

The Issue of Quality at Affiliated Colleges in Pakistan: A Case Study

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Abstract

The present case study is the part of an on-going research project to explore the issue of quality at the affiliated colleges with Pakistani High Education Institutions (HEIs). Earlier, during 2014-15, as the part of Tertiary Education Support Programme (TESP) titled as Disbursement Link Indicators-4 (DLI-4) launched by Higher Education Commission (HEC) in collaboration with World Bank, a sample was taken from affiliated colleges all over the country through a specifically designed instrument and Minimum Quality Standards (MQS) set by the HEC team which showed that the quality at affiliated colleges in most cases was questionable all over the country.

Inspired by the above study, the researchers designed a proforma and collected data from 35 (out of a total of 45) privately owned affiliated colleges from two districts (Dir Upper and Chitral) and found that the case of quality was worse in rural and far flung areas. Based on the findings of the study, the paper highlights important recommendations and suggestions for the improvement of the overall quality of the affiliated colleges in the country. The study is highly significant for the next stage of TESP-HEC program and helps the policy makers realizing the strengths and weaknesses of such colleges, specifically now when the government has already launched four-year BS degree programs in KP and Punjab provinces.

Keywords: Affiliated colleges, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Quality Assurance (QA), Minimum Quality Standards (MQSs), SBBU Sheringal

1. Introduction

Quality is a new buzzword throughout the world as there has been a rapid move to mass higher education, not only associated with a

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greater diversity of institutions and programmes but also with a large increase in the number and size of universities. In Pakistan, we have grown from approximately 20 universities in 2001 to 188 universities today (2017). Along with the establishment of such a large number of universities, an increase in the number of affiliated colleges has expanded manifold as the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are further allowed to affiliate public and private sector colleges in the country. This phenomenon has given rise to a huge concern over quality of education offered in these public and private sector institutions (both universities and colleges). Although the HEC of Pakistan along with other associations has tried to bring in a variety of Quality Assurance (QA) techniques and mechanisms in the HEIs of the country but very little has been done for the maintenance and enhancement of quality in the affiliated colleges. Keeping in mind this state of affairs of the quality at affiliated colleges, the present study focuses on investigating the situation of colleges in the country.

1.1 Rationale of the study

According to the statistics of the Statistical Division of HEC, there are approximately 1900 public sector affiliated colleges registered with the HEIs in the country and as per a careful approximation, around 75 % of the students of higher education level in Pakistan study in these colleges. Apart of public sector colleges, there are hundreds of the private sector colleges which also offer various study programmes in the country. Even having such a great influence on the higher education of the country, very little has been done directly by the watchdogs of quality for the evaluation and investigation of quality in these colleges. This present study, therefore, strives to explore the question of quality at affiliated colleges. The study is particularly significant as the government is in the policy making process regarding the launch of BS degree programmes at affiliated colleges. The research objective of the study are given in the following lines.

1.2 Research objectives

As a result of the earlier studies carried out by the HEC of Pakistan, during the Tertiary Education Support Programme (TESP) on the situation of public sector affiliated colleges of the country, we decided to further investigate the situation of the private sector colleges in order to learn more about quality problems and their causes and to identify

remedial strategies. This is an ongoing project which involves both qualitative and quantitative elements.

To identify the situation of the private sector affiliated colleges on:

1. Their capacity as institutes of higher education, and,
2. Their practices regarding the enhancement and maintenance of quality.

In order to accomplish the above research objectives, a specific methodology was designed for the study.

1.3 Research design

Inspired the Minimum Quality Standards (MQSs) set by HEC for the evaluation of the affiliated colleges, a carefully designed proforma was prepared for the present study. Since most of the MQSs were not directly relevant for the private sector affiliated colleges, therefore, some of the MQSs were reduced and more relevant standards were added.

The study was based on qualitative methodology and a convenient sampling technique was used for data collection from two districts (Dir Upper and Chitral) of the country where total number of private colleges were 45. In order to bring maximum validity and reliability to the study, 35 out of these 45 (78%) colleges were visited and the information on the proformas were collected by the researchers themselves. The following eleven factors were considered for the research:

1. Physical infrastructure (including buildings and rooms)
2. Degree programmes offered
3. Student-teacher ratio
4. No of books and research resources
5. Information technology (IT) facilities (PCs and internet)
6. Scientific laboratories and equipment
7. Quality assurance support (such as the establishment of QECs)
8. Classroom facilities (multimedia and furniture)
9. Registration with HERA (Higher Education Regulatory Authority)
10. Affiliation status with the parent university
11. Financial status

2. Survey of relevant literature

This section gives a brief survey on the relevant literature.

