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Practices of Quality Enhancement Cells in Implementation of Quality Management

Trilogy in Universities of Islamabad

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Abstract



Higher Education Commission (HEC) has established quality enhancement cells (QECs) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Keeping in view the importance of QEC, this study aims to explore the initiatives taken by QECs in implementation of the components of quality management trilogy; identify the problems faced by QECs in implementing the quality management trilogy; and determine the efforts of QECs in improving the university ranking. Sample of the study consists of Directors of twelve QECs, one hundred and forty-four Head of the Departments (HODs) and one hundred and forty-four QEC representatives. QEC directors were selected through universal sampling technique. Stratified random sampling technique was used to collect data from HODs and QEC representatives. Close-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from HODs and QEC Representatives while the directors of QECs were interviewed. Thematic analysis was done to analyse the qualitative data whereas quantitative data were analysed by calculating percentages through SPSS version 21. The findings of the study show that QECs are implementing quality management trilogy but still lack the focus on all aspects of quality due to limited resources and communication gaps between QECs and the departments.

Keywords: Quality Enhancement Cell, Quality Management, Quality Improvement, Quality Control, Higher Education

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are considered a source to increase the knowledge and drive economy of the country. Quality in HEIs has been an unending process and is linked with the social, political and economic factors. In order to assess the emerging global needs and challenges, the quality in higher education is vital. The quality in HEIs should be based on international standards of education (Al-Amri, 2012). Developing countries are facing problems of quality education in HEIs. Pakistan is one among these developing countries, but it is struggling to improve the quality of education (Shah, 2016). For this purpose, the government of Pakistan has established Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. It has also established QAC and QECs in universities to improve the quality in higher education (Usmani, suryia, shammot, & zamil, 2012).

According to Batool and Qureshi (2010), QAA focuses on nine principles which are implemented in all the developed countries for a quality education in HEIs. These principles include; students focus, leadership commitment, employees' participation, focus on quality assurance, evidence-based decision making, incessant improvement in quality, autonomy, transfer of skills, benefits and knowledge to stakeholders and systematic quality assurance process. The use of international principles and standards in HEIs in Pakistan shows that Pakistan is gradually achieving the quality standards in higher education. The stakeholders have also got some awareness and they also demand quality-based education (Butt, Mansoor & Shafiq, 2016). However, the economic survey of Pakistan (2018-2019) shows that despite of the efforts by the government of Pakistan, the quality of higher education in HEIs is very low and it does not meet the international standards.

According to the National Education policy (2017), the private sector universities have limited resources, but they are meeting the demands of stakeholders by providing the good standards of education. On the other hand, the public sector universities have good resources, but the quality

education is very low. The common challenges faced by HEIs in public sector are insufficient and up-to-date books in libraries, unequipped laboratories, lack of funds, lack of communication among policy makers and curriculum designers and lack of teachers' training for professional development (Dilsahd & Iqbal, 2012). Therefore, public universities are not contributing enough to the educational, economic and social development of the country (Hassan, 2016). The students graduated from these universities get rare chances to go to foreign universities for higher education (Gobind, Herani, Saleem & Advani, 2015). Considering the importance of quality in higher education, the quality management and the quality assurance agencies in Pakistan need to improve their efforts.

For quality enhancement, the scholars like Edward Deming and Philip Crosby have provided quality management strategies, but Joseph Juran (1989) has given the most appropriate method linked with the process of QA. The quality trilogy based on three components; quality planning, quality control and quality improvement. According to the quality trilogy, the top-management plays its effective role in quality planning, the middle management efforts for the implementation of plans and policies and the top-management conducts audits for quality control. The audit team identifies strong and deficient areas and takes steps to overcome deficiencies. The previous researches conducted in his area emphasized the implementation of the HEC quality assurance principles and guidelines, while this study focuses particularly on the practices of QECs in implementing the quality trilogy to evaluate the performance of QECs in quality enhancement.

