

Humanizing Research Culture System through Quality Assurance Practices in the Universities of Pakistan

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Abstract

The rationalization of this research was an exploration and discrimination about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) in the Universities in Pakistan pertaining to the views of students, teachers and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QEC's). This study had a mixed method design such as quantitative and qualitative. The study was conducted on a sample of 28 universities (public and private sector) of Pakistan by using multi-stage (random, convenient and purposive) sampling technique. Questionnaires and semi structured interviews were used to congregate information from the determined samples. The data was analyzed by using inferential statistics and SPSS version 16. The study reflected that participants'' faced a lot of problems without research culture system in higher education. On the basis of data analysis, key findings of the study were derived such as seminars are conducted/arranged, workshops are arranged to trained the man powers, follow up systems is done after training, research projects are completed, allowed teachers to participate in seminars, collaboration with other departments is available and publication of articles are being carried out among universities to enhance the research culture system. Lack of physical facilities, no training for faculty, provision of funds, research journals, communication system and feedback system were major problems faced by the Quality Assurance Practices with reference to research culture in the universities. Following suggestions can be accelerated to humanizing research culture system similar to provision of sufficient resources, addition of latest software, provision of modern professional development skills for academic staff, feedback system and provision of latest research journals.

Key words: Research culture, quality assurance, research projects, seminars

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Introduction

In Pakistan, quality is not up to the mark now a days in higher education. Due to some limited facilities, the level of quality education is deteriorated rapidly. Our higher education system was not supported by modern educational scenario. Therefore, many factors which are affecting quality education system, i.e., inadequate system of admission, demotivated learners, lack of trained teachers, imbalanced teachers' and students' ratio, lack of advanced curriculum, lack of research culture and inadequate system of assessment system are major hurdles to achieve the international goals (Malik, 2002).

University research performance is now a matter for global comparison (Sebalj & Holbrook 2009). The 'ideal' structure and culture for research is that it permeates academic work. As Pratt, Margaritis and Coy (1999, p. 44) described it: "Graduate students, a thriving research program, and publications in the recognized academic and professional journals and conferences are hallmarks of successful university faculties".

Existing culture is maintained and transmitted by organizational practices that keep it alive such as human resource policy, particularly recruitment, socialization and performance management, along with leadership (Robbins et al. 2008). Research in the form of creating new knowledge is central to the mission of universities. The Australian government, by introducing quality assessment system processes, has created a strong focus on research, arguably transforming it into a bureaucratic compliance process as much as a quest for new knowledge. Research is structured in different ways within institutions, with an inclusive, multi-core model seen as preferable. One advantage of this model is that it creates the critical mass necessary to compete on the national and international stage and is therefore most suitable for the government's agenda. Universities that have traditionally been more teaching-focused face a range of obstacles including lack of resources, and of embedded research culture. Effective leaders can transform universities and sub-units by valuing and rewarding research and utilizing a range of human resource management strategies to develop and encourage academics research (Healey, 2005). To enhance research culture in the universities and collaboration with advanced countries in research and development perspectives was the basic obligation (NEP, 2009).

Good researchers develop themselves through the process of self-study, experience, education and training as it is a never-ending process. The research leaders generally have the skill to direct research groups and to pressure team members and the movement of important research. They are noticeable, answerable to the research staff or team and have a vow to achieve the goals and purpose of research (Evans, 1999). For the moment, an innovative leader has the creative followers and skills to produce new goods, services or processes. In brief, good and inventive research leaders should be creative, imaginative, visionary, inspirational, insightful, intuitional and foresighted in leading their researchers. It is not sufficient being inventive, research leaders must be rising leaders too (Carucci, 2007).

Finally, it is derived from the debates that students take admission in private sector universities and perceive research better as compared to public sector universities. Sabzwari, Kauser, and Khuwaja (2009), however, justified that in Pakistan, students are more motivated to take admission in public sector universities as compared to private sector universities.

