Accreditation and Quality Enhancement Dynamics in Higher Education

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Abstract

The perspective of accreditation and quality enhancement in terms of collaborative practices framed the best model of quality assurance. Accreditation and quality enhancement cells are the main approaches of quality assurance mechanism. This study described the accreditation and quality enhancement dynamics towards programs quality and development of graduate attributes. This study adopted qualitative research methodology. The sample of this study comprised of 3 members NACTE, 3 members of PEC, and 21 directors of QECs. This research employed qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews as data collection instrument. Findings of this study explored that NACTE, PEC, and QECs plays limited roles to assure quality of faculty, quality of curriculum, bridging skills gap, development of graduate attributes, and eliminating conflict of interest, academic corruption, and political interferences in higher education. These lacks increase the challenges of NACTE, PEC and QECs to assure program quality in terms of responding towards working world. This study proposed that direct links of accreditation and QECs practices make them more effective divisions of quality assurance mechanism to assure program quality and graduate attributes.

Keywords: Accreditation; Quality enhancement; Graduates' attributes

Introduction

Quality assurance refers to the degree of confidence that academic provision meets predefined standards (DePaor, 2016). Quality assurance (QA) mechanism monitor quality of higher education through policies, procedures, and practices of internal and external approaches (Verma, 2016; Williams, 2016). Internal and external segments of quality assurance are complementary to each other (Paor, 2016). The multifaceted nature of QA has driven through accreditation. Accreditation is the main division of quality assurance mechanism. Accreditation is a third-party peer review process (Theobald, Gardner, & Long, 2017). In last three decades, accreditation changed from traditional

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independent monitoring system to the subject of national needs. This change influenced higher education sectors greatly (Liu, Tan, & Meng, 2015). Meanwhile, quality enhancement serves the quality assurance mechanism as augmentation of higher education institutions. It serves both improvements in individuals' learning and institutional programs. Quality enhancement regulates and improve the existing system of progression as per predefined standards (Hina & Ajmal, 2016).

In case of Pakistan, quality assurance agency (QAA) evaluates effectiveness of higher education institution through internal and external quality assurance divisions. Internal quality assurance (IQA) is a self-developed mechanism. IQA carried out by the institutions itself to align activities with pre-set goals (Haider, ul Husnain, Shaheen, & Jabeen, 2015). Whereas, External Quality Assurance (EQA) executes through accreditation councils. QAA works through QECs and accreditation councils. QECs executes the policies of IQA. Accreditation performs as EQA in higher education. Higher education commission (HEC) made establishment of QECs compulsory in every HEI. QECs coordinate with accreditation to streamline quality of programs ("Institutional Performance Evaluation Process Manual for Eight Standards," 2011). HEC has two tier of accreditation as institutional accreditation and program accreditation. Institutional accreditation undertakes by HEC. Program accreditation carried out through accreditation councils. Accreditation councils are working in collaboration with QAA and HEC. HEC has aim that universities' institutional internal quality assurance should parallel to the national external quality assurance system (Batool & Qureshi, 2009).

Present Research

However, HEC took many short and long-term initiative to compel approaches of quality assurance. Yet, still HEC is far away to achieve its objectives(Qureshi, 2016). The issue of quality in higher education as increasing as growth of HEIs and programs. The state of quality in higher education is not encouraging (Haider et al., 2015). This condition raised many questions on the effectiveness of QAA, accreditation, and QECs process of quality assurance. It is necessary to analyse quality assurance approaches in contemporary higher education system. The current study investigated the accreditation and quality enhancement dynamics in higher education of Pakistan. It focused on practices of accreditation council and QECs to scrutinize the quality of programs and development of graduate attributes. As well as, this study analysed the program quality process whereby accreditation and quality enhancement directly interact as professional drivers of quality assurance.

