

Improving Professional Development System through Quality Assurance Practices in the Universities of Pakistan

Muhammad Shabbir¹, M. Ibrahim Khalid², Khuda Bakhsh¹, Muhammad Naeem Mohsin¹, Shafqat Rasool¹ & M. Saleem Mohsin³

¹ Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

² Educationist, Pakistan

³ Preston University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Correspondence: Khuda Bakhsh, Department of Education, GC University, Faisalabad, Pakistan. Tel: 92-300-911-0512. E-mail: gallantup@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The rationalization of this research was to investigate about improving professional development system through Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) in the Universities of Pakistan pertaining to the opinions of students, teachers and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells' (QEC's) and to differentiate the ideas of students, teachers and Directors of QECs regarding professional development system as well as offer quality assurance practices in the universities of Pakistan. This study had a quantitative and qualitative research design. This study was conducted on a sample of 28 universities (public and private sector) of Pakistan by using random and purposive sampling techniques. Questionnaires and semi structured interviews were planned to gather information from students, teachers and Directors of QECs related to professional development system about quality assurance practices in the universities of Pakistan. The data was analyzed by using descriptive, inferential statistics and SPSS. The study exposed that students, teachers and Directors of QECs faced a lot of problems without profession development system. Majority of the students' teachers and Directors' of QECs opined that mean response value showed that well-defined recruitment criteria for faculty selection was existed well in the universities. Tests and interviewed technique were also used for recruitment of the faculty. Evaluation system of faculty was available to judge the performance of teaching staff. Seminars were held according to the departments and faculty was allowed to participate in the seminars. Departments had collaboration for professional development with other departments in the universities. Faculty was available according to the course workload, and faculty was using teaching methodologies appropriately. Guidance and counseling system partially exists in the universities. Students and teachers responded that salary package was not sufficient for the faculty, need based trainings were not arranged by the universities, regular follow up system of teachers' performance after training was not done. Performance based incentives system for the faculty was not available in the universities. It was suggested by the students, teachers and Directors of QECs of universities that Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) can be accelerated by thinking the following steps: provision of sufficient salary package need based trainings,, regular follow up system of teachers after training, performance based incentives system should arranged for the faculty.

Keywords: professional development, pedagogy, workload, feedback

1. Introduction

Today, quality in the institutions is the big issue to achieve the international standards. Arcaro (2007) explained about the forces and methodologies for changing the educational scenario. To bring quality in the institutions, it is needed to participate in quality management process. According to Isani and Virk (2005), quality is divided into many dimensions, which play a vital role to enhance the quality in higher education. We should prepare framework for evaluation of quality, infrastructure, students support services, curriculum and resources (Khan, 2015).

Quality is the name of perfection, excellence, and value for money, fitness for purpose and transformation (Harvey & Green, 1993). According to Ashcroft and Forman-Peck (1995) quality means, "perfection implies faultlessness for zero errors". Biggs (2003) explained about quality as best use of money to meet the standards of

living and its accountability. Kantio (2008) defined the quality assurance meaning, it is a procedure, processes and system to implement the plan and policy in manufacturing the products. Quality assurance is an organized and permanent attention in terms of quality preservation and quality enhancement (Vreijerstijn, 1995).

According to Lim (2001) quality assurance indicates policies and processes for ensuring the protection and enrichment of quality. In the universities of developing countries, there is a need to utilize international quality assurance mechanism to enrich the quality of their programs (Lim, 2001; Idrus, 2003). Though, there is a huge difference in the economic and social status between developed and developing countries, yet, it will be useful to apply quality assurance measures into higher education institutions of developing countries. However, for successful plan and procedure, attention must be given to the utilization of best resources in the developing countries.

In Pakistan, quality assurance system was introduced by Higher Education Commission (HEC). Quality Assurance Committee was established by HEC on October 23, 2003 comprised of Vice-Chancellors of different universities of Pakistan. The member of this committee designed a framework for accreditation and ranking of universities in Pakistan (Batool & Qureshi, 2007).

In Pakistan, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established on January 18, 2005 at Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) with a high intention to arrange the resources for capacity building through trainings/seminars and workshops in order to enable the higher education institutions to fulfill the international objectives. Furthermore, the output of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) was best to attain the objectives of higher education. To the performance of QECs, it was decided to establish QECs in all national universities in Pakistan. The QAA at HEC with the help of QECs are making all their efforts to improve the quality and its standards of higher education in Pakistani universities to put their name in the list of ranked international universities (Batool & Qureshi, 2007).

