

Some Aspects of Quality of Higher Education in Pakistan: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The current study is focused on to evaluate some aspects of quality of higher education in public sector universities of Pakistan. Very little research or investigation to show present position has so far been done in this area. Research findings and information are, therefore very scanty. The main sources for the purpose of this work are the publications of the government, either local, provincial and federal. It also includes publications of University Grants Commission, Higher Education Commission, literature on higher education and reports of UNESCO. Part 1 discusses introduction. Part 2 highlights higher education in Pakistan. It states the role of higher education with respect to problems of higher education in Pakistan, role of National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) for the promotion of faculty development. Moreover, curriculum, infrastructural, examination system development and role of quality assurance agency (QAA) have been stated with reference to qualitative aspects of higher education in Pakistan. Lastly conclusion is drawn.

Introduction (Part 1)

Higher Education and its Quality

Higher education refers to all levels of education above class 12, corresponding to an age bracket of 17 to 23 years. In the year 2001-2002, there was 18 million population of Pakistan in this category. The age

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group that is eligible for higher education is one of the highest growing demographic groups in the country and, by 2010, it is expected that there will be 25 million Pakistanis between the ages from 17 to 23 years. Catering to this demographic group there are 44 public sector universities or degree awarding institutions. These universities employ just over 6,500 faculty members, and about 10,000 other staff members. The total number of students in Pakistan's higher education institutions is 475,000, which translates into a higher education enrolment ratio of 2.6%. Of these 475,000 students, only 139,000 attend universities. This means that total university enrolment ratio in Pakistan is less than 0.8%: fewer than 8 of every 1000 Pakistanis between the ages of 17 to 23 attend university. This represents the dire lack of access to higher education for most of Pakistanis. A comparative analysis with other countries conforms the extremity of situation. Pakistan ranks among the worst in the world in higher education enrolment ratios.¹

In addition, Pakistan has only 2,700 Ph.D's, or 50,000 Non-Doctorate Pakistanis for every Ph.D. The number of active scientists (170) translates to ratio of just under one million Pakistanis for every active scientist. In over fifty years, all Pakistani universities have produced two Ph.D's in engineering sciences. In contrast, one school of India i.e. The Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi has produced almost 2,300 Ph.D's in the same span of time.²

According to some preliminary findings of Council of Social Sciences (COSS) database, from 1947 to 2001, a total of 1,095 Social Science Theses have been produced. Out of these, 418 (38 percent) are Ph.D. theses. The remaining 677 (62 percent) are of M.Phil. The highest number of Ph.D. Theses, which is 64 (15 percent of all theses), were produced in the disciplines of Political Science and Education followed by Psychology which produced 47 theses (one percent of all Ph.D. theses). The highest number of M.Phil theses (184) were in discipline of Economics.³

In National Education Policy 1998-2010, it is stated that "Quality of higher education shall be improved through measures, such as, academic audit, revision of curricula, strengthening the libraries and laboratories, liberal grants, institutional capacity building, staff development, resource

1 Government of Pakistan, *Higher Education Reforms, Implementation Plan Steering Committee of Higher Education* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2002) pp.5-6.

2 *Ibid.*

3 "The Quality of Higher Education", *The Dawn*, Islamabad, Saturday, May 14, 2005), p.6.

allocation, research funding, improvement of infrastructure and better students' support services in the institutions of higher education.⁴

Quality of higher education has become a prime agenda of the countries worldwide. In the changing context marked by expansion of higher education and globalization of economic activities, education has become a national concern with an international dimension. To cope with this changing context, countries have been pressurized to ensure and assure quality of higher education at a nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standard. Consequently, many countries initiated "national quality assurance mechanisms" and many more are in the process of evolving suitable strategy. Most of the quality assurance bodies were established in nineties and after a few years of practical experience, they are rethinking many issues of quality assurance.⁵

As far as improvement in quality of higher education in Pakistan is concerned, it cannot be obtained without financing it properly, that is why the areas of quality are also included in the Education Sector Reforms Actions Plan 2001-02 to 2005-06. These areas are:

- Promoting access and quality at higher education.
- Improvement in the quality of education at all levels through better teachers, upgraded training options, curriculum and textbook reforms and competency based examination system for promoting Pakistan as knowledge based society.⁶

Higher Education in Pakistan (Part 2)

Higher education refers to education offered at the level of post secondary education.⁷

Higher education includes all education above the level of secondary schools given in Colleges, Universities' Graduate Schools, Professional Schools, Technical Institutes, Technical Colleges and Normal Schools.⁸

4 Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy (1998-2010)* (Islamabad: Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 1998), p.83.