Statement of the Problem

HEIs are one among of the most important aspects of the development of a country. They aim to develop the economy through standard education. QECs are the central figure in HEIs. They work under HEC with the purpose to assure and enhance quality in education. The previous studies emphasized on the implementation of the guidelines of HEC to improve the quality of education, while this study focuses on the efforts of QECs in implementing the quality trilogy to improve the quality in education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the efforts of QECs in implementation of quality management trilogy in public universities of Islamabad
2. To sort out the problems faced by QECs in implementation of quality management trilogy
3. To determine the role of QECs in rank enhancement of University

Research Questions

1. What is the performance of quality enhancements cells in implementing quality trilogy in quality assurance and enhancement practices?
2. What are the issues faced by quality enhancement cells in implementation of quality trilogy in departments?
3. How are quality enhancement cells playing their role in rank enhancement of Universities?

Significance of the Study

The study is conducted to evaluate the performance of QECs in implementing the quality management trilogy so the results may provide the baseline to the policy makers of HEC and QEC directors to revise their planning concerning the requirements and current conditions of universities. The study may also be helpful for QEC representatives as they can get involve in quality planning process of QEC. The students may also be the beneficiaries of the study as the QEC directors may revise their plans based on the needs and demands of the students.

Literature Review

The word "quality" has been defined differently by different scholars. In HEIs, the word quality means to provide education according to predefined standards (Abusa, 2011). According to Bergman and Klefsjo (2004) quality means having a focused input in HEIs with the purpose to achieve excellent outcome. In this study, the word quality is taken as a concept which the universities ensure, maintain and improve in the academic progress. Quality assurance and improvement have also become the major concern of public HEIs due to increasing number of institutions, accountability to stakeholders and human resource improvement. (Nadim, Al-Hina, & Ajmal, 2016; Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004). It is mentioned in Economic Survey of Pakistan (2018-2019) that due to the changing demands and accountability to stakeholders and government, the policy makers also focus on the quality education.

Quality assurance

Literature demonstrates that the institutional liability leads towards two main approaches; quality assurance and quality enhancement (Hussain, 2011). Quality assurance is a process of managing quality thorough proper monitoring of the task to meet the set standards (Abebe, 2014). Quality assurance and quality management have been used interchangeably for managing quality (Waheed, 2013; Nikolus, 2002). In relation to quality in education, the term quality assurance comprises all the process and actions that are meant to ensure the progress and enrichment of quality. In HEIs, quality assurance has three main purposes; control, accountability and improvement.

Quality control is a process of maintaining check and balance on quality functioning programs in relation to national and international standards. In past, mostly the educational institutions were public and the element of quality was less important, but after the polarization, this element has got much importance. In present, it is required form HEIs to develop processes to make certain programs and institutions which can produce quality education and meet the demands of stakeholders and government (Hussain, 2011). The HEIs are also accountable to meet the requirements of stakeholders and satisfy them about the quality of programs being offered to them. HEIs are accountable for the resources receiving from students, government and society (Raouf & Akhtar, 2008).

The desirable stage of quality assurance is quality improvement, where different steps have been taken to development goals, objectives, plans and policies. Audits are conducted regularly. The deficient areas are highlighted and steps are taken to improve the deficiencies (Raouf & Akhtar, 2008).

Quality Enhancement

The second major approach of quality management is quality enhancement which involves an emphasis of continuous improvement by the implementation of sound practices (Abebe, 2014). Quality enhancement emphasizes on the improvement of internal environment to satisfy the internal and external stakeholders (Rana, 2009). The approaches of quality enhancement give an opportunity to students to evaluate the performance of operating programs (Biggs, 2003).

The practices of quality assurance derive the strategies of quality enhancement as these practices provide the results of the operating programs with strength and weaknesses in order to enhance the excellence of teaching learning in HEIs (Abebe, 2014). Similarly, quality enhancement approaches focus on improving communication between the departments and accreditation bodies. Based on the requirements of the internal stakeholders instead of imposing the external practices, the quality enhancement approaches focus on involving departmental staff in evaluation of the performance of the teaching learning programs. Diverse strategies are used to evaluate the performance including, teachers' evaluation Performa, students' evaluation Performa, course evaluation, peer review and self-evaluation (Hussain, 2011).

