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Perception of University Students Regarding the Role of Quality Enhancement Cells in the Universities of KP

Mariam Mahsood *

Malik Amer Atta †

Sajid Anwar ‡

Abstract: *The Prime aim of this study was to examine and scrutinize the perception of university students concerning the main objective of quality enhancement cells in enhancing the quality of education in the HEIs of KP. The study was conducted by cross-sectional survey design. A sample of 300 MPhil and Ph.D. scholars were collected from different universities of KP. For the collection of the sample, the Purposive Sampling Technique was employed. SPSS (Version-23) was used for testing the objectives of the study. Findings of the study revealed that university students had perceived satisfaction with research culture, students' performance, and conduction of workshops/seminars. However, students were not satisfied with the teacher's performance and infrastructure facilities. MPhil students perceived better satisfaction on the role of quality enhancement cells in university as compared to Ph.D. students. Similarly, men were more satisfied with perceived enhancement in university as women. The study has implications in academic settings.*

Key Words: Perceived Quality Enhancement, Education Level (MPhil/PhD), Gender

Introduction

We live in a time when quality competition reigns supreme; in the terminology of marketing, a thing only lasts as long as its excellence is maintained. When the quality of a thing elapses, it can be derived that it is progressively disappearing from the globe. The concept of quality education is questioned and debated from a variety of perspectives. The number of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan has expanded over the last decade, and the dire need for the excellence of education is augmented. As a developed nation, we want quality in the academic sector in order to compete in fields like business, industry, science and technology, and education. Considering the needs of society, the alarming concern is how to increase the

quality of these HEIs. Quality assurance, as [Lim \(2001\)](#) asserts, refers to strategies and procedures for assuring the preservation and enhancement of quality. In order to bring improvement in the quality of the offered programs, universities in developing nations should use international quality assurance mechanisms ([Idrus, 2003](#)). The higher education commission (HEC) has also developed procedures and rules for ensuring and improving quality. The HEC Manual is an attempt to compile all of the rules and processes into a single volume so that university administration, quality enhancement cells, and faculty may execute them more easily ([Ahmad & Aziz, 2012](#)). QEC's play a critical role in promoting and developing quality education at academic

* PhD Scholar Institute of Education and Research, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan.

Email: m.mahsud49@gmail.com

† Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan.

‡ Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan.

institutions across the globe, and their value cannot be understated. To achieve and realize goals and objectives, Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) were the most effective. It was decided definitely to create QECs in all Pakistani higher education institutions as a result of the success of QEC's (HEIs) ([Batool & Qureshi, 2007](#)). According to [Ahmad \(2012\)](#) at all levels quality in education is of prime importance in a Pakistani vantage point and prospect. At the international level, huge efforts are being made to enhance the quality of education to face the challenges posed to the education sector. In the education sector, quality is the basic and fundamental facet for getting congeniality with the emerging global knowledge-based societies ([Ismail, 2010](#)). The success of any educational institution primarily depends on the learning environment provided to students, which in return affects the achievement of degree or award ([Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2010](#); [Masood, Shafi, & Darwesh, 2020](#)). For ensuring the quality of education and to achieve the set targets in quality education, suitable and effective learning strategies for attaining the best learning outcomes is the need of the hour. The excellence in education is the dire need for survival in the advanced global countries, where it is termed as the lifeline. The mark of confidence that academic endowment fulfills set criteria is denoted as quality assurance ([De Paor, 2016](#)).

HEIs and HEC have realized their role in the improvement of the quality of higher education ([Khan, 2010](#)). Throughout the world, higher education and research with liberalization safeguarding the quality of education have been given top priority. Institutions catering to quality education are role models for modern civil society ([Batool & Qureshi, 2007](#)). Almost every higher educational institute has a Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) to assure the amplification of academic programs and to standardize instructional excellence. The

Higher Education Commission is now evaluating the status of quality education in Pakistan, and it is consciously developing plans to address the pertinent concerns and set the necessary criteria to compete in the global marketplace. It is unavoidable to bring improvement in the quality of higher education in accordance to grasp the objective of achieving international standards. Resultantly, HEC established the Quality Assurance Agency and then Quality Enhancement Cells as independent and autonomous agencies for improving educational quality. According to [Shaukat \(2009\)](#), Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) in HEIs have increased in number with the passage of time.

