

Impact of programme evaluation through self-assessment in higher education institutions in Pakistan

Muhammad AbdulWahid Usmani*, King Saud University, P. O. Box 2454, Riyadh 11451, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Suraiya Khatoon, Institute of Business Administration, University of Karachi, University Rd, Karachi 75270, Pakistan

Suggested Citation:

Usmani M. A. W. & Khatoon S. (2018). Impact of programme evaluation through self-assessment in higher education institutions in Pakistan. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*. 8(4), 134–141.

Received from April 21, 2018; revised from July 18, 2018; accepted from October 1, 2018.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc.Prof.Dr. Deniz Ozcan, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey.

©2018 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Quality assurance in higher education in Pakistan was formally initiated when Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established under Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The current study is a descriptive study which was conducted to review the impact of *programme evaluation* on Pakistani universities. Data available with QAA, Pakistan, Self-Assessment Report available for the programmes and field notes were used as tool in this study. Programme evaluation reports were graded on a rubric in order to rank departments within a university. The study shows that quality assurance mechanism has got its firm roots at micro level, that is, at university level in Pakistan under the supervision of QAA of Pakistan. The study would be of interest for all educationists as it shows both the role of QAA, Pakistan and the role of quality enhancement cells whose combined efforts have resulted into a systematic programme evaluation in Pakistani universities.

Keywords: Programme evaluation, self-assessment, learning outcomes, feedback.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Muhammad AbdulWahid Usmani**, King Saud University, P. O. Box 2454, Riyadh 11451, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

E-mail address: awusmani@yahoo.com / Tel.: +9661-46-70-000

1. Introduction

1.1. Programme evaluation

Generally, the term programme evaluation refers to the systematic procedure of assessing the quality of a programme with a purpose to identify the areas for improvement. Bracke, Maybee and Weiner (2016) presents the view point of Patton (2002, p. 148) in defining the programme evaluation as a structured mechanism to estimate the efficacy of the programme focusing on how well the programme is successful in attaining its predefined outcomes.

The method of the programme evaluation can vary depending upon the purpose and objectives of the evaluation. If it is the impact evaluation, it would measure the extent to which the programme is effective in meeting the desired requirements of its target population and it provides the findings that help the programme providers to decide if the programme is worth continuing or not if it has brought no changes to the target population (Newcomer, 2015, p. 137).

Posavac explains programme evaluation at various levels. For example, at the very basic level, the programme evaluation is a common, everyday practice executed to evaluate one's own activities in terms of their effectiveness like tasting food before serving. At a deeper level, it is defined as a 'methodology' that provides the in-depth analysis of the usefulness of a service or product. As the programme evaluation is an activity carried out by a team and not individuals, its parameters are also debatable among various stakeholders like programme providers, evaluators, target population and funding agencies and so on. The objectives and designs of the evaluation may vary, but usually the various forms of evaluation have one thing in common that they aim to identify the true worth of a programme (Posavac, 2016, pp. 1–3).

Goertler (2017) discusses in detail the various levels of programme evaluation as micro, meso and macro presented by Gruba and co-workers. The most important element of the programme evaluation approach that they highlight is 'the focus on providing programmes with evidences required for decision making and programme improvements' (Gruba, Cardenas-Claros, Suvorov & Rick, 2016).

Paz-Ybarnegaray and Douthwaite suggest that the implementation of 'Outcomes Evidencing' at regular intervals as one of the effective methods of programme evaluation to estimate the level of contribution in terms of the impact of the programme (Paz-Ybarnegaray & Douthwaite, 2017)

Bray (2008) suggests programme evaluation as an effective tool of quality assurance that helps the degree awarding institutions improve the academic quality. Similarly, some other evaluators are also of the opinion that the programme evaluation can be considered as a systematic or scientific procedure to evaluate the programme organisation, delivery and its outcomes (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short, Hennessy, & Campbell, 1996).

