

III. Internal Quality Assurance in HEIs

NEXUS BETWEEN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY CULTURE: EVIDENCE FROM LAHORE SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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Abstract

This paper shows a close relationship between internal quality assurance and quality culture with the help of an example of one of Pakistan's top business schools, the Lahore School of Economics. We show that with the help of stakeholders, the internal assurance policies along with internalization can result in quality culture in contrast to Harvey (2009)'s critique on quality culture being completely separate from internal quality assurance. The discussion in the paper supports the idea that if internal assurance policies are made by giving a sense of ownership to students, faculty and administration, quality culture can indeed be achieved from the QA process.

I. Introduction:

This paper will examine some of the key instruments of internal quality assurance employed at the Lahore School of Economics, which ranks in amongst the top five business schools of Pakistan. The research objective of this paper is to establish a neat nexus between the Lahore School's IQA policies, including the unique aspect of internationalization, and development of quality culture through it.

Harvey (2009) argues that internal quality assurance mechanism does not always reflect an institute's quality culture. An institute might employ internal quality control mechanisms just to fulfill the requirements posed by an external auditor such as the Higher Education Commission in case of Pakistan which means that the procedures are not the same as quality culture. The bureaucratic procedures, guidelines and manuals may or may not help in developing a quality culture in a higher education institute.

Quality culture is rather a hard concept to define. Just like it has remained hard to define quality precisely, quality culture also turns out to be an equally subjective term. Where quality is "an overpowering feeling that the university is doing everything with excellence," (Rauf 2011) culture can be broadly defined as "a way of life" (Harvey and Stensaker, 2008). Quality culture can thus be defined as the characteristics of the community within the university. These characteristics constitute of the methods and procedures in which the members of the community interact and share knowledge with each other. The community would comprise of students, teachers and administrators. The various aspects of quality culture would then include "*ownership, processes and decisions; recognition of the need for a system, a focus on behavior rather than systems; clarity of purpose of any system; an appreciation of different stakeholder perspectives; co-operation and working in partnership; community-oriented action rather than individualism; inspiring and enabling rather than dictatorial leadership; being welcoming of external critical evaluation; embracing self-reflection and taking the initiative to improve*" (Harvey 2009).

Taking into account this critique on quality culture, we show how an institute like the Lahore School of Economics from developing countries has catered to the development of quality culture within the internal quality assurance mechanism. IQA may not lead to quality culture, however, a reverse relationship can be established if the IQA policies made by the institute incorporate the aspects of quality culture. If embedded properly within the IQA, quality culture may become an outcome or result of IQA. The idea would be to develop quality culture by employing procedures and techniques which gives the community a certain degree of control and incentive in practicing quality in daily university life.

The remaining paper is divided into the following sections: Section II gives a brief review on the definition of internal quality assurance. Section III provides an overview of the university in question i.e. Lahore School of Economics along with its success in the job market. Section IV discusses some key constituents of the IQA policy at Lahore School and its success in developing the institute’s quality culture. Section V ends the discussion by the highlighting some of the challenges the university faces in IQA and way forward.

II. What is Internal Quality Assurance and its Significance?

Internal Quality Assurance can be called the keystone of Quality Assurance. The goals of quality assurance is to review, improve and implement acceptable standards of education. Quality Assurance is an on-going process which is categorized into internal and external quality assurance. The main features of internal quality assurance according to European/international standards comprise of (i) establishing focused objectives, plan and procedures of higher education, (ii) management, assessment and periodic upgrading of programmes, (iii) evaluation of students, (iv) quality assurance of faculty, (v) provision of learning materials, students support, (vi) information systems incorporated at the university and (vii) public information.

External Quality assurance is done by an auditor or government agency to evaluate the reliability of internal quality assurance. The prime difference between the two is that external quality assurance is done at intervals whereas internal quality assurance is done daily. It is because of this daily practice of internal quality that fosters quality culture of the institution. Loopholes in the outline and implementation of internal quality assurance would result in a weak quality culture. A strong quality culture is only instigated if the internal quality assurance procedures are implemented in the daily life of the university, an objective which may sound difficult but not impossible to achieve as this paper shows.