The universities and QECs should persuade the connection between research and teaching to increase the quality of learning and teaching through these strategies; provision of support and assistance to the educational staff for the progress of research-oriented approaches to learning and teaching, intensification of scholarship of teaching by cheering educational staff to disseminate and undertake educational research, research-based learning and teaching policies and plans, encouraging the teaching-research nexus in employees expansion programs, research-based curriculum and supporting in encouraging research-based learning and teaching at classroom level. A collaborative and coordinated university-based approach must be followed for enhancing and assuring the value of teaching by inter-connecting all those related i.e., teachers, students, managers, administrators and policy-developers (Bashir & Aitken, 2008).

The consequence of HEC's momentum is that the universities are reorganizing their objectives and mission to do extremely well in the area of research. The teachers of universities are steadily realizing the importance of research in their professional and academic success. Research and Development (R&D) culture is rising through publications and research, organization of conferences, workshops and seminars in the universities (Saeed, 2007).

Mohanty (2000) discussed that excellence of higher education depends on Research and Development (R&D) culture and provoked faculty to perform research as to improve their knowledge. Husain (2007) remarks that research is a solemn business and a university teacher is considered creating quality research in adding to his teaching coursework.

The respondents of this research claimed that the degree awarding institutions of private sector have enhanced services than the universities of public sector but research of an individual is also an ignored area. Students select research project, supervised by the teachers, which is now obligatory part for the award of degree, but this kind of research is carried out under pressure so the students' inquiry skills does not catch fire nor it attracts the teachers to go for unpaid research (Wood, 1999). To keep in mind the allocation of resources and put attention on quality at higher education of the governments and HEC, then there is vital need to view current need of the era. It is essential to know about "Humanizing Research Culture System through Quality Assurance Practices in the Universities of Pakistan".

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were planned to look at and differentiate the perceptions of the samples to humanizing research culture system at the Universities level in Pakistan:

1. to find out perceptions of teachers about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan.
2. to explore the perceptions of students about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan.
3. to investigate the perceptions of Directors of QECs about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan.
4. to differentiate among perceptions of teachers, students and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) related to Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) in the universities of Pakistan

Research Questions of the Study

Research questions were also designed to observe the attitudes of samples such as:

1. What were the perceptions of teachers about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan?
2. What were the perceptions of students about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan?
3. What were the perceptions of Directors of QECs about humanizing research culture system through Quality Assurance Practices (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and Research Journals) in the Universities of Pakistan?
4. What were the differentiations among perceptions of teachers, students and Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) related to Quality Assurance Practices (QAP) in the universities of Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

The conclusions of this study may be helpful to improve research culture system in HEC, preparation of research culture system manual and follow up research culture, fiscal policies, its planning and implementation at national and international level in the universities. Therefore, this study will also be helpful to make stronger the liaison between education and industry.

Methodology

It was survey type study in nature.

Population of the Study

Students of master programs, teachers and the heads of QECs constituted the population of this study (HEC, 2008).

Sample of the Study

About 980 teachers and 2100 students were selected through convenient sampling technique from 28 universities with respective Directors of QECs by purposive sampling technique. Some universities in Pakistan had no Directors of QECs, so all these subjects were taken who had the relevant information regarding QECs.

Development of Instruments

Two questionnaires for students and teaching faculty to collect quantitative as well as qualitative data about research culture system were used. Research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals were the major indicators of these questionnaires based on five point Likert scale. Some open ended questions as well as interview protocols for Directors of QECs were also arranged to strengthen the quantitative data.