5 UNESCO, *World Education Indicators* (Paris: France, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002), p.67.

6 Government of Pakistan, *Public and Private Partnership in Education Sector* (Islamabad, Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 2004), p.4.

7 Torsry Hosen and Neville Postlethwaite, *The International Encyclopaedia of Education (Research and Studies)* (Oxford: Great Britain, Pergamon Press, 1985), Vol.7 P-R and Vol.4, pp.4161-3162, 2179.

8 Carter V. Good, *Dictionary of Education*, 3rd edition (New York: USA, McGraw Hill, 1973), p.282.

Higher Education Commission (HEC)

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established in September, 2002 with a view to develop higher education policy and assist universities and degree awarding institutes in the pursuit of quality education at the seat of higher learning, both public and private sectors. Its objective is to work with the academic community for qualitative and quantitative improvement of higher education and to aid in the socio-economic development of Pakistan.

In allocating public funds and developing policies, Higher Education Commission aims to:

1. Encourage institutions to pursue continuous quality improvement and build on their existing strength in teaching and research, promote diversity of provision and beneficial collaboration.
2. Help the sector to address the needs of students' employees and society across local, national and international communities.
3. Work towards equal opportunity of access of high quality higher education.
4. Achieve value of public money by seeking to make the best use of available resources and securing accountability while recognizing institutional autonomy.⁹

Objectives of Higher Education in Pakistan

According to National Education Policy 1998-2010, the objectives of higher education are:

- i. To inculcate Islamic ideology, moral values and preservation of our religious and cultural heritage.
- ii. To equip the individuals with the latest knowledge and technology.
- iii. To provide sufficient base of scientific knowledge to every student and to enable him to contribute towards nation building efforts.
- iv. To promote intellectual faculties and develop capabilities of individuals so that they be enabled to play their role effectively in society.

⁹ Pervez A. Shami and Sabir Hussain, *Development of Education in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Academy of Educational Planning and Management, Ministry of Education, 2005), p.47.

- v. To produce highly educated and technically skilled manpower in sufficient number as required by society.
- vi. To increase access to higher education to advance learning and generate knowledge.¹⁰

Problems and Issues of Higher Education in Pakistan

Higher education in Pakistan is beset with many problems. Institutions of higher education have not been able to achieve the main purpose of higher education, which is to produce people with moral and intellectual excellence and academic ability that can develop logical thinking and contribute effectively towards the industrial, economic, technological and social development of the country. The most pressing issues of higher education in Pakistan include among others, a planned institutional frame work, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, problematic nature of design and delivery of service, irrelevance and wastage, under funding of low productivity in research.¹¹

Rapid expansion of the educational system, limited financial input and periodic student unrest have eroded the teaching/learning process, despite the efforts of the government to improve the situation. Exchange between universities and industries has not been taken place. Higher education, which was supply oriented in the past, is showing signs of working on the demands of the market. The growth of institutions in computing, engineering and business administration is neither a witness to working on the frontiers of knowledge, nor is it creating knowledge, which is the hallmark of modern university, seems less pertinent, given the low investment, scarcity of resources and paucity of funds to which this sector has been subjected. There is, however, inefficient use and wastage of public funds. The research base in universities is weak, and inadequately equipped libraries, laboratories and shortage of qualified teachers continue to hinder the progress of higher education towards achieving international standards. The system of affiliated colleges is a source of great dissatisfaction. The lower level of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education suffers from almost the same maladies.¹²

10 Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy (1998-2010)* (Islamabad: Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 1998), p.76.