[Materu \(2007\)](#) asserts for determining the affluence of any nation, the quality of education is the benchmark and set paradigm internationally. Teachers, curricula, administration, research, communication, and students are the six measures of quality education established by [Mossa \(2006\)](#). Quality improvement in leadership, faculty, students, infrastructure, research work, conducive learning environment, active governance, effective assessment process, organizational management activity, and the demanding market force are the main markers of excellence in education outlined by scholars [Jahan Zaib and Akhtar \(2005\)](#). Excellence in education is a self-organized and multi-faceted model that specifies the educational benchmarks and standards and sets out and identifies institutional chore and its objectives and sets them according to the organization's specific standards ([Skeleton, 2005](#)).

The quality in education is a complicated, multi-faceted, vibrant and complex concept ([Mok, 2007](#)). Quality education in higher education is a multi-faceted topic since it incorporates all of the systematic monitoring and assessment

methods used to improve quality in HEIs ([Kontio, 2008](#)).

Education quality is a summation of input process and outcome factors, and we need to collect information to make useful and meaningful decisions for the status of quality education by now and for its improvement in the future to meet the standards ([Masood et al., 2020, 2021](#)). The improvement in the quality of education is a big challenge for Government, and the Government should take appropriate steps to enhance it and achieve the set targets (Govt. of Pakistan, 2009). Keeping in view the international benchmarks and striving for the attainment of desirable standards to create the base and framework of knowledge, Economy, and Compatibility, the Government of Pakistan need drastic changes and needs to overhaul and reconstruct the standard of higher education. For improving the quality of education, the Higher Education Commission is on its mission to upgrade, better, and refine the standards to meet the internationally set benchmarks in providing first-rate, prime and excellent services of learning, teaching, and research. HEC has come up with a focused and precise approach for achieving stability in the progression of the quality assurance and enhancement in all HEIs of the state because every institution is equally important in changing the perception of its stakeholders ([Hassan, Shafi, & Masood, 2021](#)).

It emulates an endeavor to refine and stimulate higher education institutes to the developments occurring internationally and bringing higher education in Pakistan at par with the changing paradigms of prominent institutes of the world. For this purpose, numerous lengthy- and short-term proposals and demarche of the HEC are aiming at the revamping of the quality of education being communicated and transmitted at HEIs. So HEC instituted Quality enhancement cells in the alma mater for augmentation and

improvement of HEIs to make them at par with the international benchmarks. The major role of QEC is to advance and enhance the quality of various programs offered throughout the HEIs of Pakistan, to approve new emerging programs with consultation and collaboration with the top management, active annual checking and valuation of HEIs, assessing instructors' and students' performance by getting students and teachers feedback through the distribution of Performa for collection of information, Reviewing curriculum, monitoring the quality of MPhil and PhD programs, conduction of seminars and workshops at national and international level on self-assessment process, Institutional evaluation process (IPE), teaching methodologies, grading systems, project selection, Planning, and Implementation, etc. QEC's checks the thesis of MPHIL and PHD for plagiarism. QEC's check plagiarism of all papers which are submitted for publication in journals. QEC's work efficiently with the teaching and non-teaching departments for the collection of data and information necessary for the improvement of the ranking of universities of Pakistan. They analyze data and statistics to pinpoint strong areas and the grey areas where improvement is needed and, with collaboration with all the departments, to evolve novel plans for redressal of the areas needing improvement and refinement for betterment.

Quality education means a well-defined criterion that computes separately student quality, size, means, the faculty caliber, and overall high regard and esteem.

[Batool et.al \(2010\)](#) indicated that in all the HEIs of Pakistan, QEC has established and initiated a Self-Assessment & Internal Quality Assurance formula, which is used for measuring and gauging the efficacy of realization of its desired mission and the accomplishment of its goals and set objectives. This self-reliant system and structure also assist in the monitoring of its

conformity with national and international quality assurance requirements. According to [Khan \(2010\)](#), quality assurance at Pakistan's higher education institutions requires a complete model. Vision, leadership, evaluation, and Process Control should all be significant components of the quality assurance paradigm. Although all the countries are struggling to attain 1st position, one has to strive hard to achieve the desired goal (Siddiq et al., 2021). The only key for success is education, and all the countries that recognize this universal fact are seeking and aiming to improve the quality of their education to excel globally. The advanced world work day and night for the betterment of the quality of education. [Hoodbhoy \(1998\)](#) compares HEIs to gardens, which provide fresh fruits rich with nutrients to aid in the maintenance of a healthy human existence. Universities, meanwhile, deliver essential human capital in the form of qualified professionals and intellectuals to aid society's proper functioning.