Reliability of Instruments

For collection of information, researcher prepared two questionnaires along with the covering letters. Both tools of research consisted of 13 items in closed-form for teachers and students respectively. Results of teachers' questionnaire regarding research culture were measured by using 13 items and Cronbach's alpha value was 0.716. In addition to results of students' questionnaire regarding research culture was measured by using 13 items and Cronbach's alpha value was 0.924. Reliability of the research tools was ensured through focused group discussions with 20 teachers, 40 students and 04 experts like Directors' of QECs. In this regard, questionnaires and interview protocols were conducted with experts who were in the field of education and Directors of QECs. In this process, teachers, students and experts were briefed about the purpose of the study, especially the instruments and asked them to check the relationship of each item with the objectives of the contents, clarity, format and any other related issues of the instrument that might cope with improving these items. Reliability of both research tools was assured through Cronbach's alpha co-efficient (0.912, 0.948) for teachers and students respectively.

Data Collection

All questionnaires were distributed to the selected samples (students and teachers) by the researcher then collected back. Interviews were also conducted by the researcher from the Heads of QECs.

Statistical Analysis

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data were done. Through SPSS version 16, t-test & ANOVA were used for comparison and for interview protocols, coding technique was followed that were used by Creswell, (2007) and Bogdan and Biklen, (2003).

Results, Conclusions and Discussions

On the basis of the data analysis, the following findings were derived:

The mean response value of university teachers ($M=3.70$, $SD= 1.27$) showed that research project was compulsory, ($M=3.84$, $SD= 1.11$) indicated that encouragement system existed for participation in research activities, ($M=3.68$, $SD= 0.96$) showed that research supervisors had appropriate time for supervising the students research projects, ($M=3.75$, $SD= 1.03$) pointed out that teachers were encouraged to write research articles, ($M=3.76$, $SD= 4.04$) showed that seminars were being held regularly for promoting research culture at national level, ($M=3.84$, $SD= 2.98$) showed that the provisions of renowned educationists for seminars were existing in the universities.

Significant variation occurred ($t= -2.95$, $p=0.003$) concerning judgments of arts teachers as well as science teaching faculty of public and private universities regarding research culture as a whole scores with small effect size (0.20). Average of science teaching faculty responses ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.84$) was greater than arts teaching faculty views ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.82$) and its sub aspects of research culture i.e., research projects, seminars and research journals, except provision of funds. Difference was observed insignificant between the views of arts teachers and science teachers regarding provision of funds. It was revealed that mean scores of science teachers were greater than responses of arts teachers regarding research projects, seminars' and research journals.

In relation to research projects, seminars and provision of funds and overall scores, distinction between mean scores of teachers with regard to public and private sector were statistically insignificant ($t=0.82$, $p=0.414$). With regard to research journals, difference between mean scores of teachers was statistically significant. Mean achievement scores of public sector teachers' responses ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.68$) were much more than private sector teachers' responses ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.76$) about research journals.

About research culture and its aspects such as, research projects, seminars and research journals with overall scores, distinction between attainment scores of male and female teachers were statistically insignificant ($t=1.78$, $p=0.076$). As well as, provision of funds, differences between achievement scores of universities male and female teachers were statistically significant. It was obvious that average attainment scores of male ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.140$) were greater than female teachers' ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.04$) views regarding provision of funds.

There was statistically significant difference ($F=8.10, p= <.000$) among different designations of teaching faculty about research culture as overall scores and its sub components i.e., research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals. It was reflected that mean obtained scores of Professors ($M = 3.56, SD = 0.39$) were greater ($I>II$) than Associate Professors' ($M = 2.92, SD = 0.76$) views as well as its sub components i.e., research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals.

There was no statistically significant difference ($F=0.26, p=0.768$) among views of qualified teaching faculty regarding research culture as overall scores except research projects as well as research journals. It was found that mean observation scores of teachers' responses having Ph.D. degree were greater ($I>II$) than M.Phil. teachers' responses related to research projects as well as research journals.

