

A Comparative Study of Quality Assurance Policies in Public and Private Universities of Pakistan

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Abstract

This research examines the prevailing trends in quality assurance techniques throughout public and private universities in Pakistan. This study utilizes primary data from a PhD thesis entitled "current trends and issues in quality assurance practices: higher education Pakistan" and online data from these universities in 2024 to identify enhancements in quality assurance practices. Over the past decade, QA practices have been thematically reviewed. New trends have emerged through empirical analysis of online data from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, which has provided a comprehensive manual for quality assurance and its enhancement to the universities' quality assurance cells (QECS). The attributes of these cells have been analyzed to ascertain enhancements in QA methods, and the colleges that exhibit more excellent proficiency in implementing these aspects will be recognized.

Keywords: Quality Assurance Practices, Public and Private Universities, Online Data.

Introduction

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has taken basic action to support quality assurance (QA) measures to guarantee the quality of tertiary education in Pakistan, reflecting a developing knowledge-based economy. HEC opened its doors in 2002. It sought to advance Pakistani research-based education by encouraging it in this sense; one of the main factors was the founding of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs).

It began at twenty public sector institutions. But presently, all HEC-accredited public and private universities have these cells to strive for betterment in the tertiary education system (Rasool, 2023).

Due to their significance, the quality of higher education institutions (HEIs) is under constant discussion and remains a priority. Most significant changes in the higher education system were implemented by the HEC, derived from the recommendations of a task group meant to suggest practices for improving the quality of HEIs in Pakistan. HEC thus underwent various changes following its founding in 2002 to improve the quality of tertiary education in line with a dynamic, competitive, knowledge-oriented economy and society. HEC has set guidelines for quality assurance and assisted some HEIs in forming QECs. Currently, HEC mainly concentrates on QA and quality enhancement of the HEI quality management system (QMS), so the term "relatively new" in tertiary education in Pakistan is somewhat relevant.

This study directed the decision-makers to assess the opinions of TQM in higher education

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institutions, pinpoint the possible areas of TQM where development is required, and compare several universities. More studies are needed to grasp TQM strategies and create models and theories connected to tertiary education. The researchers can also investigate other research hypotheses concerning the TQM in environmental and contextual factors of higher education.

Review of Literature

HEC Pakistan has inspired private businesses to open HEIs and aimed to give the private sector equal opportunities. Consequently, the demand for higher education and competitiveness has also grown.

More than sixty new private HEIs have been founded over the past twenty years. For worried authorities, the growing number of these HEIs has also made the maintenance of QA systems a significant obstacle. In this sense, HEC is offering ideal support to raise the caliber. Degree-granting institutions of higher education (HEIs) are fast-setting QEC departments. QAA (HEC, 2010) has formalized almost 653 distinct program teams that guarantee quality. Many other eminent studies have recognized these reforms (Ahmad, 2023; Osama et al., 2023; & Rehman, 2023).

Steps to improve quality assurance procedures will support high standards in HEIs. Nonetheless, in Pakistan, both the public and private sectors HEIs lack any methodical assessment, including diagnostic and evaluation strategies for taught courses, programs, and academic advancement. To overcome these difficulties, external criteria still need to be present. HEC clearance is necessary, though, to add new courses or academic initiatives (Rasool, 2023). Still, the public sector HEIs of Sri Lanka accounted for 74% of successful TQM implementation. Still, suggestions on the degree of staff and student participation in the TQM systems were offered. The results of this study would be valuable for researchers working in the Pakistani higher education sector and TQM application, as well as for decision-makers. The study also advises doing comparable research in the government and commercial sectors of HEIs involving both teaching and non-teaching staff members (Indumini, 2024).

Controlling authorities were found to be very committed to using quality management systems in the HEIs; this could be related to their ignorance of QMS. It was also found that the QA results were not consistently applied. In Sri Lankan HEIs, another study also found that authorities do not entirely know TQM. Though facts from inspection do not support facts from inspection does not support it, the administration is more concerned about quality control and assurance. Consequently, TQM is not carried out in its intended sense (Indumini, 2024).

Furthermore, there is a problem using TQM in the HE sector since all the quality gurus acquired their vision and expertise from industry and manufacturing, which differs from the education sector. Following the practical application of TQM in the industrial sector, experts have started looking at the prospect of using TQM ideas and practices in the service industry. TQM extends to government, educational, and healthcare service providers. Still, over three decades, TQM values have been valued in HEIs, far ahead of the manufacturing sector (Venkatraman, 2017). Though their research activity made the academies the key hub for information and innovation, it is ironic that they followed the other companies in embracing and implementing TQM (Indumini, 2024).