Research Objectives

This study explored accreditation and quality enhancement dynamics to promote program quality and graduate attributes in higher education. Following research objectives were formulated by the researchers:

1. To examine the role of accreditation councils in program quality assurance and development of graduates' attributes.
2. To investigate the challenges of accreditation councils in program quality assurance.
3. To find out the contribution of QECs in program quality enhancement and development of graduates' attributes.
4. To explore the challenges of QECs to practice quality enhancement in higher education institutions.
5. To examine the extent in which accreditation councils and QECs share their balance practices for quality assurance

Research Questions

The following questions were made by the researchers to meet research objectives:

1. How does national accreditation council for teacher education (NACTE) play its role to assure program quality and development of graduates' attributes in Pakistan?
2. What challenges of NACTE faces to assure program quality and development of graduates' attributes?
3. How does Pakistan engineering council (PEC) play its role to assure program quality and development of graduates' attributes in Pakistan?
4. What challenges of PEC faces to assure program quality and development of graduates' attributes?
5. How do QECs contribute to promote quality enhancement in higher education?
6. What type of challenges directors of QECs face to enhance program quality and develop of graduates' attributes in higher education institutions?
7. To what extent accreditation councils and QECs are cooperate to each other for program quality assurance?

Research Methodology

The present research was qualitative in its nature. The phenomenological approach was adopted to achieve research objectives. As, phenomenological approach helps the researchers to investigate perceptions of participants who expeirence phenomena and identify the commonalities among participants (Fraenkel et al., 2016). The researchers used multiphase sampling technique to select the sample for this study. Two councils NACTE and PEC were purposively selected. 3 members of NACTE and 3 members of PEC were conveniently selected. There were two male and one female members of NACTE. The members of NACTE were also related to the academia with more than 15 years of experience. The members of PEC were associated to the academia with more than 25 years of experience. 21 directors of QECs associated with 24 public and private universities in Punjab and Capital City Islamabad were randomly selected. There were two female and 19 male directors of QECs. 17 directors have the experience of directorship more than five years, while, 4 directors were experienced the QECs'

directorship with more than two years. The data were gather through semi structured interviews. The researchers collected data during March 2017 to July 2017. The credibility of interview questions was ensured through consultation with academic experts. The researchers developed the interview questions that explored the interviewees perception about program quality assurance and graduates' attributes on different themes. The collected data were transcribed in textual form. Data were organized through NVivo 11 for analysis.

*Analysis of data collected from the members of NACTE and PEC*

Figure 1. *Word Tag Cloud to display frequently used words on different patterns*

Initially, the researchers performed word cloud to identify the frequently used words by the interviewees. The tag cloud displays that accreditation, program quality, education, engineering, teachers, attributes, and other highlighted words were the most frequently used patterns by the interviewees (Figure 1). The researchers ran hierarchy nodes compared by number of coding references to extent of coding references against themes (Figure 2).

The area of challenges of NACTE and PEC emerges bigger than other nodes. After challenges, the other nodes as: strengths of accreditation mechanism, standard of curriculum, contribution of council, standard of faculty, reflection of accreditation in program quality improvement, and self-accreditation process of NACTE and PEC, role of NACTE and PEC, graduates for working world, effect of academic corruption and

conflict of interest on accreditation process, and graduate attributes in NACTE and PEC process were covered the average area equally.

