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Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes for Teaching and Learning in Universitas 21 (U21) Institutions: Impact upon Pakistan Universities (0235)

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Quality assurance (QA) of teaching is of central importance for universities. This paper examines current practices for assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching in Universitas 21 (U21) institutions and considers their implications for Pakistan universities. Using the Delphi process opinions were sought from leaders in Pakistan universities on nine broad categories of “QA Processes for Teaching”. These categories were derived from a prior template analysis of 212 policy and practice documents concerning QA of teaching from fifteen U21 universities. The round one Delphi findings reported here suggest that all aspects of “QA processes for teaching in U21 institutions” are highly desirable in Pakistan universities but that some are likely to have low acceptability. It is hypothesized that the gap between “Highly Desirability” and “Low Acceptability” is due to the newness of the QA concept in Pakistan universities, and the lack of professional development and resources allocated to this purpose.

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Introduction

Ensuring and enhancing the quality of teaching is of central importance and one of the key responsibilities of universities. The growing emphasis on the quality of teaching has also influenced the U21 network. These research-led universities have developed a wide range of processes and guidelines for assuring and enhancing the quality of their teaching and learning. On the other hand, the universities of developing countries are in a more developmental phase of QA. The research reported here is based on the premise that universities of developing countries can benefit from considering the experiences of western universities in the area of QA of teaching. This paper uses the Delphi technique to examine the response of leaders in Pakistan universities to nine broad categories of “QA processes for teaching” derived from prior research on U21 universities’ policies and practices. The Delphi technique enables a researcher to solicit, integrate, and interpret the collective wisdom generated by a prestigious panel of experts. The Delphi is an iterative process of data collection and analysis designed to search for consensus among the anonymous experts by a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled feedback (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2005; Chen, 1990; Dalkey, 1969; Nelms & Porter, 1985; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Roberts-Davis & Read, 2001). It has been shown to be useful in cross cultural higher educational research (Kurth-Schai, Poolpatarachewin & Pitiyanuwat, 2000; Judd, 1972) and in the policy development (Averch, 2004; Preble, 1983). One of the weaknesses of Delphi is that there is no universally agreed criterion for consensus in the literature (Hung et al., 2008; Murry & Hammons, 1995) and traditionally researchers define a single consensus criterion.
To overcome the weakness of Delphi in the consensus development, we applied five consensus criteria simultaneously for the analysis of round one questionnaire. The idea of using more that one method for consensus development is derived from the concept of methodological triangulation in which all methods corroborate each other (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2005). The first of the five consensus criteria states that an item would have been reached consensus if 30% or more of the ratings will not fall simultaneously in the lower third and in the upper third of the scale (Elwyn et al., 2006). The second criterion states that an item would have been reached consensus if the value of disagreement index for that specific item is less than one (Fitch et al., 2001). The third criterion states that an item would have been reached positive or negative consensus if 75% or more of responses are generally positive or generally negative respectively (Beattie & Mackway-Jones, 2004; Roberts-Davis & Read, 2001). The fourth criterion states that an item would have been reached consensus if it fulfills the conditions of Mode-Median≤1 and Interquartile Range≤1.5 (Kurth-Schai, Poolpatarakewin & Pitiyanuwat, 2000). The fifth criterion states that items with Interquartile Deviations (IQDs) of zero would have been reached consensus along with the items of IQDs=1.00 and for which the percentage of generally positive or generally negative responses is more than 60% (Rayens & Hahn, 2000).

Findings
For this study, a six-point scale questionnaire was developed comprising 127 items about the various aspects of nine broad categories of “QA processes for teaching”. These categories emerged from a Template Analysis (King, 1998, 2006) of 212 policy and practice documents concerning QA of teaching from fifteen sample U21 universities. The development of Delphi questionnaire drawn from the policies of research-intensive universities strengthened its basis as traditionally it is solely based at experts’ interviews.

Opinion was sought from 21 experts in Pakistan, defined by position, in round one of Delphi about the “Desirability” and “Likely Acceptability” of various aspects of “QA processes for teaching” for Pakistan Universities. The experts were the members of Quality Assurance Committee and the Directors of Quality Enhancement Cells established at thirty universities of Pakistan. All 127 items of the questionnaire were grouped into nine broad categories of “QA processes for teaching” and were analysed. The experts were agreed on that all aspects of QA processes for teaching are highly desirable for Pakistan universities except four. These four items related to the peer review of teaching.

The situation was somewhat different for the “Likely Acceptability” of QA processes in Pakistan universities. Consensus was reached on only 42 items out of 127 and experts were not agreed on the remaining 85 aspects of “QA processes for teaching”. The aspects of “QA processes” at which consensus was reached were largely about the “professional development”; “recognition and rewards”, and “dissemination of good practices”. There were concerns about the remaining categories of “QA processes for teaching” and particularly about “peer review of teaching” with the lowest mean score. The data revealed that there is a gap between the “Desirability” and “Likely Acceptability” of the QA processes irrespective of whether the processes were acceptable or not. The analysis of Delphi questionnaire was based at the triangulation of consensus criteria. The findings of the study confirmed that application of all five consensus criteria in a Delphi complemented each other and thus can be employed in higher education policy development.
Conclusion

Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Firstly, the triangulation of consensus criteria can be a very useful tool in the analysis of Delphi questionnaires. Secondly, the gap between the “Highly Desirability” and “Low Acceptability” of “QA processes” may be due to an historical lack of professional development and resources focused on the “QA of teaching” in Pakistani universities with the result that the concept of QA is relatively new and, therefore, may be slow to be accepted by some. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the acceptability concerns relate to “Peer Review of Teaching”. Finally, it is suggested that for the effective implementation of QA processes for teaching in Pakistani universities, there is a need to engage staff in professional development and QA activities; create awareness among the staff, students, and administrators; recognize and reward good practices; support staff in reflection; and wide dissemination of policies, processes, and good practices.

References