11 U.A.G. Isani and Muhammad Latif Virk, *Higher Education in Pakistan: A Historic and Futuristic Perspective* (Islamabad: Pakistan, National Book Foundation, 2005), p.220.

12 Pervez A. Shami and Sabir Hussain, *Development of Education in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Pakistan, Academy of Educational Planning and Management, Ministry of Education, 2005), p.51.

The major issues of higher education in Pakistan categorize into (1) structural issues and (2) functional and instructional problems. Structural issues included bifurcation of higher secondary from degree classes, short duration of Bachelor's degree course, affiliation issues and tracheotomy of the system. Functional and instructional problems included limited access, tilt towards arts education and wastages, the problems of quality, faculty problems, outdated curricula, inadequate physical facilities and student support services and under funding.¹³

Abedi (1991) sums up his discussion on falling academic standard in universities of Pakistan into three definite prepositions, viz. (1) there is a lack of co-ordination between research and teaching, (2) there is no sense of personal responsibility and no accountability, and (3) the gap between the B.A. and M.A. syllabi and teaching methods necessitates more emphasis upon teaching than on research.¹⁴

The assessment of the quality of education is quite a new subject in Pakistan. Though all the universities are subject to financial audit annually however, traditions of academic audit in the universities are non-existence. There is now a realization that the quality of students, teachers and flawed institutional framework are the main contributing factors in determining the quality of higher education. In view of cost intensive nature of modern university education, there is a growing demand from the public for a better quality of education. The quest for quality has become a watchword all over the world; this aspect has recently received an urgent attention in Pakistan. Now there is an increasing emphasis on the quality of higher education, provision of quality assurance mechanism performance indicators, academic audit, strategic planning and management accountability of publication of league tables and ranking order of universities in teaching, research and provision of student support services. Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which includes all related functions and activities that form part of academic life in a university system. Therefore, any framework for assessment of quality should take into

13 Pervez A. Shami and Sabir Hussain, *Development of Education in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Pakistan, Academy of Educational Planning and Management, Ministry of Education, 2005), pp.46-57.

14 Razi Abedi, *Educational Chaos: Observation on the Deteriorating State of Pakistan* (Lahore: Pakistan, Rhotas Books, 1991), pp.24-27.

account the quality of students, teachers, infrastructure student support services, curricula assessment and learning resources.¹⁵

National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE)

The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) started functioning in 1976 under the overall supervision of the University Grants Commission (UGC). The scheme was directed at providing pre – service and in-service training of university teachers and conducting seminars, conferences and workshops on various topics of academic interest. It was given the status of an independent autonomous body in 1983. In 1989, the centre of basic sciences and centre of social sciences and humanities of the UGC were transferred to NAHE. Still later, the Academy was renamed as Curriculum and Training (C&T Division). By July 2003 the training activities were undertaken by the Curriculum and Training Section. However in July, 2003, Department of learning innovation was established as a separate section to introduce educational activities on a larger scale because the number of higher education institutions is constantly increasing and so it is the demand of equipping the faculty with the teaching skills required to bring academic standards at par with international standards. The department is currently accomplishing the following activities:

1. Curriculum Based Training.
2. English Language Teaching (ELT) Course
3. In-Service Training Programs
4. Three month training programs on University Teaching.
5. Developing competencies in computer skills.¹⁶

Interdisciplinary Approach in Curriculum Development of Higher Education

Interdisciplinary approach in curriculum development has not been totally ignored in Pakistan and has been at the back of the minds of people involved in this sphere of activity. However, the teaching of courses having elements of interdisciplinary in theme is largely centered around the "narrow" expertise of the teacher concerned and his subject bias, which comes rather naturally and has dominated his teaching strategy and methodology. What is needed is an interdisciplinary course

15 U.A.G. Isani and Muhammad Latif Virk, *Higher Education in Pakistan: A Historic and Futuristic Perspective* (Islamabad: Pakistan, National Book Foundation, 2005), p.232.

