

GLOBALIZATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSIGHTS TO PAKISTAN AND BAHRAIN

¹Prof. Saad Darwish and ²Zia Batool

¹Professor of Faculty of Administrative Sciences,
Applied Science University, Bahrain.

²Director General-QA, Punjab Higher Education Commission, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Prof. Saad Darwish

ABSTRACT

This paper on Globalization and Quality Assurance in higher education with special focus on Insights to Pakistan and Bahrain reflects on phenomena of Globalization, its issues, need, impact and link with improved quality of higher education along with discussion on defining quality for higher education. It further provides details of process of quality assurance, indicators of quality assurance and the practices of quality assurance in higher education sector of Pakistan and Bahrain in specific set of Good Practices. The paper also elaborates on new dynamics of higher education sector and its increased role in building of societies and emerging economies in the current scenario of more mobility of faculty and students across borders. The paper includes discussion on Quality Assurance, its concepts, diversified nature, and components as well. Further, substantial discussion on Rankings in the context of Globalization is also included to highlight one of the important practice of Rankings attaining attention of stakeholders globally. The paper provides not only general discussion on quality assurance processes, indicators and focal points but also provides an insight of Pakistan and Bahrain; two of the emerging higher education sectors in South Asia and Gulf region respectively to recognize that quality assurance in higher education institutions is equally important across regions. The paper also reflects on importance of improving quality of higher education and to achieve globally comparable standards through quality assurance policies and process as an outcome of increased phenomenon of globalization. It comes up with a notion that developing the best quality providing universities to serve as engines of socioeconomic development is inevitable for the developing countries to compete globally like same is being focused in case of Pakistan and Bahrain.

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KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Globalization, Engines of Socioeconomic Development, Rankings, Pakistan, Bahrain, Quality Assurance Processes, QA Indicators, Universities

INTRODUCTION

“The illiterates of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. (Alvin Toffler)” The world is facing multiple challenges in all spheres of life and new dynamics of education are emerging with greater challenges for higher education. The future vision to grow in the knowledge economies of tomorrow is significantly affected by all these challenges. Globalization or Internationalization in higher education is also enlisted at the top of those challenges to be addressed both nationally and internationally. The quality of education is no more an internal subject and confined to the local or national standards as it has bigger canvas to compete globally with meeting global standards of education being imparted across borders.

Globalization in Higher Education and Transnational Education:

Globalization in higher education is a broader concept and a complex phenomenon which also

includes international cooperation and the changes taking place within a higher education institution as well. Globalization or internationalization describes the state of independence that is no longer limited by the distance or geographical boundaries. The space and location are no more curtailing factors for the higher education sector development. Hence, it is generally applied to many human endeavours, including knowledge, research, innovation and capacity building. It is commonly a directed process of enabling higher education to meet the global challenges.

The higher education sector is shaping up in new dimensions as a result of globalization such as increased importance of TNE (Transnational Education). Emerging foreign providers, increased number of off-shore campuses of universities across borders, joint degrees, international degrees, associate degrees, and cross boarder affiliations etc. Not only developing countries are being affected by the globalization but developing countries like

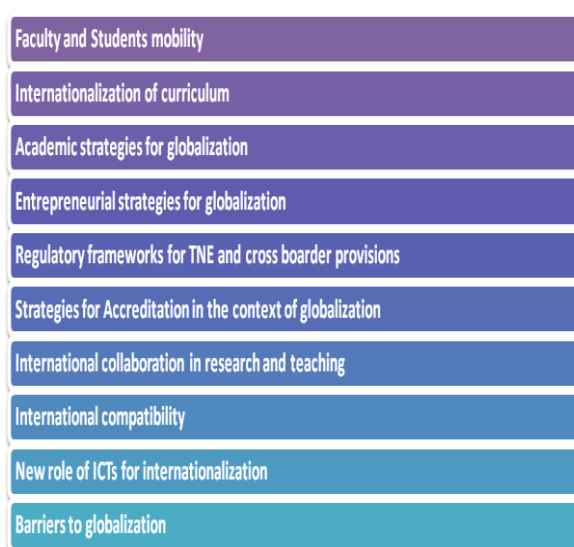
Australia, and UK are also linking their economies cross boarder education provisions and to attract most of the graduates benefited by cross boarder mobility provisions. China, Singapore and Malaysia are also contributing towards strengthening the impact of globalization. Increasing number of foreign providers, cross boarder education avenues, cross boarder affiliations of universities, and transnational education provisions are calling for serious efforts toward ensuring quality of education being delivered by such institutions.

In few case studies the challenges faced in case of Singapore, China and Malaysia the reviews focus more of quality assurance policies and processes to ensure the quality of graduates produced through similar arrangements. Thus, importance of quality of education through meeting minimum standards is now an area of further attention to coop with globalization in education sector.