1. The mean responses value of university students ($M=4.03, SD= 1.14$) showed that research project was compulsory for every student.
2. The mean responses value ($M=3.92, SD= 1.03$) signified the encouragement system of participation for students in seminars.
3. Mean observation value ($M=3.64, SD= 1.10$) showed the system of time utilization by the supervisors for research projects.
4. Mean observation responses value ($M=2.42, SD= 1.10$) signified that the system of association for research culture among the higher education institutions was not available.
5. Mean observation value ($M=3.63, SD= 1.14$) showed that students were encouraged to write research articles.
6. The mean responses value ($M=2.43, SD= 1.27$) described that seminars were not held for research culture at International level.
7. The mean responses value ($M=3.59, SD= 1.12$) exposed that seminars were held for research culture at National level.
8. The mean responses value ($M=3.67, SD= 1.15$) showed that universities invited eminent scholars for seminars.
9. Mean observation value ($M=2.16, SD= 1.19$) stated that system as concerned allocation of funds for global seminars was not available.
10. The mean responses value ($M=2.26, SD= 1.16$) represented the system as concerned allocation of funds for national level seminars was not available.
11. Mean observation value ($M=2.47, SD= 1.07$) revealed that HEC approved on line journals were not available.
12. The mean responses value ($M=2.37, SD= 1.13$) indicated that research journals were not available in the departments.
13. Mean observation value ($M=2.37, SD= 1.13$) described that impact facto research journals in the university were not available.

Difference was significant ($t = -9.89, p = 0.000$) involving arts as well as science students' opinions of arts and science students regarding research culture in collective scores with large effect size (0.61) and its sub components (research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals). It was depicted that the mean achievement scores of science group ($M = 3.84, SD = 0.66$) were greater than arts group ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.71$) students of master programs observations.

Regarding research culture as overall scores and its sub components (research projects and seminars) consequences reflected that there was significant difference between ($t = -1.03, p = 0.302$) public and private sector arts students' feelings of master programs. Difference was statistically substantial involving public and private arts students' responses in provision of funds and research journals. It was concluded that mean achievement scores of private sector arts were greater than public sector arts students.

There was no statistically significant difference ($t = -0.56, p = 0.577$) between public as well as private sector science students observations regarding research culture as overall scores and its sub components (research projects, provision of funds and research journals) except seminars. It was evident that mean achievement scores of science private sector ($t = 3.61, p = 0.86$) were greater than science public sector ($t = 3.46, p = 0.94$) students regarding seminars.

With relation to research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals as overall scores, difference between achievement scores of university students regarding public and private sector were statistically insignificant ($t = -1.09, p = 0.275$). Results were statistically insignificant ($t = 1.19, p = 0.235$) involving male as well as female students' views regarding research culture as overall scores and its aspects i.e., research projects, seminars, provision of funds and research journals.

An interview protocol was used for Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) of both types of universities. Researchers conducted interviews with 28 Directors of QECs. The 28 Directors of QECs, of whom the interviews were conducted; 15 belonged to public and 13 to private sector universities. Out of 28, nine were males and six were females from public sector, and eight were males and five were females from private sector universities. The 28 Directors of QECs of whom the interviews were taken, the 13 Directors were Ph.Ds. and two were M.Sc. from public sector and seven were Ph.Ds and six Directors possessed M.A/M.Sc. degree from private sector universities. Five Directors had M.Ed out of 15 interviewees and nine Directors were B.Ed. In public universities five interviewees had above twenty-five years experiences, 10 Directors had more than 15 years experience. Moreover, 10 Directors had 15 years and three Directors had above eight years experience in academic/administration level in the private sector universities.

Table 1

*How do you check that faculty has sufficient skills for developing research culture?
(Perception of the Director of QECs)*

Items	Public sector University Directors of QECs Responses (Frequency) f	Public sector Directors of QECs Responses (Percentage)%	Private sector University Directors of QECs Responses (Frequency) f	Private sector University Directors of QECs Responses (Percentage)%
QECs observations	5	17.86	7	25.00
Results of the students	6	21.43	4	14.29
Research papers	4	14.29	7	25.00
Attending conferences	4	14.29	6	21.43
Projects competition	6	21.43	7	25.00

Table 1 indicates that the interviews were taken from 28 Directors of QECs and their responses were recorded related to this question “*How do you check that faculty has sufficient skills for developing research culture?*” that universities have taken steps for developing research culture. As well as, regarding Directors of QECs observations, ratio of teachers’ participation in seminars, writing research papers and developing research projects in the private sector Directors were greater than public sector except results of the students.