16 Higher Education Commission, Higher Education Commission Programme and Initiatives (Islamabad: Pakistan, HEC, 2005), pp.27-66.

which draws teachers from different discipline in the University so that new approaches to the teaching and learning of a subject are encouraged and University departments become more closer to each other and do not become "Ivory Towers" by themselves. This interaction between various departments of a university is bound to argue well for the academic output of each one of them as inputs from people drawn from various disciplines surely broadens the vision and applied aspects of teaching and research get recognized and emphasized.¹⁷

Curriculum Development of Higher Education in Pakistan

Everybody realizes that syllabi at elementary, secondary and tertiary levels should be modern and relevant to what is needed for our national development. It should meet contemporary requirements and have a positive impact on national unity and cohesion. In pursuance of this, attempts have been made to bring the curriculum at par with international standards. But, more revision of curriculum was not enough. Meagre financial allocations ensured that most funds go to pay and allowances of teachers, staff and cost of utilities, virtually leaving nothing for development of teaching aids and materials resulting in partial implementation of curriculum. Other contributory factors are low quality intake, non-conducive environment and untrained and unmotivated teachers. Frequent changes in medium of instructions at different academic levels and a defective system of examination and teacher evaluation further aggrieved the situation.¹⁸

Curriculum is the core ingredient which determines the standard and quality of an educational system. It is the basis of the system and is one of the major factors which contributes directly to academic standards. Because of its importance, it has been placed in the constitution of 1973 under the concurrent legislative list. This means that both the federal and provincial governments can legislate on the subject. However in case of conflict the federal legislation will override the provincial law.¹⁹

Besides the above, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Federal Supervision of Curricula Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act 1976

17 University Grants Commission, *National Training Workshop on Interdisciplinary Approach in Curriculum Development in Higher Education* (Islamabad: Pakistan, National Academy for Higher Education, 1984), p.1.

18 U.A.G. Isani and Muhammad Latif Virk, *Higher Education in Pakistan: A Historic and Futuristic Perspective* (Islamabad:Pakistan, National Book Foundation, 2005), p.269.

19 *Ibid.*

Government of Pakistan, appointed Higher Commission as the competent Authority to look after the curriculum revision work beyond class XII, at bachelor level and onwards to all degrees, certificates, and diplomas awarded by degree colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education. Later on, the Higher Education Commission has been established under an Ordinance No.1 III of 2002 wherein under its power and function section 10 (V), it has been stated that the commission will guide institutions in designing curricula that provides a proper content of basic sciences, social sciences, humanities, engineering and technology in the curricula of management of institutions and advise the Vice-Chancellor of any institution on its statutes and regulations.²⁰

A number of new areas of studies/subjects that have emerged and continue to emerge are constantly under process of development and brought at par with the internationally acceptable standard at HEC.²¹

Role and Description of Curriculum Division

The Curriculum Programme Division is headed by Project Director. The Division endeavours to bring about a minimum of uniformity and standardization of contents into the curricula. It also ensures a minimum core standard and facilities the transfer of credits from one institution to the other. The curricula of subjects taught at graduate and masters levels are evaluated and revised periodically, once in three years. In this way new global curricula are accommodated in the discipline to meet the requirements of user organizations. Members of curriculum review committee on each subject are selected from user organization and active teaching staff of the universities and degree colleges. This enables HEC to effectively meet with the demands of the society, to apply to the academic importance of the subject and its job relevance. Upon evaluation of a subject, the committee submits curriculum outline of the subjects before the Vice-Chancellor Committee for approval. After which HEC passes over the approved curricula to the relevant university departments and degree colleges for implementation.²²

Quality of Education and Examination

The quality of education and schooling is linked with the qualification of teachers, curriculum, educational material, teaching

20 *Ibid.*

21 Government of Pakistan, *Gazettee of Pakistan, Extra September 11, 2002* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2002), p.1183

22 Higher Education Commission, *Annual Report 2004* (Islamabad, Pakistan, HEC, 2004), pp.39-40.

methodologies, equipment and physical facilities. It is well understood that the real impact of these factors on quality of education can be determined through valid and reliable examination. The performance measure of the students and teacher is based on their examination results only.²³