Quality Assurance programs in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the rise in the number of public and private universities and escalation of different disciplines has created serious issues in the domain of quality. The HEIs in Pakistan are not able to meet the requirements of national and international standards of quality education. HEC has taken various initiatives to ensure and maintain the quality of HEIs by establishing QAA and QECs (Irshad, 2012).

HEC has established guidelines and measures for QECs for evaluation of teaching learning programs. QECs work for quality assurance and conduct audit to check, maintain and improve internal quality condition. QECs review academic affiliation with other institutions to provide effective management and improve educational process. QECs focus on the development of qualification framework and promote public confidence regarding the quality degree programs. With the purpose to provide up-to-date content, it evaluates the quality of curriculum and enriches the skills of employees to develop competencies among the students, so that they can meet the educational standards (Irshad, 2012).

QECs demand the departments to develop Self-Assessment Report (SAR) focusing on standards, mission, objectives and outcomes of the programs; design and organization of curriculum; infrastructure as laboratory, libraries and computing facilities; guidance and mentoring to students; the process for quality control and the evaluation of faculty members. Departments develop SAR based on these standards and send it to QEC for approval. QECs conduct audit in departments for

monitoring the implementation progress of SAR. The accreditation staff compares the programs standards with departmental performance and highlights the strong and weak areas. The weaknesses are identified and suggestions are provided for the improvement of deficiencies (Hussain, 2011).

According to Gift and Bell-Hutchinson (2007), the departments implement the suggestions provided by QECs and the results are positive in improving the quality of teaching and learning. QECs emphasize on enhancing the quality of students' learning (Harvey & Newton, 2005). Despite of the major contribution of QECs in achieving quality education, a number of studies regard it as irrelevant, useless and mere wastage of time that puts an extra burden on departments, does not bring any fundamental changes in improving the quality education (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Hodgson & Whalley, 2007; D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005).

Quality in HEIs in Pakistan

QECs are working in HEIs but still the quality progress of universities does not meet the national and international standards. According to Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) world ranking (2019) none of the Pakistani universities ranked in top 100 universities of the world. The students studying in Pakistani universities face different challenges in competing international standards. They are unable even to get admission in foreign universities (Batool & Qureshi, 2010). Public universities do not get good status in producing the hub of knowledge instead of having resources as compared to private universities (Shah, 2016). Major problems that cause obstacles in achieving quality education are: the absence of communication among officials, lack of professional and trained members, underdeveloped research culture, political influence on education system, governance problems, lack of quality assurance process and inadequate resources. In this scenario, the policy makers need to develop a system focusing on democratic leadership, provide resources and facilitate institutions in capacity building (Hassan, 2016). The developed and developing countries have a proper system of quality management and they consider the human resource more valuable than material. Therefore, quality management through proper planning, control and enhancement is vital for achieving excellent outcomes (Hassan, 2016; Naixia, 2011). The father of quality management trilogy introduced three universal processes for quality management; quality planning, quality control and quality improvement (Neyestani, 2017). According to quality management trilogy, the first initiative is to set clear aim, goals and standard and then develop a relationship between standards and outcomes through managerial processes. The managerial processes include quality planning, quality control and quality improvement are also known as Juran's quality trilogy (Neyestani, 2017).

In quality planning, the leaders develop quality plans and policies, identify the needs of students, develop process and procedures and then transfer the plans into actions. In quality control, the staff and middle management implement the plans in their departments and the accreditation bodies conduct audit to check the quality progress. In quality improvement, the accreditation bodies identify gaps between the set standards and progress of the concern department and provide solutions (Juran & Godfrey, 1999). The quality trilogy is much related with the quality assurance process of QECs. Therefore, the focus of this research is to evaluate the performance of QEC in implementing quality management trilogy in public universities of Islamabad.

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive and mixed method approach was applied. The concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was used to cross verify the data obtained from QEC directors.