Any nation's economic development depends much on improvements in the teaching and research on tertiary education. It directly benefits the community and results from learning and innovation in higher education; for instance, the government generally pays money to individuals and committees, enabling the nation to grow through innovation. Maintaining the quality and scope of tertiary education depends much on the resources. Unfortunately, evaluating and preserving the input and output equation is much more complicated as the quality and performance of institutions' production cannot be defined. The difficulty begins with each student's graduation cost and finishes with community economic growth

measurement. Significant elements to strengthen the system are quality enhancement, higher graduation rates, better learning and research and many more. Should these elements stay qualifying and quantifiable, reaching quality education at a reasonable cost is feasible (Baig et al., 2019). One must find a neat system of excellent instruction. As we know, HEC Pakistan controls HEIs, guiding several fields, including policy-making, resource allocation, investment in tertiary education and administration for specific objectives. Direct persuasion of advancements in tertiary education corresponds with the attempt to parallel the system with accountability mechanisms. The procedure of measuring the quality of data supplied by HEIs takes much time. In industrialized nations, for instance, the graduate rate, graduate cost per student, and income contribution of each student to the system have clearly defined limits. HEC should evaluate the quality measures using these metrics. Concurrently, adapting already effective models can serve as a fast remedy for quality control (Batool & Qureshi, 2019).

Economic development is focused on HEIs, so the Pakistani monetary system has to be opened as a strong conduit between corporate entrepreneurship and university education. HEC helps to promote cooperation between academic advances and commercial ones. Formal education should equip pupils with the tools and knowledge to foster economic progress. It should be combined with active research projects and their spread to solve actual issues (Ahmed & Ali, 2024). Apart from that, Pakistani HEIs ought to be able to expose their students abroad. International HEIs also give worldwide talent opportunities to work and internships. Using this approach, they would create a worldwide link. Moreover, HEIs can help to solve social issues by encouraging honest discussion. Our educational system and its effects should increase the quality of life through higher production and better analytical ability among the pupils. HEC has improved in the past few years. It has transformed by giving money, keeping an eye on the HEIs throughout Pakistan, and controlling and certifying them. The aim of monitoring and assessment of the educational system is to offer a complete service for faculties, HEIs, and students. The commission has established and advanced its purposes through an appropriate act or ordinance. More direct return on community investment, sustainable development, and industry cooperation in higher education support (Mohammed, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