III. The Lahore School of Economics: A Center of High Quality Teaching and Research

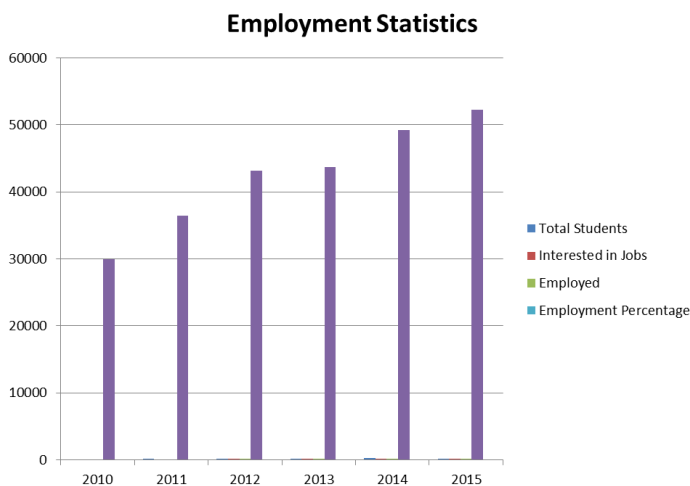
With almost 150 full time faculty members and around 3,100 undergraduate and graduate students, the Lahore School of Economics ranks amongst the leading business schools of the country (The university gained 2nd position in the national higher education *business* institutes ranking finalized by Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. The ranking is based on five factors: (i) quality assurance, (ii) teaching quality, (iii) research, (iv) finance and facilities, (v) social integration and community). The institute was established in 1993 and received a charter in 1997 by the Government of Punjab. Since its inception, its major success has been the employment statistics of the graduates it produces.

Pakistan faces a grave challenge in the educational sector. The number of graduates it produces has increased in recent years, however the job market is sluggish in their accommodation. Thus, it makes it a serious challenge for the universities to produce graduates who are competitive and meet the requirements of the job market. Including innovation in teaching and learning helps to meet this target. The challenge is handled in a way that the Lahore School makes sure that the students it produces are ready to enter the practical field of life as leaders and accelerators of positive change in society.

Table 1. Employment Statistics of Graduates

Year	Total Students	Interested in Jobs	Employed	Average Salary	Employment Percentage
2010	81	74	74	30,000	100%
2011	151	107	107	36,485	100%
2012	198	153	153	43,174	100%
2013	215	137	137	43,761	100%
2014	236	187	184	49,239	98%
2015	184	148	148	52,235	100%

The success story shared above has been a result of the internal quality assurance schemes employed at the institute. In the next section, we assess some key components of IQA employed at the Lahore School. The quality culture which arises as a result of these policies makes the university’s environment more promising not just for the current students but prospective students as well.



IV. Assessing the Components of Internal Quality Mechanism Employed at the Lahore School

The Lahore School of Economics provides multidisciplinary programmes at the undergraduate and graduate level. Currently the undergraduate academic programmes it offers covers six disciplines of Business Administration and Finance, Economics, Social Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Environmental Sciences and Media Studies, Art and Design.

Each of the aforementioned discipline is run by a different head of department.

The graduate programmes are offered by the Departments of Business and Finance, Economics, and Environmental Sciences.

As globalization and internalization gains pace all around the world, the need for a planned internal quality assurance policy is stressed by governments and university heads in order to achieve the objective of developing a knowledge economy. The most important thing for higher education institutes is to make sure that the programmes it offers have an alignment between its mission, objectives and outcomes. The objectives of these programmes is not just what is required by the Higher Education Commission but includes innovative ideas from the faculty and Deans of departments.

Innovation in Teaching and Learning to Support Quality Teaching and Learning

In this new era of social sciences, researchers (Mezirow, 1999, O’Sullivan, 2003 and Harvey 2010) have shown how students are no longer only customers of university education but also its stakeholders and participants in policy making. Transformative learning through critical reflection gives “intellectual performers” and leaders to the labor market.

At the Lahore School of Economics, innovation in teaching and learning is practiced at the individual level by the faculty in an attempt to promote critical thinking in students. Innovations in teaching practiced at the university includes classroom activities which revolve around collaborative and project-based learning. Experiments are carried out within classes to help students make a connection between theory and practice. Case Studies and research-led projects are used to enhance technical and problem-solving skills of students.

The university arranges a distinguished lecture series which relies on speakers from the corporate world to engage students in discussions and share with them the knowledge requirements and experiences of the labor market. The objective of this exercise is to bring the students, researchers and practitioners together. In the year 2016, the corporate relations department of the Lahore School of Economics arranged 53 speaker sessions for the graduate students.

The synergy between students, practitioners and researchers is also created through the annual seminars and conferences held by the institute. Quality student learning is stimulated by on-campus activities arranged by student-led societies to bridge the gap between theory and application. Lahore School Innovation Challenge and Econothon are two major annual events which gives students ownership of university spurring transformative learning (Both events are organized and executed by an elected student council in collaboration with the Extra-Curricular Department. Lahore School Innovation Challenge consists of a business idea competition between thirteen teams and a debating competition between four teams invited from universities across Pakistan. It was held on 14 November, 2015 for the first time. Econothon initially began as an internal Economics Quiz Competition in 2015. This year the event is expected to grow larger as the first national event in the discipline of Economics as students from universities across Pakistan would be invited to participate. The event generally allows students to explore basic knowledge of economics and apply it to real world situations in teams).