In the first phase, the qualitative paradigm (semi structured interviews from QEC directors) was use, while in the second phase, the quantitative paradigm (close-ended questionnaires from HODs and QEC representatives) was used. The population of the study consisted of QEC directors, HODs and QEC representatives from 12 public universities of Islamabad. 12 directors, 144 HODs and 144 QEC representatives were selected. There were 12 directors of QEC in 12 public universities therefore; universal sampling technique was used to collect data from the directors of QECs. HODs and QEC representatives were selected through stratified random sampling technique. The researcher obtained permission from the directors, HODs and QEC representatives. The instruments used for data collection were self-developed based on the literature and quality management trilogy, therefore were validated by pilot testing. According to Treece and Treece (1982), 10% sample is used for pilot testing. Therefore, 16 HODs and 16 QEC representatives form 4 public universities International Islamic university Islamabad (IIUI) National University of Modern Language (NUML), National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Quaid- E- Azam (QAU) were selected for pilot

testing. Thematic analysis was done to evaluate the qualitative data. Quantitative data was analysed through calculation of percentages.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is classified into two parts; qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data were based on the analysis of the responses obtained from QECs directors. Themes were generated to analyse the data obtained through interviews. Quantitative data were based on closed-ended questionnaires used for HODs and QEC representatives. The analysis is done through calculating percentages using SPSS version 21.

Qualitative analysis

Quality Planning

It is analysed from the responses of the participants that in quality planning QECs use specific methods such as formulation of quality goals, quality calendar and self-assessment-report (SAR), consultation with faculty members, identification and responding to students' needs.

QECs develop quality goals based on the criteria provided by HEC and quality objectives according to the needs and requirements of students and stakeholders. QECs demand the departments to make SAR considering the standards such as, program aim, objectives, product, curriculum review, library, computer, laboratory counselling and advising facilities, control for quality process and faculty and institutional support. The departments develop SAR with details of all event and activities of quality assurance and improvement process. QECs develop quality calendar which includes the details of quality assurance process and practices with date and deadlines. QECs share quality calendar with departments to provide feedback.

According to the participants, faculty members have limited role in quality planning process. They develop plans within the department. The practices of quality assurance are planned by the team of QEC. In quality assurance process, QECs use evaluation Performa for identification of students' needs which are used in the next planning process.

Quality Control

For the purpose of quality control, QECs develop quality calendar as a tool which provides baseline to the quality assurance practices. QECs disseminate information related to quality plans through websites and hardcopies. In response to QEC plans, departments develop SAR within given time and submit the report to QECs for feedback. QECs check the SAR, approve it, and conduct audits every semester or annually in the departments following quality calendar in order to check the progress of SAR implementation. QECs use evaluation Performa for students about the quality of academic and non-academic programs and evaluate the performance of faculty members against the standards provided in SAR. QECs visit the departments and faculty members give presentation about the quality of their performance against the standards. QECs take interviews from students to evaluate the performance of faculty members.

QECs generate a report based on the identified strengths and weaknesses in performance and send it to department with suggestion and deadline to overcome the deficiencies. QECs organize meetings with concerned faculty members and provide them useful suggestions to rectify the deficiencies. QECs also provide resources and training to faculty members for the improvement of deficient areas.

Few of QECs also use academic audit manual based on the criteria of HEC and external accreditation bodies in order to conduct mock audits. Following the academic audit manual, the deficient areas are identified and rectified timely.

Quality Improvement

QECs conduct audits in the departments and highlight deficient areas through quality assurance practices. QECs send report to the department with useful suggestion to overcome deficiencies and require the departments to provide report on actions taken for the improvement. In response to the QECs' demand, departments make a report based on three columns including deficiencies, reasons and action taken for improvement and resources for the improvement. The departments send the report to QEC and demand resources. QECs request the top-management to provide resources to department for working on the identified deficiencies.

Most of the QECs form a team for a short period of time which ends at the completion of project, based on the nature of problem. The team is provided with sufficient resources and training to work in the respective departments on specific identified problem.

Problems in Implementation of Quality Trilogy

QECs share quality calendar with departments to cross verify it. QECs do not make quality calendar without taking feedback from departments and cooperate if the departments need any change in time and date of audits. QECs face problems in quality planning while arranging meetings with faulty members to discuss quality calendar.

QECs face hurdles in quality control because of insufficient resources. QECs do not conduct audit in every semester with inadequate resources and limited staff. Lack of co-operation from departments is another major problem faced by QECs as the departments do not fill Performa on time and consider it a burden or extra work. According to one of the respondents, “departments waste most of time in reminding them to fill the Performa”. QECs also face problem in quality control due to lack of quality awareness as the stakeholders do not take quality and quality assurance practices as important as QECs do.