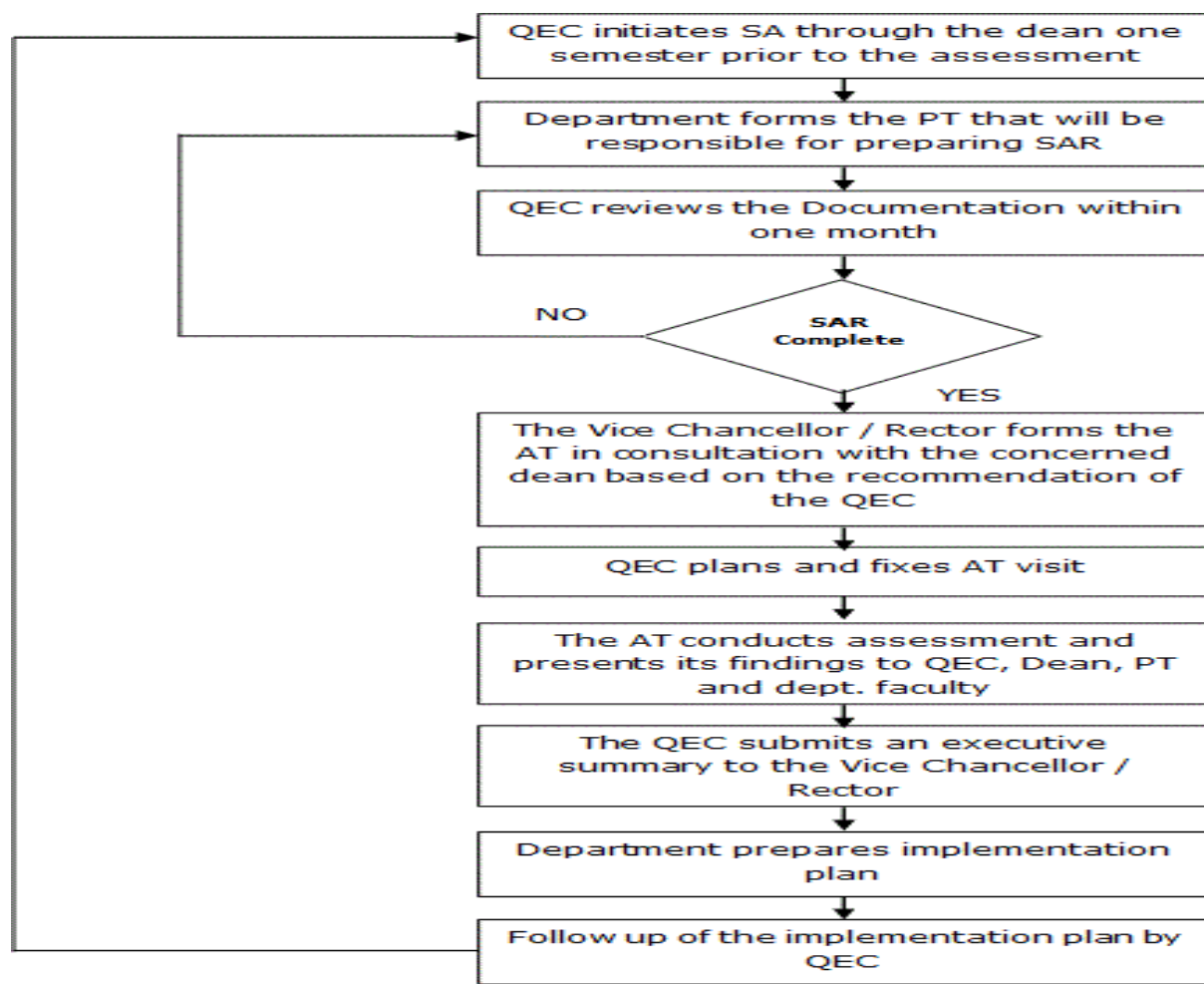
1. Methodically examine, over the past 10 years, quality assurance policies in the Pakistani Higher education industry.
2. Determine Pakistan's higher education sector's present assurance practices' trends.

Research Questions

1. How have Pakistan's government sector and private universities improved their quality assurance policies?
2. How closely have universities adhered to HEC's recommendations for enhancing the quality?
3. How do private and government sector universities differ in their quality assurance?

Research Methodology

Underlining instructions of the HEC manual (2006) and a PhD thesis titled " Current Trends and Issues in Quality Assurance Practices: H, the Education Pakistan " a systematic review was conducted. The main focus of the current study was: how much the improvements had been applied in the government sector and private sector Pakistani HEIs' QA procedures? The study's 7 government sector and 4 private HEIs' online databases were considered to solve this. We have retrieved the head of QEC's description on their websites' homepage of various HEIs.

Figure 1: Self-Assessment Procedure (HEC Pakistan, 2024)

According to the online information found on the websites of 4 private and 7 government sector HEIs, it has been observed that four private HEIs have provided information about QEC on home page with clearly stated the ‘message of director, objectives, functions and activities and among government sector HEIs.

These are private sector universities:

1. University of Faisalabad, Faisalabad
2. University of Lahore, Lahore
3. National College of Business Administration and Economics, Lahore
4. National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad

These are public sector universities:

1. Govt. College University of Faisalabad
2. Govt. College University Lahore, Lahore
3. Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
4. University of Education, Lahore
5. University of Sargodha, Sargodha
6. PMAS University of Arid Agriculture, Murree Road, Rawalpindi
7. Islamia University, Bahawalpur

A mission or vision statement is a statement of an institute's goals for which others should see it (Zhang et al., 2018). Vision is the direction or aim of an institute showing its destiny. An excellence-oriented vision and goal will surely guide academics toward realization of quality

in terms of defined criteria. Although some of the HEIs might not have mission or vision statements in the past, HEC has added them into its rating criteria. On their websites, practically every HEIs have explicitly stated that (Zubair, 2023).

Findings

Universities and their QEC content available on websites.