Table 2

Research Culture - comparison between views of students’ and teachers’

Practices	Students		Teachers		t-value	df	p-value	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Research culture	3.54	0.75	3.44	0.83	3.07	2693	< .002	0.06
Research projects	3.73	0.80	3.69	0.82	1.22	2693	.221	0.02
Seminars	3.57	0.99	3.67	1.91	-1.83	2693	.067	0,03
Provision of funds	3.21	1.06	3.11	1.11	2.26	2693	<.024	0.04
Research Journals	3.40	0.93	3.01	0.91	10.45	2693	<.001	0.20

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

Table 2 reflects the difference involving students as well as teachers' views of public and private universities regarding research culture. To distinguish views, independent sample *t*-test was used. Consequences reflected that difference was statistically substantial ($t=3.07$, $p=0.002$) regarding research culture as a whole scores through small effect size (0.06) and its aspects (provision of funds and research journals) except seminars and research projects. Mean achievement scores of students ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.75$) were greater than teachers ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.83$) related to research culture. It was apparent that mean observation scores of students were greater than teachers regarding provision of funds as well as research journals.

The opinions of teachers of both type of universities i.e., public and private sector regarding the problems being faced for quality assurance practices, a large number of responses were found from university teachers in public sector universities as compared to private sector universities regarding lack of resources, lack of professional development skills, lack of guidance and counseling centres and lack of feedback system. Moreover, majority of teachers responded that there was also lack of awareness regarding latest research studies, lack of assessment system, less pay in private sector, and less number of permanent staff as compared to public sector teachers' responses.

The responses of students related to open-ended questions of problems were: a large number of students were found in public sector universities as compared to private sector universities regarding lack of resources, lack of professional development skills, lack of guidance and counseling centres and lack of feedback system. Moreover, majority of students responded that there was also lack of awareness regarding latest research studies, lack of assessment system, less pay in private sector, and less number of permanent staff as compared to public sector teachers responses, which attracts the attention for improvement.

Discussion on Results

On the basis of data analysis, key findings of the study were derived such as seminars and workshops were being conducted to train the man power, follow up was being done after training, research project were being completed. Teachers were allowed to participate in seminars. Collaboration with other departments was being made. Publication of articles were being carried out among universities to enhance the research culture system. Lack of physical facilities, no training for faculty, provision of funds, research journals, communication system and feedback system were major problems faced by the Quality Assurance Practices in the universities.

Research plays beneficial role in this technological era. Research culture helps us to find new things related to our needs (Gross, 2001). To enhance research culture in the universities and to enhance collaboration with advanced countries in research and development perspectives was the basic obligation of the country (NEP, 2009). Research helps in getting information about phenomenon (Swindoll, 2012). Research helps to understand the situation and communicate it to other people for better position. Students and teachers are enabling to understand the real professional achievement (Walker, 2010).

Finally, it is derived from the data that students take admission in private sector universities and perceive research better to life as compared to public sector universities. Sabzwari, Kauser, & Khuwaja (2009), however, justified that in Pakistan, students are more motivated to take admission in public sector universities than private sector universities. Iqbal (2004) also suggested that standardized items are required to be gradually increased so that knowledge of the students could be assessed. In this way, Black and William (1998) stressed about feedback system as an enormously important part of the assessment system process.

Recommendations

In the light of above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made for the enhancement of quality assurance practices in the universities of Pakistan:

1. All the higher education organizations should give priority to providing the appropriate funding to the universities and higher education institutes for enhancing the research culture.
2. Research journals should be provided to higher education institutions/universities for creating a research culture in their respective entities.
3. All the academic activities in the universities should be research based.
4. There should be co-ordination among all universities regarding sharing research activities in the different fields of studies.

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