Statement of the Problem

It is opinionated that QECs at afresh constructed and evolving alma maters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are lagging behind in meeting and satisfying the standards mentioned by HEC. This study examines the essential steps taken by QECs for the augmentation of quality education and explores the perception of Scholars regarding the role and function of QECs.

Objective

To examine the opinion of scholars of the university about the function and role of quality enhancement cells (domains: research culture, instructors' performance, students' enactment, infrastructure facilities of organization, and supervision and conduction of training workshops and conferences) in the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) of KP.

Research Question

How do the scholars perceive the role of quality enhancement cells 'QECs' to enhance the quality of education by improving student performance, teachers performance, promotion of research culture, conducting of fruitful meetings regarding augmentation of quality education, and availability of good infrastructural facilities.

The hypothesis of the Study

There is no apparent dissimilarity amongst the perceptions of scholars concerning QECs for the improvement of the excellence of education (domains: research culture, instructors' performance, students' enactment, infrastructure facilities of organization, and supervision and conduction of training workshops and conferences) in the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) of KP.

Significance of the Study

The current work will contribute by proposing a novel strategy for refining the performance of QECs in the higher education sector, as well as opening up new avenues for future research. Moreover, this study provides a base to all the stakeholders and policymakers in enhancing and promoting quality education in the universities as prescribed by HEC and by making the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at par with the international standards.

Research Methodology

This section informs about the objective, research design, sample, measures, and procedures of the current study. Therefore, it provides a pathway and is significant in the research ([Masood & Shafi, 2020](#)).

Research Design

When it comes to the subject of this in-progress study, "Perceptions on Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) at the Alma

Mater of KP," the research design was a cross-sectional survey and descriptive in nature because the main purpose of the researcher was to examine and evaluate the prevailing state of affairs of the quality enhancement cell. Cross sectional survey design was adopted as the data and information were gathered and compiled from a dissimilar group of partakers.

Sample

The sample of this study comprises of 300 students aggregated from the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) of KP, a state of Pakistan. Out of these 300 contributors, 150 were Ph.D. scholars, and 150 were MPhil scholars. As regard to gender variable, females and males both were involved. As far as the sampling technique is concerned, the Purposive sampling technique was employed. As a pilot study, all the 300 scholars of both private and public sector Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) of KP, registered in the academic session of 2019-22, were encompassed. The sample size of this research work was adequate and emblematic of this particular study and assessed by G software.

Measures

A self-fabricated questionnaire for quantifying the supposed quality of education in Pakistani Alma mater was selected in accomplishing the current

research work. The scale used in this study was framed by [Nadeem \(2018\)](#). The scale used is a 5 point rating scale. Response choices contain 5 for agree, 4 for strongly agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree 1 for strongly disagree. The scale has well-accepted and ingrained psychometric properties. The scale used was an authentic, well-grounded and reliable and well-founded, and sound tool for measuring perceived excellence of education in Pakistani educational institutes.

Procedure

Data and information were gathered from the universities of KP, Pakistan. University administration, as well as university students, gave their informed consent. Only those who were willing to participate were included in the study. The researcher scanned the scale once it was completed to look for any questions that were missing or had been cloned or duplicated. As a sequel, the participant was acknowledged for their helping hand, collaboration and time, and figures and facts were analyzed by means of SPSS. Data was scrutinized by employing SPSS (Version-23). Descriptive statistics were computed, and alpha reliability was explored for each scale. For investigating the objective of the study, Median was used as the cutoff score, and Mean was checked against the median score. An Independent sample t-test was used for investigating gender differences in all study variables.