Faisalabad University, Faisalabad

Under the direction of QEC, this university's website clearly lays its mission, vision, and goals in great detail. These elements ensure that maintenance of the systematic review process of students learning and improvement of research activities have assured assurance for quality of higher education. Furthermore, it is validated in the fields of faculty development policies and curriculum design to create a uniform process. It also guarantees meeting the criteria of accreditation councils and regulatory authorities. This demonstrates the university's will to be proactive in QA under great seriousness. From its website, parents and students may have a thorough picture of the university.

University of Lahore, Lahore

The site material of this university claims that QEC was founded in May, 2010 using the HEC Pakistan model to uphold research activities and quality education. Starting from the "message of director QEC and ending with the ranking and accreditation policies," there is comprehensive information available. Construction of mission, aims and objectives, key roles, self-assessment process of teaching and learning, even staff profile seems to follow HEC guideline (2006).

National College of Business Administration and Economics, Lahore

Likewise, this private sector university, University of Lahore, has also added QEC head on homepage of the institute. It has obviously expressed the vision, mission, and overall goals of quality improvement cell in line with the advice of the director. One obvious aspect under the mission statement is the establishment of t-learning and community services in line with the learning and research encouragement. Likewise, among such many objective one distinguished point is expressed to build methods for distributing effective QA practices (official website of NCBAE).

National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad

Among the three universities listed above, this private university ranks highest in giving maximal QEC detail on the homepage. It covers introduction, vision, mission, roles, and lastly achievements. It is applying internal and external assessment guidelines set by the HEC. HEC said in 2015 that it would carry out the best degree of quality assurance both in terms of local and worldwide criteria. QEC is headed by dean of this university, and he must report directly to VC. Under functions, approval of the new programs, departmental review and feedback processes are obviously listed. One amazing inclusion is the thorough account of achievement provided on official website.

Govt. College University of Faisalabad

This university claims that QEC opened here in 2005 under HEC's direction. One unique feature of QEC office in this university is that one faculty member—from every department—is team member. As advised by the director, this is a proactive and alert department. Among staff descriptions, QEC functions, on this page, membership, accreditation, ranking, program team member, and assessment team member are also mentioned in thorough manner. Here,

following the HEC rules, it appears to be completely operational. Under functions, the university's annual ranking has also been defined with great scores.

Govt. College University Lahore, Lahore

Rector of the university statement on the university website has only indicated the objectives of QEC establishment here in passing. Furthermore, it is abundantly evident that QEC is functioning here for three main objectives: QA of research, QA of teaching, and QA of organizational efficiency.

Bahauddin Zakariya University located in Multan

The QA cell directorate of this government sector institution has been set up here in 2007. It improved in 2009 because to appropriate appointments for deputy director and director. Apart from the vice chancellor's speech, the most crucial element among all is future plan presented here, with regard to mission of quality enhancement director, aims and function. Furthermore emphasized are minute specifics of academic programs, new courses and laboratory information on official website of BZU.

University of Education, Lahore

Instructions have been followed in construction of aims and objectives, self-assessment procedure of teaching and learning and even formulation of review committee.

There is just staff shown on the website. Since QEC's operation is unknown from any source. It suggests that the UOE has little interest in QA.

Established here in 2006 using the HEC Pakistan model to preserve the quality of education and research activities.

University of Sargodha, Sargodha

QEC Starting from the "message of director QEC and finishing with the complete downloading performances, there is offered comprehensive information. Construction of targets and objectives, self-assessment process of teaching and learning, even composition of review committee has seemed to follow HEC guideline (2006).

PMAS University of Arid Agriculture, Murree Road, Rawalpindi

Established here in February 2007 using the HEC Pakistan model, QEC was created to preserve the quality of education and research initiatives. Starting from the "message of director QEC," the material is given in great detail and ends with pertinent web links. It covered vision and goal, self-assessment program, QEC organizational structure, staff, news and events, photo gallery and QEC membership. For other government agencies as well as commercial HEIs, this can serve as a model. Not only is pertinent information given, but link of official website of Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi is also given to the stakeholders so they may learn more about QA.

Islamia University, Bahawalpur

It is clear that no data is available online to the stakeholders about QA of this university. This problem is being witnessed in many HEIs. Unfortunately, for the time being it is shown on the website that the required page cannot be located. QEC head is found there under administration where all other administrative directorate links are present. Clearly, the stakeholders have no internet access to any information regarding this university's quality assurance. Many HEIs are starting to show this issue.