1.2. Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a very common practice to estimate students' academic progress in disciplines like medical and allied health sciences. Self-assessment can be of an individual, of a programme, of a department or of an entire organisation. Programme self-assessment refers to the set of systems or procedures designed to measure the programme progress in terms of attaining the achievements against a certain model or benchmark with a purpose of continuous improvement (Peter Hillman, 1994). Self-assessment provides the assessor with the opportunity to reflect upon their own performance if it is satisfactory or not (Artzt, Armour-Thomas, Curcio & Gurl, 2015).

Programme self-assessment and programme evaluation are interconnected with each other. Self-assessment intends to show the current status of its compliance to the prescribed criteria so as to identify the areas for improvement. It helps the assessor to view the degree to which the programmes

or individuals have attained the compliance to the set requirements whereas the programme evaluation provides the evaluation of its overall progress in meeting the set objectives and outcomes so as to determine its value for future decision-making and to rating the quality of the programme in terms of its effectiveness to the users or stakeholders (Andrade, 2007).

Measuring the impact of quality on higher education has always been a major concern of the education providers and researchers. Measuring tools and models may vary but the overall objective of the impact assessment studies has been more or less the same to identify areas for improvement through continuous process of review, assessment and evaluations (Dattey, Westerheijden & Hofman, 2017).

With so much emphasis on measuring the quality and impact of teaching and learning, the higher education providers, whether it be the degree awarding institutes or funding agencies, and the users, whether it be the students or job market, need categorical information about the quality of the services and products they are providing or receiving so that they can fix the benchmark and market their best performances. To gather such information, the methods and tools of quality assurance need to be adapted and inspected in light of the changing quality assurance (QA) processes and systems such that performance indicators based on true quality focus can be measured (Coates, 2005).

1.3. Self-Assessment Report in Pakistani context

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan established Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) in a total of 87 public and private sector universities and degree-awarding institutes. These QECs were established in different phases started from 2006 and continued till 2012. After necessary trainings and awareness sessions on QA policies, these QECs were given the task to conduct the programme evaluation of their respective academic programmes using the Self-Assessment Model prescribed by the HEC, Pakistan (Usmani, Suraiya, Shamot, & Zamil, 2010). The HEC Self-Assessment Model is based on eight criteria and each criterion has a set of standards and sub-standards. HEC has made it mandatory for all QECs to submit the Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) of each degree and diploma programme stating clearly the compliance status against each criterion, standard and sub-standard along with documentary evidences supporting the claim. Not only this, but it was also required to get the SAR assessed by the Assessment Team including external subject expert to validate the report findings and submit the Assessment Team observations along with the implementation plan summary based on the following five heads (Usmani & Suraiya, 2015):

1. Problems identified
2. Suggested rectification
3. Implementation date
4. Responsible body
5. Resources needed

Initially, when QECs started evaluating their programmes using the prescribed model, they had to face great deal of resistance and difficulties from the management and the faculty who were involved in the programme development and implementation mainly because it was considered sufficient that the programme was approved by the designated university statutory bodies, so there was no need of assessing whether it was in compliance with the regulatory bodies' requirements which were prescribed after the establishment of the QAA-HEC.

The current study is a descriptive study conducted to review the impact of programme evaluation on Pakistani universities.

2. Methodology

Although it took time to change the mind sets of the faculty and university management involved in the development of the programmes and their implementation convincing them about the usefulness of the self-assessment exercise; once they got involved into it and witnessed the drastic changes, they began to realise the significance of the model and its impact. Besides, in order to equip the Programme Teams, comprising the faculty and senior management, with required skills to perform this task, they were given necessary trainings on how to write the SAR and how to design and review the programme vision, mission, objectives and outcomes with multiple hands on sessions (Usmani & Suraiya, 2015).

QAA-HEC calls Progress Review Meeting of all QECs phase wise on quarterly basis, in which they are required to present and submit the self-assessment implementation status of each programme categorically along with the Assessment Team findings called implementation plan summary. The data available with QAA, Pakistan in the form of programme SARs, field notes and Assessment Team findings collected from 47 out of 87 universities were used as the tool/basis to conduct the current impact study.