The emerging concepts of globalization is based on various approaches whereas one of these commonly used approaches is considered having two prongs, one is the “*Geographic extension*” of higher education and the other is “*Internal transformation*” of the institution of higher education itself. Thus, it affects in both ways internally and externally. The globalization leads to introducing international and intercultural dimension into all aspects of education, training and research.

The article 11 of the UNESCO, WCHE states “*Quality also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students and research projects, while taking in to account the national cultural values and circumstances (World Education Report, 1993, 1995).* The globalization or internationalization in higher education is perceived as a direction for further development of higher education with significant impact on economic, political, social, and cultural changes. The expected outcomes of globalization are more international opportunities, sharing of knowledge to extend its boundaries. Further, academic networking, improved quality of education, faculty, research and graduates, curriculum, benefits of synergies and overall excellence. All these factors are linked with more employability of the graduates linking the process with economic growth indirectly.

In case the issues and challenges of globalization are not addressed seriously its outcomes and desired results will not achieved Therefore, few of these issues are enlisted below to be focused for the purpose:



The above enlisted issues of globalization strongly affect the new dynamics of higher education at the institutional, regional and international level. The emerging importance of globalization in higher education demands for improved standards of quality of faculty, facilities, research, training, teaching and learning overall and needs focused attention on quality assurance and enhancement in higher education.

How to define Quality Assurance in Higher Education

“Tertiary education is a complex activity, with many interested parties and participants. Each of those interested groups and participants will have their own definitions of what is quality in tertiary education, which may or may not be the same as of others.”(Brazil Market Analysis-Connected Scotland, 2015)

By its one of the most common definitions; Quality refers to the means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced (Quality Assurance Agency, UK, Website, 2016). The Quality Assurance System is composed of both qualitative and quantitative standards while judged through quantifiable indicators. As a result of emerging and promising international practices the phenomenon of assessing the quality in higher education is gaining momentum in developing countries also. However, the national context cannot be ignored while dealing with new challenges of globalization and it needs to be in harmony and viability with the prevailing learning environment, academic culture and historical background.

Quality adds value to higher education and role and scope of a quality higher education system in building knowledge economies and developing

enlightened civic societies is recognized globally. It leads toward developing significant correlation between higher education and economic development of that country. The strength of correlation between economic development of a country and higher education reflects that enrolment ratios in higher education show an average value over 50 percent for countries belonging to the *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)*. While in comparison, 21 percent is an average value for middle income countries, and it is 6 percent in low income countries. (*Quality Assurance in Higher Education, OECD*)

With the enhancing efforts in higher education and increasing enrolment along with increased number of institutions, multiple choices, cross boarder provisions, transnational affiliations, are strongly linked with increased importance of quality assurance considering it one of the most critical issue.

Over the past decade a number of universities have opened branch campuses overseas. (Oxford University, National Trends in Higher Education, 2015). This is a glaring example for disseminating high quality teaching through transnational education. These trends will drive educational institutions in different countries to follow rigorous rules in order to improve quality of education aiming at student's employability in the competing markets. The new era of applying the 21st century skills is a quality requirement in developed world and these faster changes are reshaping the role of higher education across globe.

Outlining Quality Assurance Processes:

The combined effect of limited financial resources, fiscal constraints and increasing demands of higher education with massive population size, less developed countries has led to deteriorating quality of infrastructure, faculty, facilities, services and overall teaching, learning and research. Further, lack of financial and human resources, scarcity of resources for essential such as text books, research, and lab-equipment's is adding further challenges to meet the global standards. Quality assurance in higher education outlines certain processes to address the issues of quality in one way or the other. Few of the most common ones are discussed below:

- ❖ **Quality Control:** It reflects on that how a university determines that the management of its teaching and learning and assessment activities is working as planned and intended, to verify that such activities are carried out satisfactorily. This includes feed-back systems (Quality Assurance Agency, UK, website, 2016).
- ❖ **Quality Assurance:** Refers to that how a university satisfies itself that the structures and mechanisms for monitoring its quality control procedures are effective and, where appropriate,

that they promote the enhancement of the quality of its educational provision (Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland, website, 2016).

- ❖ **Quality Audit:** Leads towards a systematic and independent examination system to determine whether quality control and quality assurance are satisfactory, implemented effectively, and suitable to achieve objectives (Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland, 2016)
- ❖ **Quality Assessment:** Mainly focused on External assessment by peers of actual provision in particular subjects, by scrutiny of institutional documentation and student work, direct observation, interview, and by reference to performance indicators.
- ❖ **Academic Standards:** These are explicit levels of academic attainment that are used to describe and measure academic requirements and achievements of individual students and group of students. (Quality Assurance Agency Website, 2016).