2.1 Quality in Higher Education (HE)

According to Lee Harvey and Peter Knight (as mentioned by Vanchai, 2000) 'quality' in HE means; something exceptional, perfection or consistency, value for money, fitness for purpose, and transformation. Similarly, Dorothy Lander has provided the concept of 'quality' as service (ibid). No matter what is the exact definition of quality, the present globalization era with speedy movements of changes along with intense competition has made 'quality' a must. Now, in every field, a system of quality has to be put in place to ensure it. In order to gain maximum confidence of the stakeholder (such as parents, their graduates, employers) and further build on it, our higher education institutions have to work on quality at a satisfactory level.

Having established the concept of quality in HE, now let us see the concept of latest issues related to HE. Harman (1996) points to certain concerns on the quality issues that presently dominate the debates in higher education circles:

- a. Maintenance and improvement of levels of teaching, learning, research and scholarship
- b. Improvement in the quality and adaptability of graduates
- c. How to define and measure quality
- d. Whether management approaches of universities and colleges improve outcomes
- e. The use of benchmarking and performance indicators, and,
- f. How to convince stakeholders that institutions and systems are doing a competent job in ensuring quality outputs.

Based on the issues related to quality, various approaches have been developed internationally and the phenomenon has been titled as Quality Assurance (QA). The term QA refers to various mechanisms and processes applied to lead to the maintenance and improvement of quality outcomes in educational institutions. QA has come to mean a guarantee or satisfaction level that particular standards in a specific field are being met. QA is, thus, largely about the systematically applied procedures and processes which are adopted to ensure achievements and certification of a given quality and continued improvement in quality processes. 'Quality assurance' in higher education can be defined as a systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by HEIs and systems in

order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure the achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. Essentially, quality assurance systems aim to provide an appropriate evidence to substantiate claims made by HEIs about quality and so to enable key stakeholders to have confidence about the management of quality and the level of outcomes achieved. Stakeholders are graduates, individuals and groups (such as employers) who have a major interest in higher education institutions and systems, and their achievements made.

In Pakistan, the QA processes are mainly managed by HEC through the adoption of various mechanisms and processes. HEC, within its 15 years has strived to focus on the issue of quality by establishing Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) at almost all HEIs of the country and by establishing other internationally recognized procedures such as, qualification frameworks, review surveys and periodic reports of degree programmes and institutions and evaluation of HEIs through rankings. It has also contributed its part in the establishment of 188 universities in the far flung areas of the country (such as Chitral, Turbat and Skardu).

Although universities throughout the country today are focusing special attention on designing and implementing new quality assurance mechanisms and systems set by HEC in order to ensure that students receive high quality and relevant education and that degrees and diplomas are widely recognized. But the case of affiliated colleges is very different. It has not been given the due attention by the relevant policy makers. Since the focus of the study is quality at affiliated colleges, the following section provides relevant information on it.

2.2 Quality at affiliated colleges in Pakistan

As per the data available with Statistical Information Unit of HEC, there are 1993 Colleges affiliated with 41 public sector Universities of Pakistan during early 2000s. After the establishment of HEC in 2002, the first serious effort for the enhancement of quality at affiliated colleges was made during the launch of Tertiary Education Support Programme (TESP) during 2011-15 when a special study was carried out throughout the country. This project directly benefited public sector colleges in all provinces as various training programmes were arranged for senior teachers and administrative staff (such as principals and vice principals). The following Minimum Quality Standards (MQSs) were set for the evaluation and improvement of quality at these colleges:

- Standard 1: Vision, Mission, & Objectives
- Standard 2: Academic Programs

Standard 3:	Students
Standard 4:	Academic Staff/Faculty
Standard 5:	Educational Resources
Standard 6:	Programme Evaluation
Standard 7:	Governance and Administration
Standard 8:	Research
Standard 9:	Capacity Building of Academic/Administrative staff of College

Along with these training projects in provincial headquarters, the colleges were also evaluated through the following standards (slightly different than the above ones). During the TESP project by HEC, Minimum Quality Standards (MQSs) (outlining major areas to be focused on for the evaluation of quality, effectiveness and future development of affiliated colleges) were set for the evaluation of affiliated colleges in the country. The finalized MQSs and their percentages are given below:

Table 1: Minimum Quality Standards for Affiliated Colleges

S. No:	Name of the MQS Percentage allocated
Standard 1	Vision, Mission and Goals (05%)
Standard 2	Academic Programs and Evaluation (10%)
Standard 3	Student Admission and Progression (10%)
Standard 4	Academic Faculty and Non-Academic Staff (10%)
Standard 5	Physical Infrastructure, Academic Facilities and Learning Resources (20%)
Standard 6	Organization, Governance and Financial Management (20%)
Standard 7	Research (03%)
Standard 8	Public Disclosure and Transparency (15%)
Standard 9	Community Link & Outreach (07%)

In addition to training programmes for teachers at public sector colleges, HEC also worked on the private sector and prepared 'affiliation rules' for the HEIs to affiliate private sector colleges.