Results

Table 1. Differences Statistics and Psychometric Properties of all Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range	A
Teachers Performance	12.95	2.68	5-19	.85
Research Culture	15.45	2.76	9-21	.76
Students Performance	10.09	2.17	5-17	.89
Infrastructure Facilities	10.67	2.57	5-20	.77
Conduction of Seminars/ Workshops	10.95	3.00	4-17	.75

Table 1 shows psychometric properties among all study variable. Reliability analysis indicated that all scales have a satisfactory level of alpha reliability ($\alpha > .70$), and therefore objective can be tested for further investigation.

Table 2. Perception of Students Regarding Role of QEC in Promoting Quality Education in Universities of KPK

Role of QEC	Teachers Performance	Research Culture	Students Performance	Infrastructure Facilities	Conduction of Seminars/ Workshops
Student's Perception (M)	12.95	10.09	10.67	10.95	10.42
Cutoff (Mdn)	13	10	10	11	10
Skewness	-.28	.12	.48	-.31	.14
Range	14	12	15	13	14
Minimum	5	5	5	4	4
Maximum	19	17	20	17	18

Results revealed that university students perceived better at research culture, students' performance and conduction of workshop/seminars. However, students were not satisfied with the teacher's performance and infrastructure facilities.

Table 3. Differences on the basis of Education in all Study Variables

Role of QEC	PhD		MPhil		t(298)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Teachers Performance	13.01	2.68	12.87	2.69	3.40	.00	.50
Research Culture	15.54	2.66	15.36	2.86	2.29	.01	.45
Students Performance	10.21	2.23	9.96	2.11	1.90	.04	.23
Infrastructure Facilities	10.67	2.55	10.66	2.60	2.61	.01	.22
Conduction of Seminars/ Workshops	11.02	2.85	10.87	3.14	2.45	.01	.35

Table 3 shows differences on the basis of education in study variables. Results revealed that there were significant gender differences on the basis of education in study variables. It was found that PhD scholars scored higher on teachers performance $t(298) = 3.40, p < .01$, research culture $t(298) = 2.29, p < .05$, students' performance $t(298) = 1.90, p < .05$, infrastructure facilities $t(298) = 2.61, p < .05$, and conduction of seminars/workshops $t(298) = 2.45, p < .05$, as compared to MPhil scholars.

Table 4. Gender Differences in all Study Variables

Role of QEC	Women		Men		t(298)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Teachers Performance	13.19	2.66	12.58	2.68	2.69	.00	.71
Research Culture	15.71	2.66	15.07	2.86	2.32	.01	.51
Students Performance	10.11	2.23	10.05	2.07	4.32	.00	.82
Infrastructure Facilities	10.86	2.44	10.38	2.74	2.19	.02	.33

Conduction of Seminars/ Workshops	10.84	2.95	11.11	3.07	2.33	.01	.31
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Table 4 shows gender differences in study variables. Results revealed that there were significant gender differences on the basis of education in study variables. It was found that women scholars scored higher on teachers performance $t(298) = 2.69, p < .01$, research culture $t(298) = 2.32, p < .05$, students' performance $t(298) = 4.32, p < .01$, infrastructure facilities $t(298) = 2.19, p < .05$, and conduction of seminars/workshops $t(298) = 2.33, p < .05$, as compared to men scholars.

Discussion

Findings indicated that university students perceived better at research culture, students' performance, and conduction of workshop/seminars. However, students were not satisfied with the teacher's performance and infrastructure facilities. According to [Gitta. E., \(2014, p. 10\)](#) quality assurance augments the efficacy and proficiency of any educational organization. Quality assurance, on the other hand, should be transparent, allowing all stakeholders to agree on the outcomes.

Disclosure of data manifested that scholars enrolled in PhD program attained high-pitched on educators' performance, research culture, pupils' performance, infrastructure facilities, and arrangement and conduction of training workshops, meetings, and seminars as compared to MPhil scholars. The reason behind this may be that PhD students may have better adjustment as compared to MPhil students because they have previous experiences of getting higher education in Pakistan. Because we live in a research-based era, it is clear that a generalized research culture is necessary for the development of professional competencies, so it is imperative that the alma maters provide all of the necessary

infrastructure, facilities, and facilities for the conduct of seminars/workshops.