3. Impact of programme evaluation

The analysis of the data received from 47 universities shows unanimously that the impacts of the implementation of QA initiative through programme evaluation on Pakistani higher education institutes' performances are large in number and their effect is far reaching.

These impacts have been discussed in the following sub-headings

3.1. Impact on Programme Structure

First, the programme evaluation provided universities with a guideline to structure their programmes being offered at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels on a standardised format. Beginning with the programme vision, mission, objectives and outcomes, the programmes either did not have these elements documented properly or if they were there, they were not operational. Second, the link or alignment was missing at various levels such as between the programme mission and department and the organisation mission; between programme mission and programme objectives; between programme objectives and outcomes. There were no set criteria at department or institutional level for the inclusion or exclusion of a course in a programme. The programme was designed based on assumptions on individuals' opinions. There was no structured, approved mechanism to design and evaluate a programme. This exercise helped the programme developers and providers to fill the gap between what was being claimed and what was being practiced.

Similarly, the programme objectives which were submitted by the programme teams responsible to prepare the SARs for their respective programmes were too general and vague. First, they were not specific and measurable. Second, they did not focus on various learning domains—mainly they addressed lower-order skills and ignored the higher-order skills or hardly addressed them. The most important thing was that the programme teams were required to provide the Programme Objectives Assessment in which they were required to provide assessment tool for each objective with a timeline to assess them. Besides, the programme teams were also required to link programme objectives with programme outcomes so as to check the level of contribution of programme outcomes to programme objectives whether it contributes substantially or moderately or does not contribute at all. Finally, they were also required to map courses with the programme outcomes. As the SAR findings were validated by the Assessment Team including external subject experts, they made sure that these elements were not just documented but were operational as well. As a result, this entire exercise made the faculty and management realise the importance and sensitivity of this document.

Another significant change observed through this practice is that this structured programme evaluation led them think for the justification of the presence of each course in the programme. There were courses for which no programme objective and outcome was documented in programme structure. Thus, it helped them set inclusion and exclusion criterion for each course based on programme outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative summary of self-assessment impacts on programme structure

| No. | Before programme evaluation through self-assessment | After programme evaluation through self-assessment |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | Programme vision and mission were not stated separately. The difference between vision and mission was not clear to many programme developers | They learnt the basic difference between vision and mission and they revised them as per the programme requirements |
| 2 | Programme objectives and programme outcomes were treated as the same | Programme objectives and programme outcomes were separated and revised |
| 3 | There was little alignment seen among programme vision, mission, objectives and outcomes. There was little alignment seen between programme mission and institution mission | Alignment was developed at each level. Each of these elements was seen holistically to make the whole |
| 4 | Courses were included in the programme without any justification and they were not mapped with programme outcomes | Criterion for course inclusion and exclusion was set. Courses were justified by designing outcomes for each |
| 5 | Most of the things listed above were observed at documented level merely and not operational at programme and institutional levels | Rigorous academic audits were done to make them operational involving all concerned stakeholders at programme and institutional levels |

3.2. Impact on feedback mechanism

Programme evaluation through self-assessment also brought great impact on the need of a structured, continuous feedback mechanism. Before implementing self-assessment practices, there was no organised and regular system to collect feedback from graduating seniors, alumni and employers. Only teachers and courses were evaluated by students in a very monotonous way but with the help of this model, universities felt the need to seek the feedback from these stakeholders and revised the programmes and courses in the light of the analysis for example one university started Experiential Learning Programme after collecting alumni feedback as they felt the need of bridging the gap between academia and market instead of sending graduates directly into the job market, they were given an opportunity to work with corporate sectors as internees to gain real-life work experience. Similarly, Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey and Students' Satisfaction Surveys also helped the university administration improve the university processes like admission, enrolment, examination and so on. The concerned departments prepared structure of procedures and implemented them at each level to ensure the organised process control. Finally, before implementing the self-assessment, there was no proper counselling system available for students. If they had any problem that was affecting their performance, there was no platform available to them within the university teaching and learning system where they could consult or referred to for any counselling. With the implementation of the self-assessment parameters, this need was also addressed. Students' counsellors were hired and their services helped students overcome their problems gradually and thus enabled them focus on their studies (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative summary of self-assessment impacts on feedback mechanism