QECs face problems in quality improvement as they are not financially independent to implement quality assurance practices. Approval from the top-management takes time and becomes the cause in delayed implementation of plans.

Role of QECs in Rank Enhancement of Universities

QECs have a very major position in rank enhancement of universities as QECs facilitate the departments in all academic and non-academic tasks and maintain proper check and balance. QECs conduct quality assurance audits in departments, identify deficient areas and provide useful suggestions and resources for improvement. QECs report to HEC about the progress of departments and programs. QECs collect and compile the required data and apply for national and international ranking.

Quantitative analysis**Table 1***Role of QECs in quality planning*

| S. No | Statements | Percentages of HODs' responses | Percentages of QEC representatives |
|-------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Quality goals are established in quality planning after finding facts and figures | 77% HODs agreed | 64% QEC representatives agreed |
| 2 | Students' needs are identified in quality planning | 81% HODs agreed | 64% QEC representatives agreed |
| 3 | Faculty members are involved in quality planning | 87% HODs disagreed | 80% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 4 | QEC provides quality schedule with department for feedback | 79% HODs disagreed | 89% QEC representative disagreed |
| 5 | The quality plans of QEC are acceptable and implementable in the department | 63% HODs agreed | 64% QEC representatives agreed |
| 6 | The quality plans of QEC are helpful in enhancing quality of teaching and learning in department | 64% HODs agreed | 54% QEC representatives agreed |

Table 1 shows the responses of HODs and QEC representatives regarding the role of QECs in quality planning and the results indicate that QECs establish quality plans after finding facts and figures and students' needs. According to the participants, QECs do not engage departments in quality planning and do not provide quality schedule with the departments for feedback. However, the quality plans are acceptable and supportive in improving quality of programs in the departments.

Table 2*Practices of quality control by QEC in the departments*

| S. No | Statements | Percentages of HODs' responses | Percentages of QEC representatives |
|-------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 7 | QEC visits the department every semester to monitor quality progress during plans implementation | 85% HODs disagreed | 78% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 8 | Department provides positive response to QEC in | 84% HODs agreed | 76% QEC |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|------------------|------|------------------|-------------|
| | plans implementation | | | representatives | |
| 9 | QEC uses survey forms every semester | 87% disagreed | HODs | 74% disagreed | QEC |
| 10 | The faculty members fill survey forms of quality assurance on time | 76% HODs agreed | | 84% disagreed | respondents |
| 11 | The students fill survey forms of quality assurance on time | 71% HODs agreed | | 75% disagreed | QEC |
| 12 | QEC evaluates the performance of faculty members and compares it with quality goals | 61% HODs agreed | | 63% disagreed | QEC |
| 13 | QEC provides suggestions to the department to act on the deficient areas | 67% HODs agreed | | 60% disagreed | QEC |

Table 2 shows the responses of HODs and QEC representatives about the practices of QECs in quality control. The data shows that QECs do not visit the departments regularly to check quality improvement. There is contradiction in participants' responses as HODs respond that the departments provide cooperative response to QECs in executing plans and the teachers and students fill forms of quality assurance on time while QEC representatives disagreed about the statement. The HODs and QEC Representatives agreed that QECs check the performance of departments, evaluate it against quality goals and give feedback to the departments to take action to overcome deficient areas.

Table 3

Process of quality improvement by QEC in the departments

| S. No | Statement | Percentages of HODs' responses | Percentages of QEC representatives |
|-------|---|--------------------------------|--|
| 14 | Department identifies reasons for the improvement of deficient areas | 76% HODs agreed | 66% QEC representatives agreed |
| 15 | Department demands resources from QEC for the improvement of identified areas | 60% HODs agreed | 59% QEC representatives agreed |
| 16 | QEC provides resources for the improvement of deficient areas | 95% respondents disagreed | 90% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 17 | QEC builds a team to work on identified areas in the department | 76% disagreed | HODs 72% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 18 | QEC delivers training to the team to work on deficient areas | 71% disagreed | HODs 67% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 19 | QEC provides the team with resources to work on deficient areas | 80% disagreed | HODs 76% QEC representatives disagreed |
| 20 | QEC provides quality awareness to stakeholders | 86% disagreed | HODs 87% QEC representatives disagreed |

Table 2 shows the responses of HODs and QEC representatives regarding the performance of QECs in quality improvement. The HODs and QEC representatives responded that departments discover reasons to overcome the deficient areas and demand resources from the QECs, but the QECs do not provide resources and teams to departments to work on deficient areas. QECs do not provide quality awareness to employees for quality improvement purpose.