2.3 Standard norms for the affiliation of an institution

While preparing the 'affiliation rules' for affiliated colleges, the HEC also prepared standard norms for the affiliation of an institute (college) with a university. The following nine norms were set by the committee established for the purpose:

1. Physical facilities: Including infrastructural facilities such as available land, type of current building (owned/rented) and total covered area, total number and size of class rooms, capacity for students, labs, halls, faculty rooms, sports ground and hostel facilities).
2. Academic facilities: Academic programmes, curriculum development and revision.
3. Faculty/staff: Faculty strength, salary packages and their professional training facilities.
4. Library: Number of books, textbooks, journals (international and national), periodicals, newspapers, reference books in library.
5. Facilities regarding Information Technology: Computer labs and internet connectivity.
6. Students: Support for student affairs, their strength and assessment policy.
7. Admissions: General admission policy number of students to be enrolled.
8. Quality Assurance and student supervision: Administrative and technical support for QA.
9. Finances: Financial position of an institution and scholarship awards offered to its students.

Keeping in mind the above developments, the present study was carried out for the private sector colleges in the lines of the methodology discussed in Section 1.3. The results are given in the next section.

3. Results, discussion and conclusion

The study found out the following results:

3.1 Physical infrastructure (including buildings and rooms)

Weak infrastructural facilities were found in all 35 colleges. Most of them (30/35) were without playground and proper common rooms for boys and girls.

3.2 Degree programmes offered

The majority (84.7%), held BAs or BScs with some holding others, such as B Com., MA, Bed, MEd, DP Ed. The variety of the programmes was found insufficient at these colleges as no modern programmes (such as BS) were offered.

3.3 Student-teacher ratio

In most cases, the teachers were acquired on part time basis. The average of the student- teacher ratio was over 40-1. The qualification of teachers was maximum up-to MA/MSc.

3.4 No of books and research resources

Less than 500 books. Only three colleges had 500 plus books.

3.5 Information technology (IT) facilities (PCs and internet)

No proper IT services were given to the students. 15 % of the colleges had computer labs with internet services.

3.6 Scientific laboratories and equipment

80 percent of the colleges has weak labs.

3.7 Quality assurance support (such as the establishment of QECs)

No college had established a section for QA and, overall, they were unaware of the concept of QA in academic setting.

3.8 Classroom facilities (multimedia and furniture)

Only two colleges had multimedia facilities and the conditions of furniture found in these colleges were weak.

3.9 Registration with HERA (Higher Education Regulatory Authority)

50% of the registration were expired with HERA.

3.10 Affiliation status with the parent university

80 % of the colleges were given only provisional affiliation with the parent university.

3.11 Financial status

90 % of the colleges had arrears on their part to clear and no scholarships were offered to students.

Overall, the results showed that the QA conditions of the private sector colleges were very weak and serious shortcomings were found on the part of them to maintain and enhance the educational quality of their degree programmes.

The HEC of Pakistan, provincial Higher Education Departments (HEDs) and the HEIs of Pakistan need to develop a uniform mechanism for the evaluation of affiliated colleges throughout the country which may include:

The establishment of a council for private sector affiliated colleges or a body which shall be responsible for maintaining minimum standards of these colleges.

The periodic evaluation of affiliated colleges to maintain MQSs. Such a system would encourage their voluntary adoption of QA mechanism.

Similarly, a periodic ranking system may be devised for the ranking of these colleges at national and provincial levels. This system will increase the environment of positive competition among the colleges.

Proper planning may be carried out to organize training projects for the affiliated colleges of private sector. Special funding may be given for their capacity building and infrastructural development.

A system for strict liaisoning may also be established to make sure the accreditation of affiliated colleges.

It is to be acknowledged at the end that there were three major research limitations in the study:

Firstly, the sample was taken only from the private sector affiliated colleges which may not be extendable to public sector colleges as the latter type of colleges are always quite rich in terms of buildings,

human resource and labs. Secondly, the sample of 35 colleges was taken from two districts is relatively small and it represents a very small portion of the affiliated colleges of the country and the results may not be generalizable to all privately owned affiliated college. Finally, the two districts selected for the study were most far flung and backward areas and the country which might not be equally generalizable to other parts of the country. Future studies on the topic, it is hoped, may address these limitations accordingly.

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Note: The present case study is the part of an on-going research project to explore the issue of quality at the private sector affiliated colleges of the country. A request may be sent to kamal@sbbu.edu.pk for the final publication of the study once it is completed.

Appendix – Checklist

Institute [Name & Address] Principal [name, qualification & contact]
Building detail [rooms? or rented?]
Degree Programs [shift?]
Number of students & teachers (ratio)
Library status (No. of books in library)
Computer lab [internet?] (Weak Moderate Strong)
Scientific Labs detail (Weak Moderate Strong)
QEC coordination (Established or not)
Classrooms facilitation [multimedia & furniture?]
HERA Registration Status Yes - No/Expired
SBBU Affiliation status (Provisional – Final)
Fee status [Finance] (Clear – pending)
Remarks (Any important point) Closed- relocated to other place – notice issued)