Examination System in Pakistan

The system of examination, which has been in vogue in our universities and boards from decades is in all essentials, at least in terms of formal structure, the British in sub-continent introduced the same as about a hundred years ago. Let us see what its antecedents were like. With the founding of the universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857 on the modal of the University of London, an entrance examination was introduced as a gateway to the university. This was later changed into Matriculation and School Certificate examination. These universities, to begin with primarily examining bodies and exercised their functions strictly and rigidly. Parenthetically, it may be added that nearly all the universities on the sub-continent started as examining bodies, and only latter took upon themselves teaching functions. Research came still later, and this is perhaps one of the reasons why there is still considerable lag between teaching and research in our universities. Among the older universities, the only two which Pakistan inherited were Punjab and Dacca. The former functioned more or less on the same pattern as the universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, but the latter followed Aligarh as its model. Other, universities of Pakistan have largely followed Punjab and partially Aligarh.

Eventually, however, some of the universities have attempted to deviate from the old traditional pattern by introducing the North American educational model "the semester system" of instruction and examination, as it had come to be known in Pakistan, with the hope, at least so it is claimed by their advocates, that this would remedy the ills of the old system, inculcate in students regular study habits and provide a more accurate measure of their academic performance.²⁴

Semester system is comparatively a new idea which is being experimented with in Pakistan, to improve the standards of teaching and

23 Government of Pakistan, 1998. Draft Policy on Higher Education (1998-2010), University Grants Commission, Islamabad, pp.93-95.

24 University Grants Commission, *Report of Study Group on Examination in Universities* (Islamabad: Pakistan, UGC, 1975a), pp.31-33.

learning. Although, basically a sound system which has proved its effectiveness in the USA and other countries.²⁵

In United States, almost every university either follow Semester System or Quarter System. Where semester system is followed, an academic year is spread over two semesters, where the universities quarter system is prevalent, normally three quarters make up an academic year. However a fourth quarter called summer vacation stretches from June to August. This is designated as summer school. In the semester or quarter, special courses including class work, lab works and field work are main features. Irrespective of semester or quarter system, the teaching of courses is specified by a number: Courses ranging from 1 to 100 are usually for undergraduates and 100 onward for graduates. However the head of a Major department may prescribe a course below 100 as a pre-requisite for the advance courses above 100 (100 to 300, 300 is usually thesis or dissertations).²⁶

Major Findings of Different Reports on Examination

Following summary shows major findings of different reports.

	Major Findings	Reports
1.	Shift to internal and continuous system of students achievement with introduction of commutative record forms.	National Council on Examination Reforms 1971
2.	Introduction of valid and reliable texts in external and internal examination	Education Policy 1972
3.	In Service training of teachers, paper-setters and examiners in modern testing techniques.	Inter-Board Committee of Chairman, 1973,
4.	To reduce the importance of the public examinations by devising alternative measures/procedures for system to further education and employment	Dr. John S. Helmit (Foreign Advisor 1974)
5.	All possible measures be taken to eradicate malpractices prevalent in existing system.	Mr. J. Deakin (Foreign Advisor 1974)

Infrastructure Development in Pakistan

i) HEC launches national digital library program

Keeping in view the increasing access to scientific literature for increasing the research productivity of Pakistani institutions, the Higher

25 University Grants Commission, Report of Study Group on Improvement of Education and Research in Universities (Islamabad: Pakistan UGC, 1975b), pp.18-19.

26 Government of Pakistan, *Examination Reforms in Pakistan: A Review and Analysis of the Recommendations of National and International Experts Reports* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, Curriculum Wing, 1997), p.75.

Education Commission (HEC) announced the launch of National Digital Library program. A launching ceremony was held at HEC, Headquarters Islamabad on 27th February, 2004.