Figure 3 displays the comparative extent of coding references to the contemplation of members of NACTE and PEC. The coding matrix query presents data proportionally to accreditation council. Matrix coding query demonstrate the length of discussions of members on various themes. The result of coding matrix query show that members of NACTE talked more about the challenges of council, conflict of interest, effect of academic corruption on accreditation process, reflection of program quality in graduates, graduates' attributes in accreditation process, and strengths of accreditation council than that of PEC's members.
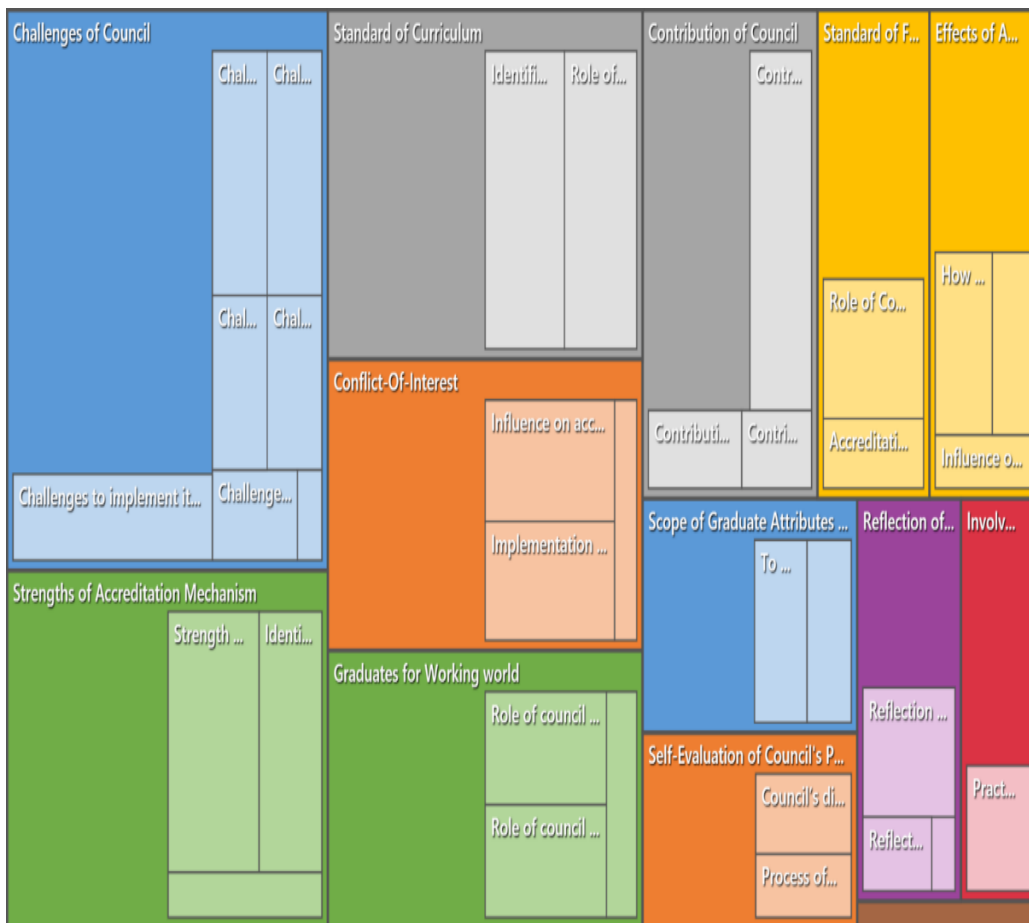
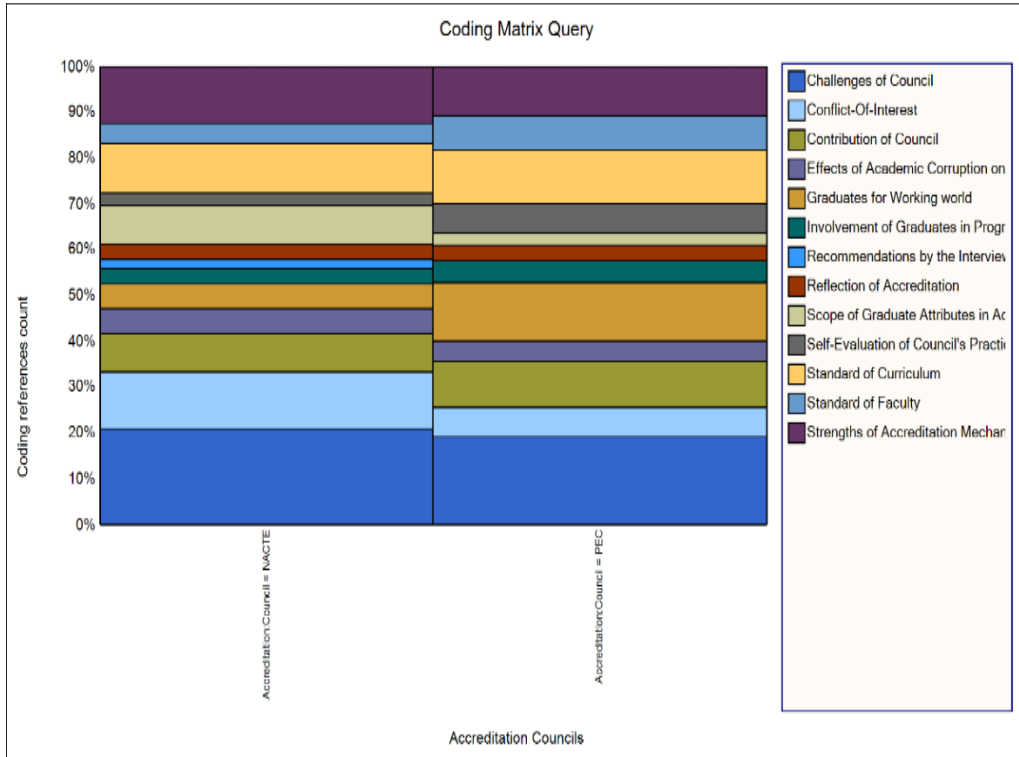*Figure 2. Hierarchy nodes compared by number of coding references to extent of coding references*