What are the main gaps in quality assurance process of the QEC in your opinion?

HODs and QEC representatives have identified deficiencies and gaps in the quality assurance performance of QECs. According to them, QECs do not use latest technology in their quality assurance practices. Most of the quality assurance practices are manual and they require accomplishing the task in a short span of time which over burdens the departments. HODs and QEC representatives reported that QECs follow the same quality calendar and rarely visit the departments to monitor quality progress. They viewed that QECs do not consult faculty members because it is not possible for them to get views of everyone but QEC representatives must be involved for departmental feedback. QECs have untrained staff and they are unable to implement quality assurance

practices effectively and take practical steps for improvement. Most of the QEC staff members are working as faculty members in the departments therefore they cannot focus on the QECs and departments at the same time. QECs are also failed to provide quality awareness to stakeholders.

What is the role of QEC in rank enhancement of the university?

According to HODs and QEC representatives, QECs are determining factors, but the departments are performing well in rank enhancement of universities. They reported that QECs do not have role in rank enhancement of universities. They are just wasting the time of the departments. QECs focus on collecting and compiling data just to keep record, and to show it to authorized bodies. They do not work solely for quality improvement or rank enhancement of universities.

Findings

From the analysis of the responses of QEC Directors, HODs and QEC representatives, the findings show that there are contradictions in participants' responses. According to QEC directors, they are struggling hard for quality enhancement, while HODs and QEC representatives said that departments are focusing more on quality improvement as compared to QECs.

According to the responses of QEC Directors, QECs develop quality plans after findings facts and figures and students' needs and then establish quality calendar to conduct audits in the department. The quality calendar is shared with the departments to obtain the feedback from them with the purpose to cross verify it with departmental activities. QECs cooperate with departments if they want any change in date and time. HODs and QEC representatives reported that QECs' plans are acceptable and helpful in enhancing progress of teaching learning process, but QECs do not share quality calendar with the department for feedback. They do not co-operate and ask the departments to accomplish task within given date. They use the same plans for longer period of time.

QEC directors reported that they do not involve faculty members in their planning process as it is difficult to get views from all faculty members. HODs and QEC representatives agreed that all the faculty members cannot be involved in planning process, but the QEC representatives must be involved in planning in order to get departmental feedback.

The findings from the responses of QEC Directors show that QECs use quality calendar, academic audit manual and survey form every semester or annually as tools for quality assurance process. QECs take step in implementation of quality assurance practices. QECs identify deficiencies and provide suggestions for the improvement and also take practical steps. They conduct the meetings with concerned faculty members and provide training and resources to them. However, according to HODs and QEC representatives, QECs rarely conduct audit in departments. They provide suggestions, but do not take practical steps to overcome deficiencies.

In view of QEC Directors, QECs provide teams to departments for working on deficiencies, but HODs and QEC representatives responded that QECs do not make any team. QECs provide suggestion for the improvement, and departments overcome the deficiencies.

QEC directors reported that they face problem in quality planning, as the departments do not provide time for meetings, which delays their plans implementation. There is contradiction in this statement, as in views of HODs and QEC representatives, QECs do not consult the departments for the development of quality schedule.

According to QEC directors, QECs face hurdles in quality control due to lack of resources and un-cooperative behaviour of department. They said that the faculty members take survey forms a burden on them. According to HODs, the departments cooperate in filling the quality assurance Performa, while QEC representatives responded that faculty members and students do not cooperate in filling survey forms on time. HODs and QEC representatives agreed that QECs have limited resources and untrained staff which affects their performance. QEC directors reported that departments do not take quality as important as QECs concern. According to HODs and QEC representatives, QECs are failed to provide quality awareness to stakeholders.