After spending a huge amount on education, every year results are hopeless, and every plan and education policy fail, these things create a critical question. The teacher training institutes face a tremendous problem such as, buildings, equipments, furniture, teaching aids, library books and fresh reading material which fulfill the current challenges. Today, higher education institutions play a role as a capital investment to promote economic and social development. Government is responsible to provide such things to see the current scenario and equipped higher education institutions' with full facilities. There are some characteristic of National Educational policy 1998-2010; to expand the access to quality higher education on merit, to produce quality manpower to meet the current trends, share to the advanced knowledge and success of nation and in other countries we see, great emphasis were given on establishment of quality council, provision of quality assurance mechanism, performance indicators, academic audit, strategic planning and management, ranking order of universities in teaching, research, and provision of students support services.

Nicholls (2001) has given attention to the appraisals of performance for professional growth. He emphasized that performance judgment by head of department, students, self or peers, all are very significant for professional growth. By these appraisals, a teacher could evaluate his reputation and performance among the students and his staff members. The focus of the professional development of the teachers is to equip them with modernized teaching methods, enhancing the knowledge of discipline, increasing professional and intellectual perspectives, enhance academic capacity through inquiry and research and all these aims are achieved by the constant professional learning of teachers to offer students with the valuable learning environment (Memon, 2007; Abbas, 2014).

Higher education is of very important for social and economic development (Khan, 2015). Staff growth is the total of activities that increase the skills, performance, knowledge, understanding and vision of the staff. In educational institutes, staff progress program increases the classroom behavior, teaching methodologies, communication skill and thoughts of the teacher. The function of staff growth is to encourage the quality of students' learning by diverse teaching strategies. Education is a procedure to give moral, intellectual and social coaching particularly as an official prolonged process, which considers instruction or training for a particular reason. It considered growth of mental power and character through orderly instruction (Anjum, 1998). Sisodia (2000) stated that the achievement of any organization mostly depends upon the efficiency of its administration, which in response is chiefly resolute by the skill, skill experience of its staff.

Training of the teachers is a significant tool for quality management. Through this, skills of staff are developed and sharpened to contribute successfully towards continuous upgrading of the system. The quality management considers training as a tactic not as a sporadic event (Ferketish & Hayden, 1992). Three different types of training such as broad skill orientation training, Organizational Development (OD) and job related training are

required to maintain the quality management system (Jadoon & Jabeen, 2000).

Feedback is the knowledge about how the student's current state (of performance and learning) relates to the preferred standards and goals (Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006) and logical reviews showed that valuable response leads to positive learning gains (Black & William, 1998). The feedback of lecturers served as an dependable outside reference point against which students can estimate, and gain their own internal objectives and self-correct their progress (Juwah et al., 2004). The main goal of feedback is to develop self-regulated students, which needs them to internalize their individual goals against that their improvement can be assessed and compared by themselves (Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006). To provide the purposeful feedback regularly is difficult. The number of students is increasing attending higher education institutions but the provided sources to these students are less than the last ten years (Gibbs, 2006). The job load of teachers and lecturers is counted by "class contact hour" that ignores class size. That's why assessment system loads are also sometimes ignored (Gibbs, 2006). These time restrictions often without any enhance in staffing, can increase the use of cumulative assessment system (Gibbs, 2006). It would leads to reduce in relevant and timely response, which would have improved learning.

According to the National Educational Policy, 1998-2010, annual reports of Federal and Punjab Public Service Commission and other recruiting bodies pointed out about low quality of the universities. It indicated that there is need to strengthen the institutions with over all physical resources and need based professional development. Faculty is the heart of any institution, but it should be very active in qualifications and experiences. Teaching strategies, communication and use of ICT skill was needed to enhance the quality in teaching (NEP, 2009).