Figure 3. *Matrix Coding Query to compare the extent of coding references*

Whereas, members of PEC talked much about development of graduates' attributes for working world, involvement of graduates' attributes in accreditation process, quality assurance of curriculum, and quality of faculty than that of NACTE's members. Members of NACTE and PEC equally discussed about the contribution of council and self-accreditation of council.

Analysis of Data Collected from the Directors of QECs

In initial analysis, word cloud used to identify the words image. The words in big sizes demonstrate the more attention of interviewees than that of smaller words (Figure 4). In next analysis, the query of hierarchy of nodes compared by number of coding references of sources was ran (figure 5). The area of challenges faced by the QECs emerges bigger than other nodes. After challenges, global compatibility of QECs practices and scope of graduate attributes in quality enhancement are covering large area.

Figure 4. *Word tag cloud to display frequently used words on different patterns*

The other nodes extent as QECs practices to measure program quality inside the institution, contribution of QECs in external program quality assessment, Role of QECs in promoting program quality enhancement, role of QECs in reflection of program quality enhancement in graduates, institution cooperation with QECs, and suggestions provided by the directors to tackle challenges reveal extent of interviewees discussion.

The researchers ran coding matrix query to display the comparative extent of coding references in terms of directors associated with public and private HEIs (Figure 6). The coding matrix query shows that the directors of public sector HEIs explained more about challenges of directors, institutions corporation with directors, QECs assessment practices, and suggestions for improvements than that of directors of QECs private HEIs. The directors of private sector HEIs talked more about global compatibility of QECs practices, reflection of quality enhancement, and graduates' attributes in quality enhancement than that of directors of public sector HEIs. Both sectors are equal in covering the matrix area on contribution of QECs in quality enhancement (Figure 6).
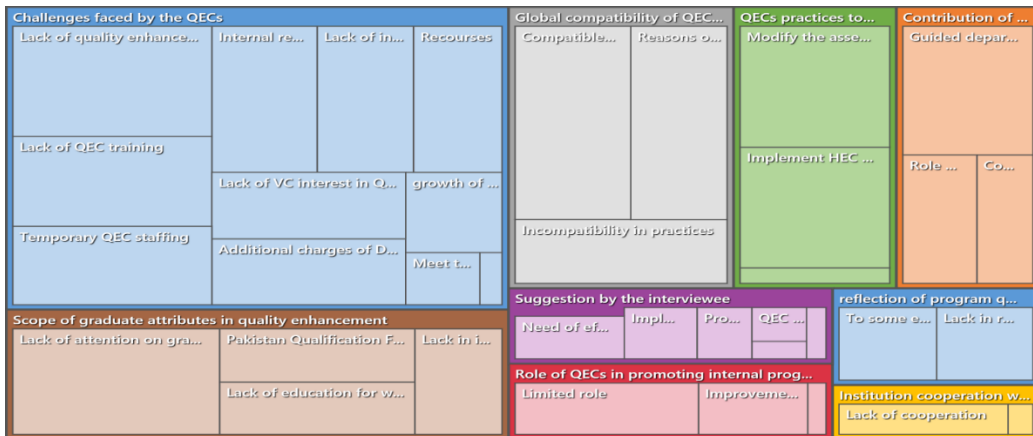