QEC Directors responded that QECs have dominant role in rank enhancement of universities as they facilitate departments in recognition of strength and weaknesses of the programs and provide suggestion to rectify deficiencies. QECs maintain proper check and balance on departments and apply for national and international rankings. In views of HODs and QEC representatives, the departments have significant role in rank enhancement of universities.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that the universities in Islamabad face different obstacles in the way of achieving quality. The QECs strive hard to achieve quality plans, quality control and quality improvement. They are also working for rank enhancement of the universities. The stakeholders, on the other hand, are not aware of the efforts or role of QECs. They do not take quality related matters seriously. The faculty members take the efforts of QECs for quality improvement as wastage of time. Moreover, the lack of resources, trained staff and the coordination between the departments and QECs are the major hurdles in the way of implementation of quality trilogy in public universities. Moreover, neither the plans of QECs for quality improvement are shared with the departments nor do the QEC representatives in different departments are included in the meetings. The consistent efforts by QECs and departments are needed to overcome the hurdles in way of practically implementing the quality trilogy in universities to raise and maintain the standard quality of education in Pakistan.

Conclusions

It is concluded from the findings that QECs are focusing on implementation of quality trilogy, but still lack effective implementation of the components of trilogy due to limited resources and communication gap with the departments. QECs do not share quality plans with the departments. QECs do not consult with departments about quality related shortcoming, and do not offer quality awareness to the stakeholders. The departments are not content with the role of QECs. According to them, instead of latest technology, QECs use manual work and Performa which takes a longer time to complete and hence overburdens the departments. Therefore, the departments do not cooperate with QECs and consider their audits as useless.

QECs do not conduct quality audits regularly due to limited staff. It is not possible to conduct audits in every department every semester with limited staff. The departments consider that faculty members in departments are struggling hard on their own to implement quality trilogy as compared to QECs. Therefore, they do not give priority to QECs quality assurance practices and SAR.

There is a communication gap between QECs and departments because of which they misinterpret each other. Quality cannot be enhanced only by QECs. The departments need to take responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement, and supportive QECs in completion of their plans. The quality can be improved if QECs are provided with trained staff and resources. The quality can also be enhanced if QECs minimize communication gap with departments and raise quality awareness.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are made based on the conclusion of the study:

1. QECs follow quality calendar for a long time. The quality calendar may be updated keeping in view the current situations and demands of stakeholders.
2. QECs do not share quality calendar with the departments for alignment with departmental activities and events. It is recommended that quality calendar may be shared with departments to obtain feedback.
3. QEC Representatives are not consulted in QECs quality planning. They may be involved in QECs quality planning.
4. QECs do not conduct quality assurance audits in departments regularly. It is suggested that QECs may conduct every semester to check the quality progress in the departments with the purpose improve quality in the departments.
5. QECs do not visit the departments every semester because of the limited number of staffs. Therefore, QECs may be provided with larger and trained staff for effective and regular implementation of quality plans.
6. Departments do not cooperate with QECs in filling survey forms of quality assurance on time. It is recommended that departments may provide positive response to QECs in filling forms on time so that QECs can implement the tasks without any delay.
7. The quality assurance practices by QECs are manual which takes time to complete. It also overburdens the departments. Latest technology may be used in quality assurance practices to save time of both QECs and departments.
8. QECs do not form a team to improve deficient areas in departments. QECs may form a team of experts based on the nature of problems with the purpose to improve deficiencies.

9. QECs may conduct audits in departments based on the standards of external reviews so that the deficient areas may be improved before external audits.
10. QEC Representatives are overburdened with the work load from departments and QECs. It is recommended that each faculty should have professionals who can deal only quality assurance related issues.
11. QECs' representatives are also working as faculty members in departments. It is suggested that QECs staff should not be given the additional charge so that they may focus on their tasks related to QEC only.
12. Conferences, meetings and seminars may be organized by QECs to provide quality awareness and minimize communication gap.
13. Lack of resources makes QECs and departments unable to enhance quality of education. Government of Pakistan may provide resources by investing more on education sector in order to meet the national and international standards.

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