Discussion

Most of the government sector as well as private HEC acknowledged HEIs were using the HEC model of QA practices, claims Rasool (2023). This approach claims that Self-Assessment (SA) is absolutely necessary. The managerial body for self-assessment is QEC. Six main components make up it: "goal setting, result oriented, assessment and evaluation of collected data, data collecting, analysis & evaluation and decision-making regarding actions to be taken," says the Self-Assessment Manual by HEC, 2006. It guarantees, essentially, institutional level general upgrading of research and education.

Few HEIs have effectively applied ISO 9000 model of quality assurance. This approach holds that external parties help to define the standards for educational institutions or companies. Later on, should criteria be met, the institutes are certified as meeting the management criteria. Globally, Europe and USA HEIs follow this paradigm; nationally, NUST Pakistan has ISO 9001 accreditation for every division. A few NED divisions have also earned ISO certifications. While in majority of the government sector and private HEC acknowledged HEIs the HEC model of Self-Assessment for QA practices was being followed and QA policy was obviously referenced in "mission statements" of both commercial and government sector HEIs (Rasool, 2023). Considering the private sector HEIs, certain troubling indicators were found. These constitute:

Only those courses, with great demand in the employment market, were provided in private sector HEIs. Three large cities—Lahore, Islamabad, and Faisalabad—saw most of the private HEIs located. There was a shortage of skilled QA experts. Potential employers and alumni did not engage in course and program review. In current studies the description under QEC head will be assessed to keep in view the above stated factors. Since online data sources provide a rapid means of analysis, it is decided to observe current trends in QA policy and methods.

Conclusion

The main focus of the current study was: how much the improvements have been applied in QA procedures in government sector and private sector Pakistani HEIs? In order to solve it, the study's 7 government sector and 4 private university web databases were considered. In the websites of these HEIs the description under the head of QEC on homepage of these HEIs have been extracted. Of these HEIs, four private and seven government sector ones (details are given in the table 2 above) have obviously showed the tab of QEC and given description of its establishment, functions and vision etc. Although some of them have given thorough scope, functions, successes, and staff details in this regard, both government sector and private HEIs have obviously expressed the goal, vision, and objectives. It guarantees the upkeep of many other aspects, including the systematic review method of student learning, faculty growth, accreditation council operations. Out of the four private HEIs listed here, QEC head information on National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Islamabad, ranks first in offering the most thorough explanation of QEC. It covers introduction, vision, mission, roles, and lastly achievements. It is using the HEC internal and external assessment guidelines. proclaimed by HEC in 2015, QEC is headed by the director QEC rated equivalent to dean and has to report VC of the university immediately. It is proclaimed with regard to both local and worldwide standards in this university. Under functions, approval of the new programs, departmental review and feedback processes are obviously listed. One amazing feature is the detailed account of success. In this sense, Govt. College University, Faisalabad has given more inclusive information between government sector HEIs. This university claims that QEC opened its doors here in 2005 under HEC's direction. One unique feature of QEC office in this university is that one faculty member—from every department—is team member. As advised by the director, this is a proactive and alert department. Among staff descriptions, QEC functions, on this page, membership, accreditation, ranking, program team member, and

assessment team member are also mentioned in thorough manner. Here, following the HEC rules, it looks to be completely working. Under functions, university annual ranking has also been defined with scores.

Recommendations

The current work could motivate next scholars to perform more thorough and comparative study of the full used models of quality assurance. Furthermore, this research can help to clearly rank and grade processes for HEIs. It will also give HEIs advice on how to use online data as a source of improvement so that private and public sector HEIs may build healthy competition. Furthermore, Rasool (2023) had suggested the following five factors for the developments in this sense:

1. In ranking criteria, bridge internal and external QA practices.
2. Create both internal and external QA systems in regular peer review.
3. Guarantee external academic audits
4. Create tight cooperation between companies and academia.
5. Plan seminars and training courses.

From the standpoint of higher education, relevance to each element and quality of instruction have great value. Among the projects HEC launched for quality assurance is QEC. In this sense, HEC Pakistan's regulatory power has helped to ease revolutionary movements. Reviewing all procedures and systems of maintaining higher quality of education is still quite necessary. Since quality is a continuous process, the present research adds value to previous studies depending on QA policies at Pakistani universities. The current review has opened the doors to acknowledge full mechanism of QA activities of HEC Pakistan i.e. Quality Assurance Agency, Quality Assurance Committee, Quality Enhancement Cell, International Linkage, Accreditation Council and HEIs. Researching all above subjects extensively for the enhancement and expansion in higher education is definitely a necessary demand.

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