of colleges has become increasingly rigorous due to the ease of accessing information from various global sources. The study was conducted in order to understand the factors including quality assurance practices, stakeholder's perceptions, institutional governance and technological integration on the quality of higher education in Pakistan. The study used quantitative methodology and used close-ended survey in order to collect the quantitative data and then the data was analyzed through SPSS. It is found ultimately that, there is a significant relationship between quality assurance practices and quality of higher education in Pakistan as the p value was found to be less than 0.05 through Pearson and Spearman correlation test. The strength of relationship was found to be moderate in nature. It is also estimated that, there is a positive but weak impact of stakeholder's perception on the quality of higher education in Pakistan. The nature of relationship is significant in nature. Moreover, there is a significant relationship between technological integration and quality of higher education in Pakistan as the p value was found to be less than 0.05 but, the strength of

relationship was observed to be weak in nature as correlation coefficient was below 0.05. Subsequently, it is calculated at the end that, the institutional governance and policy has a significant but positive impact on the quality of higher education in Pakistan but, the impact is strong in moderate as the value of correlation coefficient is above 0.05. Conclusively, it can be asserted at the end that, quality assurance practices, stakeholder's perception, technological integration and institutional governance and policy, all have a positive impact on the quality of higher education in Pakistan.

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