Figure 5. Hierarchy node s compared by number of coding references to display extent of coding references
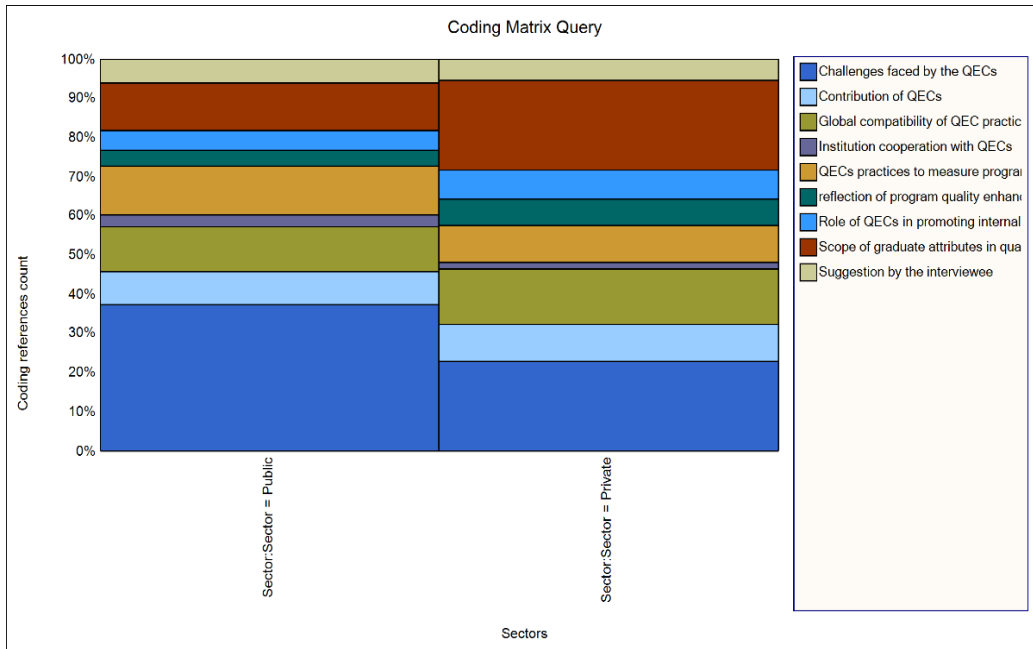
Figure 6. *Matrix coding query to compare the extent of coding references*

Research Findings

The findings of qualitative data of this study revealed the role and challenges of NACTE, PEC, and QEC in program quality assurance and graduates' attributes development. The themes of interviews emerged through the interviews of members of NACTE, members of PEC, and directors of QECs' agreements. The following are the findings on various themes of interviews.

Strengths of NACTE/PEC Mechanism for Programs Quality Assurance

The members of the NACTE expressed that the mechanism of NACTE was very effective as it was improving the MA/MEd programs' quality. Members of PEC also showed the same perspective as their strength of PEC mechanism was in the improvement of engineering programs quality. However, members of PEC added that full signatory status of Washington Accord (WA) made PEC more effective. The NACTE member added that *"NACTE provides a proper framework to run department and program of teacher education. In past, we neglect this, but now this is happening practically. This framework places in education field and now keep in proper record to facilitate the NACTE mechanism".* Members of PEC showed the same perspective that full signatory status of Washington Accord (WA) makes PEC more effective mechanism. A member of PEC said that *"PEC has the strongest and experienced committees in council…which are the largest panel of member in accreditation in Pakistan. The members of the accreditation*

committee are the most experiences, trained, and professional in comparison to the other councils". Finding of directors of QECs shows similar context as directors that the structure of QECs is compatible to the global standards of quality enhancement yet there are many lacks in implementations. A director of QEC from public sector *"Basically, the QECs are UK based mechanism, and 60 percent or criteria are adopted. We are also following the QS ranking. So, the mechanism is compatible to global requirement. The problem is in involvement and implementation".*

Contribution of NACTE/PEC in Program Quality Assurance

Members of NACTE believed that the major contribution of council is setting minimum standards for program quality. A member of NACTE explained that "*NACTE is very important organization. Since, the acceptation of NACTE, the standards for teacher education, educators, and teacher education programs are going to be enhanced day by day".* Members of PEC stated that contribution of PEC is that threshold standards for engineering programs and achieving full signatory status of WA. A member of PEC expressed that *"The major contribution of PEC is its criteria to assess the quality. These parameters set the quality standards in engineering. These standards assure the quality which is great contribution".* The directors of QECs demonstrated that QECs are only implementing HEC standards and enhance quality in HEIs. This is the QECs major contribution to meet those standards set by HEC.