In most of the research, it has been concluded that higher education is services concerned and students are its backbones and clients. So, establishing a long-term association with students is of great benefit for the institutions ([Eagle and Brennan, 2007](#)). According to [Harvey \(2002\)](#), good and long-term coordination between the consumers i.e. students and the services i.e. educational institutions, is essential and pivotal for achieving the set targets. Various educational institutions and organizations are keenly interested in the improvement of quality education, and they invest in it heavily ([Houston, 2008](#)). For promoting quality standards in HEIs, new ways and strategies are needed to be developed and practiced. While quality assurance cells are responsible for ensuring that all higher education institutions have a quality assurance process in place, which serves the objective of improving one's learning and strengthening the performance of institutions.

Quality enhancement cells control, improve and manage the prevailing system of progression as per predefined benchmarks ([Hina & Ajmal, 2016](#)). The higher education commission of Pakistan has recently formulated a Quality Enhancement Agency and has asked all national higher education institutes to establish Quality enhancement cells (QEC) to monitor and modify the higher education and learning within the institutes ([Zafar, 2006](#)). The QEC uses some survey forms filled by students for quality assurance. Students can be the best narrator of the quality of education of an institute if they take the survey forms seriously. Unfortunately, there is a generalized lack of awareness and non-serious attitude of these students causes difficulty in measuring and

monitoring the quality of education by the QEC team and has an equal opportunity to yield a negative response.

Gender differences were also investigated. It was found that female scholars got higher scores on basic physical and infrastructure accommodations, students' academic progress, research work, and activities, managing and organizing research-based meetings/workshops, and teachers' scholastic performance and achievements as compared to men scholars. In previous studies, gender differences with respect to the quality of education have rarely been investigated. The influence of year of study, gender, and ethnicity on student views of quality in higher education is unclear; therefore, this investigation intended to find out what Kingston University students regarded as quality indicators and if there were any apparent changes depending on these variables (Dicker et al., 2017). revealed that diverse ethnic groups had different attitudes toward support services, and more males than females were happy with support services; however, this varied by year group, and student numbers were modest.

Conclusion

A cross-sectional survey methodology was used in this descriptive study. It was found that university scholars notched significantly sky-high on research culture, students' enactment, and planning and arranging of workshop/meetings. Students were not satisfied with the teacher's performance and infrastructure facilities. Findings on level of education indicated that PhD scholars significantly scored higher on research activities, students' academic achievement, instructors' work and performance, infrastructure amenities and conductance of workshops and seminars as compared to MPhil scholars. Gender differences revealed that women significantly scored higher on students' educational benchmarks, fact finding research activities, infrastructure

depot and facilities, teachers' good performance and achievements, and aligning of conferences/workshops as compared to men scholars.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are made based on data interpretation and conclusions, which are applicable to all universities.

Universities' QECs are facing hurdles and are not fully successful in putting plans into action. QEC requires rigorous oversight and finance in order to fulfill its mission effectively. The university's mission and vision should be defined based on the resources available and the university's future demands and criteria. Students, teachers, administrative staff, alumni, and professionals should be involved in decision-maker as stakeholders. QECs should implement the plans efficiently for students learning as QECs are responsible for promoting public confidence and ensuring the amplification of academic programs as academic augmentation is fundamental for economic, social, cultural, and technological growth. There should be an accountability system in universities. Proper accountability measures may be followed on a regular basis with the help of concerned quarters. QEC may ensure action strictly based on the feedback of students. Deserving students may be provided foreign scholarships.

QEC is playing a vital role by enhancing and upgrading the excellence of higher education institutes in Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistani universities are included for the first time in history to the top 500 top-ranking universities of the world according to Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Universities Ranking. Owing to the outstanding results, esteem and recognition, with each passing day, the demand of QECs is growing for attaining the set standards by HEC for making the Pakistani universities at par with the international benchmarks to

meet the needs of the society. With the backing, support, and assistance of TQM, QEC and QAA, Higher Education Commission (HEC) has carried out and consummated a lot of encounters and struggles to strengthen the HE system. The

plans composed by HEC, their executions with the teamwork of diverse institutions of higher education should be ensured for achieving the set benchmarks of quality education.

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