The important element of quality assurance in teaching is affirmed in two ways: Faculty Development workshops and mentoring, guidance and discussion amongst the young and experienced faculty.

Each year, thirteen to fifteen mandatory faculty development workshops are held for the faculty belonging to each discipline taught in the institute. The faculty development workshops provided ground for the faculty to interact, share ideas, assess and improve teaching methodology. This is very closely linked to the quality culture of the institute. As it is held every semester, it encourages the faculty to innovate in classroom and teaching methodology. Connections are made and discussions following the workshop continues till the next workshop in the subsequent semester.

Curriculum Improvement

Department meetings are held after every two weeks each semester which sums up to a total of sixteen meetings in a year. The curriculum discussions are primarily held after student and faculty feedback. The upgrading of the curriculum takes place every year which includes updating the textbooks and class materials used for teaching, in particular the applications, experiments and case studies to be used in classrooms.

Internationalization

A key driver of innovation in teaching and learning discussed above is internalization of higher education. Globalization and internalization are different in the way in which national base is used. In globalization the national boundaries lose significance and educational decisions are made transnationally. In internationalization, the national education policy remains viable, however, practices and procedures are undertaken by institutions and individuals to cope with the global academic environment.

Seeking and sharing knowledge from the world, designing curriculum which includes international examples, and student exchange programs are some of the practices included in internalization. The Lahore School of Economics is currently active in seven participatory programmes. The following table gives a brief description of each of the programmes aimed at gaining and exchanging knowledge from the international education market.

Partner University	Year of Collaboration	Brief Description
<i>International Collaborations through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)</i>		
Bahcesheir University, Istanbul, Turkey	2006	An undergraduate one semester exchange programme for a group of 5-10 students chosen from the sophomore year.
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka	2010	A four week research-based study tour arranged every summers for students in the junior year. The tour includes interactive sessions between the students and the Sri Lankan faculty along with workshops held on research methods.
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia	2014	A one-month tour for eight students from the junior year focused on exploring Australian university life revolving around campus activities and classes of Business Administration and Economics.
University of St. Gallens, Switzerland	2016	Summer school for post graduate students of the Lahore School. The arrangement is organized by the Global Business School Network under scholarship for the Global School in Empirical Research.
University of Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang Malaysia	2016	Lahore School has recently established a long term cooperation with University of Sains Malaysia in areas of student exchange, faculty exchange and research exchange.
<i>Other International Collaborations</i>		
Oxford University	2015	A Visiting Scholars program with the School of Interdisciplinary Area studies (SIAS) at Oxford University known as the Oxford- Lahore School ILM Program. The programme comprises of exploring campus life, participating in workshops and interactive sessions with faculty from SIAS as well as the Department of Economics for dissertation work.
Warwick University	2016	Another visiting scholar program. Students attend lectures given by the top economists in the world where they present their work which exposes them to new avenues of research and sophisticated econometric techniques.

The Tie between IQA and Quality Culture

As it follows from the above discussion, we can now link quality culture to IQA. As already discussed in the introduction that it is hard to define quality culture. However, in the case of Lahore School, the quality culture is attributed to the interaction between the various stakeholders of the institute. This includes administration, faculty and students. The internal quality assurance policies are embedded in the university's life as connections are formed across the institute's stakeholders. A sense of ownership is instilled in every stakeholder, which gives them representation in internal assurance policy making. Since the policies are made by those practicing it, through this causality, quality culture is not developed but also reformed every year with the exchange of new ideas, information and methodologies in the departmental meetings, faculty development workshops and student-centered education events.

V. Way Forward.

Some of the aspects which the institute is currently working on are listed below: Support academic and administrative staff exchange program, Building an interdisciplinary microculture in learning through collaborated on-campus activities and curriculum design, Enhance socio-constructivist approach to promote technology-enhanced learning environment by creating networks amongst the student body and alumni for lifelong learning and unending relationship with the institute, Academic service to the community outside the university; collaboration with the government on various projects.

In all circles of social sciences, it is known that quality assurance is not a myopic system, in fact an on-going and forward looking process. The vision of quality assurance future is rooted in quality improvement. On the other hand, quality culture "cannot be codified in a manual" (Harvey 2009) hence it has to be inculcated in the life of the university through policies made and enacted by the stakeholders themselves. This is achieved through teamwork, self-reflection by the Heads of Departments and synergies created between departments and stakeholders of the university. As a result of this engagement amongst stakeholders the culture induced in the university life is expected to spillover in the whole country as the students and faculty both take home the unique trait of learning via cooperation and communication. In the process of making quality assurance a responsibility of each individual related to the university, the idea of attaining quality in the area of society living can be also be achieved; this can perhaps be called the first step in the creation of a knowledge economy.

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