After studying different researches, it was found, that quality of higher education in Pakistan is decreasing. Enrollment rate was also decreasing about 5% per annum (Statistical Information Unit, 2010). The enrollment ratio in higher education in Pakistan is not satisfactory. Not a single Pakistani university is in the list of top 500 ranking universities in the world. There could be many problems such as; no attentions were given on the quality criteria at universities. Huge funds and scholarships were allocated for students' in the universities but all in vain. Although, there is a great need to increase the number of PhDs in different disciplines to promote research culture. Many graduates who qualified their education either remained unemployed or got jobs in irrelevant fields. A large number of students went to abroad for seeking quality higher education, due to dearth of professional development system i.e., recruitment, professional development strategies and workload in Pakistani universities (Isani & Virk, 2005). Therefore, there is a dire need to explore the improving professional development system through quality assurance practices in the universities of Pakistan.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Quality requires new improvement in ideas and resources to increase the level of any continuous condition of the phenomena. This is the case with higher education as well as concerned with Pakistan. There is shortage of universities according to the growth level of population. But if we arrange about education for our graduates then there is need to view current need of the era. If a country spent some more over their educational system then the achievement level will be higher. The aim of this study was to know about "Improving Professional Development System through Quality Assurance Practices in the Universities of Pakistan".

1.2 Research Questions of the Study

Research questions were also set to examine the views of students, teachers and Directors of QECs related to improving professional development system through quality assurance practices in the universities of Pakistan:

What were the perceptions of students, teachers and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) pertaining to professional development system faced by the universities, to implement QAP in the universities of Pakistan?

What were the differences along with the opinions of students, teachers and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) about professional development system faced by the universities to execute QAP in the universities of Pakistan?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Stakeholders of this study are as under: the study may be helpful for Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan in its activities to expand a quality assurance system for universities to achieve the current need. The conclusion of this study may be helpful to enhance professional development system, its manual of training and follow up trainings, fiscal policies, its planning and execution at national and international level in the universities. Results of this study may also be valuable for the experts of QECs in the universities of Pakistan to see the evaluation system of the faculty. Therefore, this study will also help to strengthen the relationship between education and industry.

2. Research Methodology

To gather the information, descriptive and survey method was used. Procedure of this study is described as under:

2.1 Population of the Study

All universities students of master programs, teachers and the Directors of QECs were the population of this study (HEC, 2011).

2.2 Sample of the Study

Twenty-eight (15 public and 13 private sector) universities were selected with random sampling technique from Pakistan. Nine hundred and eighty teachers were chosen with the help of random sampling. Two thousand and one hundred students were chosen with the help of random sampling. Twenty-eight Directors of QECs from all selected universities were taken with the help of purposive sampling technique.

2.3 Development of Instruments

Quantitative as well as qualitative information were taken from students and teaching faculty with the help of questionnaires from their respective universities about professional development system (recruitment, professional development strategy, feedback and workload) on five point (Strongly Disagree (SDA) = 1, Disagree (DA) = 2, Undecided (UD) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5) Likert scale, as well as some open ended questions. For strengthen quantitative part, some open-ended questions were also included in interview protocols for Directors of the QECs for the twenty-eight public and private sector universities of Pakistan.

2.4 Data Collection

All questionnaires were circulated to the participants (students and teachers) with instructions by the researcher and interview protocols were conducted personally by the researcher from the Directors of the QECs of the selected universities.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data was completed through descriptive, inferential and SPSS and interviews protocols were transcribed, then segregated to broad categories and descriptive coding were used by Creswell, (2007); Bogdan and Biklen, (2003) were followed.

3. Results

The perceptions of university teachers regarding professional development system that mean response value ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.87$) showed well-defined recruitment criteria for faculty selection, ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.03$) tests were conducted for recruitment of faculty, ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 4.85$) evaluation system to judge the performance of faculty, ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.12$) seminars were being held at departmental level, ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.01$) seminars were being held for professional development system at university level, ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.96$) faculty was allowed to participate in the seminars, ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.04$) departments had collaboration for professional development with other departments, ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.07$) faculty was available according to the course workload, ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.86$) faculty were using teaching methodologies appropriately, ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.91$) course outlines were being provided on time to students, ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.99$) guidance and counseling system was existed in the universities. Mean achievement scores of science teachers were greater with respect to workload than that of arts teachers regarding workload. As regard with professional development and workload, difference between achievement scores of universities male and female teachers were significant ($t = 2.11$, $p = 0.035$) as overall and its aspect, except recruitment system and Professional development strategies. Mean achievement scores of male ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.86$) were much more as female teachers' ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.57$) with regard professional development and workload. Regarding professional development, difference among perceptions of having different designations of employs were statistically significant ($F = 4.26$, $p = 0.005$) as overall and its components (recruitment and Professional development strategies) except workload. Mean achievement scores of professors ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.55$) were greater (I>II)) as associate professors ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.75$) responses.