| No. | Before programme evaluation exercise | After programme evaluation exercise |
|-----|---|---|
| 1 | There was no active and effective feedback mechanism in practice from key stakeholders such as students, faculty, alumni, employer and so on regarding course reviews, students and faculty satisfaction level of academic and administrative services of the programme | A very structured and effective mechanism was initiated. Feedback was collected from students, faculty, alumni and employers and also from patients in clinical sides in medical universities. Responses were tabulated, analysed and compared to find out strengths and areas for improvements |
| 2 | Process control was not much organised | Processes such as admission, registration and examination were documented properly and communicated to students. SOPs were prepared for each process |
| 3 | Students' counselling system was not available/documented | Students' counselling systems were identified, documented and communicated to students |

Abbreviation: SOP = structure of procedure.

3.3. Impact on teaching-learning practices/experiences

The most important of all the areas discussed above showing improvements, teaching-learning practices in higher education institutes in Pakistan was the one that showed significant improvement. Before the start of the self-assessment, there was hardly a mechanism at practice that could make the faculty accountable to submit their course outlines on a structured format to the departmental heads and QECs and to share them with students as well. The self-assessment initiative held the faculty responsible to provide the copies of the dated course outlines to their higher-ups and monitoring bodies like QECs as well as to students before the start of the semester. Similarly, the shared courses were taught on mutual agreements and with no formal, documented, organised planning. As a result of this QA initiative, the faculty members were trained to develop an effective mechanism to ensure the coordination and collaboration in all shared courses for their smooth and quality delivery. Moreover, the HEC self-assessment model laid much emphasis on having faculty development programmes; but, because this area was also found deficient in most of the higher education institutes in Pakistan, this practice brought this area into light and faculty development programmes were made functional. QECs played a vital role in arranging capacity building in-house trainings for the in-service teachers on areas like Teaching Methodologies, Classroom Assessment Techniques, Classroom Management, Communication Skills, Presentation Skills and Research Designs/Methodologies, Outcomes-Based Education and so on. In order to equip the junior faculty, micro-teaching sessions were also arranged. This remedial action brought very positive results and improved the quality of teaching. Not only the teaching and learning practices improved but also the support educational services were monitored regularly which had remained neglected in most of the institutes in Pakistan. Certain labs were found non-functional; computing facilities needed upgradation; library catalogues were not updated; faculty offices, students' common rooms and canteens were also unattended. After the implementation of the self-assessment, proper maintenance and upgradation of the support educational services and infrastructure were made ensured to attain the utmost results in the provision of quality education (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparative summary of self-assessment impacts on teaching-learning practices

| No. | Before programme evaluation exercise | After programme evaluation exercise |
|-----|--|--|
| 1 | There was little or no concept of providing students with course outline | Dated courses outlines were prepared and copies were provided to students |
| 2 | There was no proper mechanism for delivery of the shared courses | Mechanisms were developed. Frequency of meeting and collaboration/coordination among the faculty for shared courses was documented |
| 3 | Faculty development programmes were less | Frequent training sessions were organised to |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | functional | address the needs of the faculties to equip them with latest teaching tools such as Teaching Methodologies, Classroom Assessment Techniques, Classroom Management, Communication Skills, Presentation Skills and Research Methodologies and so on. Micro-teaching sessions were arranged to bring improvements |
| 4 | Little attention was paid to improve the quality of support educational services such as library, digital lab, computing facilities, science lab and so on and also in other infrastructure such as faculty offices, students' common room, canteen and so on | Support educational services and infrastructure was made more facilitating and conducive |