Indicators of Quality Assurance

- ❖ Keeping in view the diversification of the higher education sector, it is difficult to define quality indicators fit for all which reflect significantly on the quality teaching and student support services. However, some indicators can serve the purpose of continuing improvement at the system with flexibility of modification according to national context. Quality assurance and enhancement is a continuous process as standards keep on raising thus based on experiences of countries in practice the following focal points are identified to be addressed to achieve excellence through an effective system of quality assurance in higher education:
 - ❖ Improving the legal and regulatory frameworks for the establishment of new institutions and programs in the public and private sectors for the purpose of university management and quality evaluation
 - ❖ Creating incentives and supporting initiatives and investments to increase the efficiency and quality of these higher education institutions
 - ❖ Improving the system of appropriate allocation of resources within universities and supporting initiatives to generate further resources.
 - ❖ Since globalization is a reality for higher education that makes improvements in quality of higher education inevitable for the higher education institutions. Therefore, the components of quality and focal points of quality to be addressed by the universities of developing countries in order to meet the international standards and to play an effective role in producing the graduates matching with national socioeconomic needs and more global compatibility.

Rankings and Globalization

Rankings of Higher Education Institutions generally aim at reflecting the global competitiveness based on certain criteria reflecting the overall quality and standards of the higher education being imparted by the institutions ranked through various systems. Various ranking models are practiced globally such as Shanghai Jiao Tong's Academic Ranking of the world Universities, the Webometrics ranking of World Universities, the World University Rankings compiled by the Times Higher Education Magazine and QS University Rankings. Few of the alternates for ranking are Baldrige System of HEIs rating, Academic Audit based rating of HEIs in Australia, British HEIs rating System and Institutional Performance Review system Shanghai (Batool, ACU-UK, 2013).

Another Ranking Model exercised by HEC, Pakistan for Ranking of HEIs nationwide based on certain national and international criteria and matching with other global ranking systems was also discussed in the ACUK Conference of all Commonwealth universities and recognized as a *Good Practice* and indigenous model from a developing country experiencing tremendous growth of higher education sector since last decade. (Batool, ACUK Conference, Kingston, 2012). However, it is considered to be dissimilar to other global ranking in terms of bodies carrying out the rankings which are independent third parties or media groups etc in other cases but funding body, HEC itself in case of Pakistan that needs to be revisited to avoid conflict of interest.

Rankings can be fairly considered as one of the outcomes of increased globalization leading towards improved quality of higher education across borders with more focused efforts of universities on improved performance to achieve better reflections in the global ranking systems. One of the added benefit of these rankings is also about identifying the weaknesses and strengths of the HEI in the context of global competitiveness and to improve further consequently. Therefore, accountability is also known as one of the key drivers of these rankings with ultimate goal of achieving excellence in higher education and to bring the HEIs at par with global standards.

Quality Universities as Engines for Socioeconomic Development

Although, situation varies among countries and various trends have been observed in establishing the policy framework for quality assurance in higher education because higher education has moved from "Elites to masses". Today, mostly in low income countries, between 25 and 45 percent of youth people enrol for higher education (*Human Development Report, WB, 2003*). Greater diversity of educational provisions is part of response to massive demand for

higher education and mobility of faculty, students and workforces across borders. Further, as universities are getting larger in size and specialized in scope therefore, their role has also become more diversified with more attention to match the needs of business and industry and to contribute more effectively in local, national and regional development being engines of socioeconomic development.

As a result of these factors, quality has gained equal importance along with increased access to higher education and needs to be focused area of attention in the modern era and new challenges of the education sector. It has become critically important to guarantee that the students are acquiring meaningful knowledge that may help to observe a better quality of life for societies. The quality of knowledge leads towards assuring that certain standards are met which are required to equip the graduates with technical skills, training, education, knowledge standards, competencies capacity, abilities and vision to survive in survive in a knowledge economies of tomorrow. Thus, an added role of a Quality Higher education system is now to build societies reflecting civic, social, ethical and cultural values without any biases and discriminations providing enabling environment to grow for enlightened communities and educated work force of future. The same is being realized by the countries like Pakistan and Bahrain having diversified portfolio but similar attention and efforts toward developing a quality higher education system. Increased number of universities covering gaps in access and more focus on improved quality of higher education being carried out by these universities to meet the global standards and providing equal opportunities to the graduates produced to secure jobs in the global market.