The mean response value ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.99$) provision of pertinent materials related to courses, ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.27$) use of proper instructional materials, ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.24$) students used A.V. Aids (Audio and video) during their presentations, ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.19$) use of teaching skills in the class, ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.96$) provision of course outline on time, ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.08$) availability of guidance and counseling facility, ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.13$) provision of feedback after assessment system of papers, ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.09$) system of makeup classes, ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.13$) regularity system of the teachers. It was calculated that teachers of both

public and private sector universities use pedagogy skills during teaching. Difference was significant observed ($t = -3.03, p = 0.002$) involving opinions of arts and science students of master programs regarding professional development as overall scores with small effect size (0.18). Mean responses scores of science ($M = 3.84, SD = 0.83$) were greater as arts ($M = 3.70, SD = 0.71$) students' responses regarding professional development. Difference for statistically considerable ($t = -2.84, p = 0.005$) involving public and private sector arts students' of master programs responses regarding professional development as collective scores with small effect size (0.21) as well as its aspect (guidance & counseling). Mean response scores of private sector arts ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.78$) were greater as compare to public sector arts ($M = 3.35, SD = 0.86$) students of master programs regarding professional development. The difference for statistically substantial ($t = 3.89, p = 0.000$) concerning public as well as private sector science students' views regarding professional development as on the whole scores with large effect size (3.86). Mean achievements scores of science public sector ($M = 3.86, SD = 0.73$) were greater as private sector science ($M = 3.67, SD = 0.82$) students regarding professional development. . Mean achievements scores of science private sector ($t = 3.61, p = 0.86$) were greater as science public sector ($t = 3.46, p = 0.94$) students regarding seminars. According to interviewees' it was responded that universities have taken steps for faculty development as sending them abroad on the job training, provision of the opportunities for higher education for faculty.

4. Discussion

Almost, all Pakistani university teachers opined that recruitment system, teachers performance evaluation system were accurate. Seminars, Conferences and workshops are also being conducted in the universities for their teachings academic enhancement. Follow up systems after training were not working in the universities. Fast speed of increasing the ratio of public and private universities in Pakistan, allocation of huge funds, launched innovative activities, tremendous enrolment in higher education, it bonds the researcher to see the things, its level, utilization and deficiency in the field of education. Today, role of private sector is not neglected. It stands shoulder to shoulder with the public to strengthen the higher education. After review the aspects of different researches, it was concluded that private sector universities play a significant role in the field of education. To see the expansion level in different programs, it felt to review the Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) in the universities of Pakistan. Higher Education Commission (HEC) has done a lot of efforts to strengthen the HE system with the help of QAA, QEC, and TQM. HEC policies, its implementation with the collaboration of different universities. As, it was evident from this research that no educational conferences and seminars are conducted frequently in the university. As, it is a need of hour to conduct such events to promote professional development. Universities must conduct seminars to share and hear the experiences of internal and external scholars. Each university should publish the research journals of good impact factor in each department in the universities. Furthermore, Jones, 2001, Diaz Mag (2004) also focused that the professional development is very important for update and improve the skills, knowledge and teaching methods. So that, teacher could deliver their messages in a well manner. Besides, Memon (2007) also showed the worth of professional development that attention should be given to improve the performance of teachers. Stephen's, (2013) also explained about the collaboration with each other teachers and departments for enhancement of research culture. Anjum, (1998) also focused the paramount importance for staff development that it is a sum of activities that enhance the knowledge, skills, vision and understanding of the staff. Temporary learning depends upon the weak quality of learning and permanent learning based on use of quality infrastructure and learning in peaceful environment (Ramsden, 1992). Sharma (2013) suggested that failure of students and poor learning based upon the heavy workloads of the faculty and students.

5. Recommendations

It was suggested by the students, teachers and Directors of QECs of universities that Professional development system can be accelerated through Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) by thinking the following ways:

- Provision of an attractive salary package.
- Need based trainings/workshops on How to write a good thesis.
- Regular follow up system of teachers after training.
- Performance based incentives system should be arranged for the faculty.
- Provision of software and required electronic devices to the students and teachers to uproot plagiarism in this regard.

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