The primary objective of this digital library project is to provide researchers within public and private universities in Pakistan and non-project research and development organizations with access to international scholarly literature based on electronic (on-line) delivery, with access to high quality, peer-reviewed journals, databases and articles across a units range of discipline to achieve the objectives; HEC has secured inclusion in program for Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) of the International Network for Scientific Publications.²⁷

ii) A One-window search interface for the digital library

University and research libraries participating in HEC's Digital Library programme have begun to overcome the first generation access challenge to be able to query databases and indexes of journals, articles and to download the required full text documents. The Higher Education Commission and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific publication the main partner in HEC Digital Library programme, have linked up with Lund University libraries, Sweden to adopt and extend their existing Electronic Library Information Navigator (ELIN@) system so that it can be used by universities in Pakistan.

iii) Digital repository in offing

Higher Education Commission is setting of a national-level research repository which will among other things have a record of the Ph.D. thesis accepted by the universities of Pakistan. The Higher Education Commission has been actively engaged in devising a strategy to increase the visibility of research work published in Pakistan, to promote quality work, and also to address the issues of duplication and plagiarism. The setting up this Digital repository will address all these issues and will bring significant benefits to educational and research institutions in Pakistan, by improving the visibility and impact of indigenous research.²⁸

27 Higher Education Commission, *Higher Education News April 2004* (Islamabad: Pakistan, HEC, 2004), Vol.2 No.4., p.3.

28 Higher Education Commission, *News Letter June 2005* (Islamabad: Pakistan, HEC, 2005), Vol.3, No.6, p.6.

iv) Introduction of information technology through distance learning and Virtual University

In Pakistan for the achievement of quality infrastructure Allama Iqbal Open University was set up in 1974 and Virtual University was launched in 2001. The launch of the virtual university is a historical milestone for Pakistan in the field of higher education it is expected to have great impact on the socio-economic growth of Pakistan. The idea of the virtual university of Pakistan is to extend affordable, quality higher education to all areas of Pakistan, based on the excellent existing telecommunications infrastructure. PERN-Pakistan Educational Research Network is a nationwide educational Internet connecting premier educational and research institution of the country. PERN focuses on collaborative research, knowledge sharing, resource sharing, and distance learning by connecting people through the use of internet and internet resources.²⁹

v) Function of Quality Assurance agency (QAA) in Pakistan

A major leap forwarded by HEC for quality control has been the establishment of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which will be responsible for the implementation of recommendations of Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). It will plan, implement and evaluate the program of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions.³⁰

QAA will arrange the capacity building training/seminars, and workshops on regular basis to enable the higher education institutions of Pakistan to meet the global challenges of Quality Assurance in higher learning. It will also be responsible to maintain the uniformity and pace of quality in higher education across board. The Agency will develop policies and guidelines to assure a uniform standard in the universities across the country. The Professionals of QAA will get foreign training in the field of Quality Assurance and will serve as Master Trainers for capacity building of professionals working in universities, QECs, etc. Quality Assurance Agency will also be a monitoring and regulatory body. It will ensure implementation of all quality assurance policies.³¹

29 Higher Education Commission, *News Letter April 2005* (Islamabad: Pakistan, HEC, 2005), Vol.3, No.4, p.13.

30 Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2004-2005* (Islamabad: Ministry of Finance, Finance Division, 2005), pp.147-48.

31 Higher Education Commission, *Higher Education Commission Programme and Initiatives* (Islamabad: Pakistan, 2005), pp.27-66.

Conclusion

There is a dire lack of access to higher education for most of Pakistanis. The pace of Ph.D.s production in all Pakistani universities is very slow as compared to the other countries of the world. Higher Education Commission is assisting universities and degree awarding institutions both in public and private sector for quality education. HEC is confronting structural issues, functional and instructional problems. National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) is equipping the faculty with the teaching skills required to bring academic standard at par with international standard. Curriculum of different subjects is being revised and a number of new areas of studies or subjects have emerged and brought at par with internationally acceptable standard at HEC with the help of curriculum division. The system of examination has deviated from the old traditional pattern by introducing the North American educational model "the semester system". Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has planned, implemented and evaluated the programme of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions. Infrastructural development is taking place by launching national digital library programme. Information technology has been introduced through distance learning and virtual university.