3.4. Impact on university/department projection at national and international levels

Last but not the least, the self-assessment exercise not only just identified areas for improvement but also identified strengths of the programme, faculty and the institute over all. There were areas where the outstanding performance and achievements were observed but they were not highlighted at any forum. For example, students were doing internships and projects based on Pakistani communities which had brought changes in the life styles of the people. However, these projects and services did not gain any recognition. Similarly, the research contributions of the faculty also remained unrecognised and unacknowledged. With the implementation of the self-assessment exercise, the best practices and accomplishments were projected at national and international forums. Various print and electronic media were accessed to give these events visibility. For example, to make community engagements visible, Talloires Network was accessed. Research day celebration and other significant events were sent for publication in HEC News & Views (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparative summary of self-assessment impacts on university/department projection at national and international levels

| No. | Before programme evaluation exercise | After programme evaluation exercise |
|-----|--|---|
| 1 | There was little recognition and projection of various significant achievements such as community services and key performance indicators such as research contribution done by the faculty and students | Achievements and accomplishments were projected at national and international forums such as to make community engagements visible, Talloires Network was accessed. Research day celebration and other significant events were sent for publication in HEC News & Views |

4. Summary & conclusion

To conclude, it can be summed up that the implementation of programme evaluation through self-assessment has brought several significant improvements in the academic and administrative systems of the higher education institutes in Pakistan. These changes are ongoing as the universities have realised the importance of a strong and sustained internal quality assurance system and are now willing to take it up to gain far better results so as to compete and benchmark with the educational institutes of international repute.

5. Areas for further investigation

A quantitative case study is suggested for further investigation exploring the performance of quality enhancement cell of the institution where QEC is operating. Such case studies would supplement the findings of this paper.

References

- Andrade, H. (2008). Self-assessment through rubrics. *Educational Leadership*, 65(4), 60–63.
- Artzt, A. F., Armour-Thomas, E., Curcio, F. R. & Gurl, T. J. (2015). *Becoming a reflective mathematics teacher: a guide for observations and self-assessment* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bracke, P., Maybee, C. & Weiner, S. (2016). Developing a practical framework for information literacy program evaluation. *Libraries Faculty and Staff Scholarship and Research*. Paper 149. Retrieved from http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/149
- Bray, C. (2008). Program evaluation of the sustainability of teaching methods. *Environmental Education Research*, 14(6), 655–666
- Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11(1), 25–36. doi:10.1080/13538320500074915
- Dathey, K., Westerheijden, D. F. & Hofman, W. H. A. (2017). Impact of accreditation on improvement of operational inputs after two cycles of assessments in some Ghanaian universities. *Quality in Higher Education*, 23(3), 213–229. doi:10.1080/13538322.2017.1407398
- Goertler, S. (2017). Review of blended learning program evaluation. *Language Learning & Technology*, 21(3), 63–66.
- Gruba, P., Cardenas-Claros, M., Suvorov, R. & Rick, K. (2016). *Blended language program evaluation*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Newcomer, K. E., Harty, H. P. & Wholey, J. S. (2015). *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (4th ed.). XXX: YYY.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paz-Ybarnegaray, R., Douthwaite, B. (2017) Outcome evidencing: a method for enabling and evaluating program intervention in complex systems. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 38(2), 275–293. doi: 10.1177/1098214016676573
- Peter Hillman, G. (1994). Making self-assessment successful. *The TQM Magazine*, 6(3), 29–31. doi: 10.1108/09544789410057863
- Posavac, E. J. (2016). *Program evaluation: methods and case studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rossi, P. H. & Freeman, H. E. (1993). *Evaluation: a systematic approach* (5th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Usmani, A. W. & Suraiya, K. (2015). Impact of quality assurance initiative on Pakistani universities. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 5(4), 83–90.
- Usmani, A. W., Suraiya, K., Shamot, M. & Zamil, M. (2010). Towards a network of quality assurance in higher education: a Pakistani model. *Archives Des Sciences*, 65(7), 224–229.