

Quality registry for improving the quality and relevance of higher education in Pakistan

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This short paper presents the possibility of establishing a ‘quality registry’ for higher education in Pakistan. It presents a tentative list of variables for measuring the structural indicators, process indicators, and the results and outcomes of higher education. Further research, planning and discussion are needed to establish a central quality registry for higher education in Pakistan, as this article only highlights the possibility, and usage of it.

Background:

The total number of students at university level in Pakistan was 650 in 1947, while it is now over 350,000 (Hoodbhoy 1998). At graduate and post-graduate level, there are several government and private universities in each city. There are many colleges that provide vocational or skill-based technical education as well. It is hard to get admission in the government institutes since they have a very low fee, thus attracting a large number of applicants. When it comes to universities, there is no set standard that divides government universities and private universities according to the quality of their education. Some private universities are among the top ranking business and economics institutes in Asia and the Pacific¹ while some government /semi government universities, like NCA², are also considered high-ranking universities. NCA is ranked as the best arts institute in Pakistan by HEC³.

Since it is easier to get admission into most private universities, they are filled with students whose parents can afford the tuition fees. There is a certain ‘economic class’ of students from each private institute depending on the tuition

¹ LUMS’ MBA programme, e.g., is ranked 18th in Asia according to www.asiaweek.com and is ranked as the best institute for Business studies in Pakistan according to Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (www.hec.gov.pk).

² National College of Arts

³ Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. (www.hec.gov.pk)

fees. In government universities, there is no such distinction, since the admission is (generally) strictly merit based. In this way, getting an admission in a good government university is considered a merit itself.

The higher education in Pakistan is not able to provide a promising career to young people. Up to 90 % migrate to the West to earn or settle permanently after graduation (Malik 1997, 126). Thousands of Pakistani students are studying in Sweden, and in 2008 approximately 6,000 students applied for a student visa while the number was 2,800 in 2007 (Tasleem 2008).

Almost all the decisions in the field of education and policy are made without any scientific data, evidence, or documentation; In fact the policy makers' own experiences, politics, and observations usually decide the policy.

Some important considerations in this discussion are:

- The students spend time and money on education in Pakistan, and that is why it is necessary to know the relevance and quality of education they receive.
- The students are not aware that jobs are not available for many academic disciplines; that is why it is necessary to evaluate whether it is relevant to spend time and money on an education that only leads to unemployment or to a flight out of the country.
- The students, who do find jobs, have to compete with others, and it is necessary to evaluate which institute is producing better students than the others, and how? So that an equal/similar quality of education can be provided at all institutes.
- Some students continue to study abroad, or work in international companies, which is why it is necessary to evaluate whether the education they received in Pakistan is comparable to the level of competence in other countries.

Quality Registry:

I define quality registry for the purpose at hand as a systematic, regular, and continuous data collection from students, administrators, and teachers from all the higher educational institutes in Pakistan. The data should be held in a central database.

A 'quality registry' consists of important factors like selection, measures, and outcomes. The factors to measure are all the indicators of quality education and educational attainment, and outcomes are the eventual skills the students acquire, the way they use those skills in lives, and their satisfaction.

In order to establish quality registry, to analyze the relationships, and to see what can be improved, the data for the following variables need to be collected. The information from current students and future should be regularly collected by online questionnaires, while for the other structure variables and the process variables, it should be reported regularly by teachers and administrators of each institute.

A: Process variables:

1. How many hours of teaching does a teacher do for a course?
2. How many assignments/exams does a teacher evaluate for a course?
3. What is the admission criterion at each institute?
4. How is the competition for admission in each institute?
5. How is the relationship between students and teachers?
6. Is there any sort of discrimination over gender or over socio-economic status of the student?
7. Do students learn what they were supposed to learn as the objectives of the course?
8. Do the students have a chance to comment on the teaching methodology?
9. Do the students have a chance to express any concerns to the teachers?
10. How do the students rate the teacher?
11. How do the students rate the learning outcome from each course?
12. What proportion of students passes the exam for every course?
13. What proportion of students complete the degree in due time?
14. Do the students know where they could apply for jobs after their education finishes?
15. What is the amount of required reading for every course at every institute?

B: Structure variables:

1. What is the student-teacher ratio in every department of every higher education institute in Pakistan?
2. What equipment/facilities does every institute has? (Projectors, air-conditioned classrooms, clean drinkable water, clean toilets, student canteen, availability of required books in libraries, etc.)

C: Results/Outcome variables:

1. Were the students satisfied with the quality of education they received?
2. Were the students satisfied with the course reading material/books, etc.?
3. Were the students satisfied with the assessment methods (exams, assignments, presentations, etc)?
4. Were the students satisfied with their relationship with the teachers and department administration?
5. Where do the students work after studies?
6. Do the students even find any jobs related to what they learned and studied at the university?
7. How much did the students learn? (Based on self-reported answer)
8. Were the students able to work at good firms/companies/organizations?
9. Do the students think they are able to study further at a Ph.D. level, if they want to?
10. How did the education help them in their career later on in life?
11. Were they able to apply the knowledge in field that they learned at the university?
12. Do they have the updated knowledge from the university, or do they need to update themselves while working?
13. Did the students find the education relevant for their career?
14. Do the students find the amount of knowledge acquired at the university justified in terms of the time spent on it?
15. To what extent do they utilize the knowledge they learned in education?

Discussion:

Many of the indicators/variables need to be measured on regular basis by online self-reported questionnaires. The data should be collected from each higher education institute in Pakistan. The outcomes will be gathered from students by asking them to fill out the online self-reported questionnaires. The results should be published, and a report with comparison between different institutes should be sent to all the institutes in Pakistan.

The main objective of this quality registry is to improve the quality of education, increase the participation in relevant education and vice versa, and assess the outcomes/results.

There is a need for the combination of process variables and the outcomes variables, so that we get the knowledge about the relationship between the quality and relevance of education and the result/outcome of the formal higher education.

Based on the variables I have listed above, it will be possible to know ‘if we do what we want to do’, and ‘if we do what we think we do’. The relationship between process and structure variables with the results/outcome variables will inform us as to how better decisions can be made, and what changes need to be initiated in order to get better results.

The most important factors in considering this quality registry are the attitude of the institutes, the teachers, administrators, as well as the students who have to provide feedback after they complete their education. The administration of the educational institutes and the teachers need to realize that this is not a clever way to find ways to criticize them or check their output. It is instead a systematic way for improvement. Improvement cannot come on its own; it needs transparency and constant monitoring. Similarly, the students who have finished their studies need to realize that their feedback will help change the education system to the better. They may not reap the benefit of this whole exercise in any way, but the future students will. As for the students who are studying, they need to realize that this is not a chance to criticize the teachers, or the institute, instead it is a chance to express their opinions, which will eventually be useful for the betterment of future students and the higher educational system as a whole.

This paper presented the idea of a quality registry along with the tentative protocol for higher education in Pakistan. The protocol should be improved, and in order for operation of the registry, a database needs to be constructed along with the necessary ICT tools.

References:

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