As far as Pakistan is concerned the annual budget of higher education is increased from 4.00 billion PKR to 91 Billion PKR in last decade. Tremendous efforts we made at the national level such as establishment of Federal Higher Education Commission at first place in 2003 and then establishment of two provincial Higher Education Commissions in Punjab and Sindh province in the current scenario of 18th amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan. The projects like PERN providing national level connectivity to all universities of the country, Digital Library with enormous access to online journals and other research resources,

Faculty Development Programmes with Foreign and Local PhD programmes, foreign scholarships and local scholarships programmes for graduates, shifting towards four years BS programmes at bachelor level etc. are all serious efforts being made to improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and research in the country to meet the challenges of globalization

and international competitiveness. Further, systematic development of QA Standards, processes and policies through QA Framework composed of both Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA) practices are at advance stage of execution in all universities as defied at early stage (Batool. Qureshi, 2007).

It is concluded from the above discussion, observations, concepts and definitions that responsibility for assuring the quality of provision in learning, teaching, research and maintenance of academic standards rests finally with the institutions themselves. However, a tripartite external QA body agency for monitoring and evaluation is recommendable to improve the efficiency of higher education systems as observed in case of Pakistan the Quality Assurance Agency(QAA)was established in 2005 as a project of HEC. Pakistan through development funds initially and later on it was shifted on recurring budget of the HEC and of universities subsequently to make an integral part of the universities(Batool. Rashid. Nishat, 2015). The QAA of HEC, Pakistan works through Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) as its functional units at the universities. However, the QAA established under HEC of Pakistan needs to be independent and free from administrative control of funding body; HEC like other models such as QAA-UK, TEQSA, Australia that was primarily AUQA and QAA-Scotland. The challenges of QA faced under influence of globalization are being dealt by such external and independent QA Agencies with little variance of structure in most of the countries.

Similarly, Bahrain is also making serious efforts towards higher education development to meet the global standards with capacity building through establishing specialized bodies. By referring to the annual report 2015(the future vision is to make Bahrain a hub for education in the GCC area. There has been a tremendous efforts to establish quality systems that will help Bahrain to meet the vision 2030."It also sustains the general orientation of enabling Bahrain to become a regional and international leader in education and training, motivating QQA and all its directorates and employees to achieve the highest possible levels of sustainability and development to enhance Bahrain's and Bahrainis' status in the region and worldwide. "

Since the beginning of Quality Review projects Survey in the year 2011-2012, part of the 'Programmes within-College Reviews', the DHR has scrutinized and distributed reports on 57 scholastic projects offered by 20 universities software engineering and IT and business administration . The appraisal comes to demonstrate that 40 programs got a "confidence" decision, 6 got a 'Limited Confidence' decision and 11 got a 'No Confidence' decision. It is worth mentioning that 16 of the 57 projects were

evaluated from January 2009 to October 2011. Looking at the reviews of the first and second audit stages demonstrates that 31% of projects (five projects) indicated enhanced execution, 63% (10 programs) kept up the same level of performance and one project showed lower performance.(National Authority for Qualifications & Quality Assurance of Education & Training, Annual Report)

It is clear from the above concluding report that globalization had an influx on the issue of quality. Globalization and the target to get Bahraini graduates to compete in the regional and international sphere motivated the government to establish bodies to enhance and develop the education sector. Furthermore, the Higher Education Council played a crucial role in supporting universities to comply with the quality standards. This is reflected in the statistics given earlier. Furthermore, accreditation is another face of quality where the kingdom of Bahrain –HEC is committed to examine educational institutions in Bahrain. "Accreditation is based on an inspection of the full range of the institution's provision, and evidence is required that the institution's management maintains acceptable standards and complies with its legal obligations and HEC licensing regulations during the period of accreditation."(Accreditation Handbook, Higher Education Council, 2015).

These bodies of scrutiny are essential to meet the globalization trend and to make Bahrain a better place for quality education. Now, there plans to affiliate with British and American universities to bring new modes of education to the country.(List of Universities in Bahrain –e Government portal)

CONCLUSION

The globalization has made tremendous change in the educational institutions and universities are being run and it has significantly affected the quality of education being imparted by these institutions. The universities are now serving as engines of socioeconomic development across countries with emerging roles in building up societies of modern age and the issues of wider divide between higher education systems of developed countries and underdeveloped countries is also being addressed to some extent if not fully. The Universities in the advanced countries are creating an impact on higher education systems of the underdeveloped countries by encouraging transnational education through cross boarder arrangements, off shore campuses, affiliations and networking etc. Hence overall quality of teaching, learning and research is being enhanced with greater competitiveness and improved quality of graduates being produced with better knowledge, skills and capabilities required for social and economic development. However, the need for Regulatory Frameworks, Accreditation, Reviews,

Assessments and other measures is required to be addressed timely with establishing and strengthening the respective professional bodies, in order to achieve the desired goals of globalization and Quality Assurance. Effective role of said professional, accrediting, and regulatory bodies is important to further strengthen the higher education sector

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