Reflection of Program Quality in Students and Graduates

Members of NACTE stated that quality of educational programs is not reflecting in graduates. One male member of NACTE said that *"I have believed that NACTE has a big role to play for the improvement of teacher education program and for the improvement of education as subject as well. There is still a gape. it does not fully reflect".* Majority of PEC members believed that quality of program reflects in graduates through PEC's standards. A member mentioned that, "*We assure the quality of engineering for the students. We also periodically assess the satisfaction level of students from our faculty, facilities, and other academic things. This enables quality to reflect in students".* Directors believed that there is lack of quality enhancement reflection in graduates. A director of private sector QEC stated that "*Still, it is not reflecting. It is not happening in Pakistan. It is not implemented. In my point of view, graduates are not taking any benefit from this".* The directors' answers exhibit that there is very limited role of graduate attributes in quality enhancement practices.

Graduate Attributes in NACTE/PEC Process

The members of NACTE admitted that there is no assurance of graduate attributes. A senior member of NACTE explained that *"NACTE is not properly evaluate attributes or students' quality. It is only evaluating program quality rather to monitor students' quality in teacher education. The major focus of NACTE is on program quality. The documentation of NACTE is not including graduates' quality assurance".* Whereas,

members of PEC explained that PEC is conscious to implement the engineer profile of WA as graduate attributes in all disciplines of engineering. A senior member of PEC stated that "*there are 12 graduate attributes and we are trying to successfully adopt in manual. So, we are slowly moving towards at 9 and 5 attributes mechanism, at this moment most you know 90% institutions are not on that criteria of international standards*".

Influence of Conflict-Of-Interest on NACTE/PEC Process

Most members of NACTE agreed that conflict of interest influenced NACTE's process. A member explained that "*Everyone has affiliations, whether individual or regional affiliations. So, I am not in the part of implementations, but NACTE should be careful of being transparent and unbiased in the process of accreditation*". Most of PEC members admitted that to some extent conflict of interest influences the accreditation process. A senior most member of PEC stated that "*As I said before. It is default of accreditation process system. In the context of higher education, it is like you scratch my back and I scratch your, that is the conflict of interest*".

Academic Corruption that Influence Accreditation Process

Majority members of NACTE admitted that academic corruption influence accreditation process. One male member of NACTE expressed "*That it can influence, for example if I go to the organization for accreditation, it depends on my honesty and professionalism. This is the biggest issue. Some may be happy with this. It influences the accreditation process*". Most of members of PEC disclosed that to some extent corruption influence accreditation practices and decisions. One member said that "*I do not think that PEC undertakes task of eliminating corruption in the academic*".

Self-accreditation of NACTE/PEC Practices

The members of NACTE mentioned that there is annual reporting and review system to evaluate NACTE's activities. The NACTE member suggested that "*I believe NACTE needs more work to accredit its activities*". While, members of PEC said that PEC reviews the activities of accreditation annually through Annual General Meeting (AGM) consists of members and governing body. As one of member specified that "*Well, Pakistan Engineering Council has obvious functions and those functions are being supervised by the boards which are called the Board of Governor or a Governing party and obviously, the entire report annually is being produced the governing body and then it is being to produce to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) all the entire engineers and open meeting is called by the all members. So, that audit is being carried out internally by Board of Governor*".

Assurance of Quality of Curriculum by NACTE/PEC

Members of NACTE explained that there is standard of curriculum but there is need to assure it through teaching, upgradation, and revision. One NACTE member highlighted that "*Teacher education program revolves around the professional standards. There are the characteristics of good teacher in teacher education curriculum. But the*

National Curriculum Review Committee does not take care of the compatibility of these things". Similarly, members of PEC pointed out that PEC is assuring the quality of engineering curriculum through its standards and criteria, but curriculum should be upgraded and revised. One PEC member said that *"Pakistan Engineering Council also analysed the curriculum because this is a team who has experience of looking at the curriculum of many other similar institutions as well. So, during the visitation, they always guide and recommended with their report what changes they think we should have carried out"*.

Assurance of Quality of Faculty by NACTE/PEC

The majority members of NACTE stated that there is standard on quality of faculty. But it is documentational mostly. One NACTE members admitted that there are lacks in accreditation process to investigate the criteria of faculty. The member said that *"It is very important what our teachers have for the field of education. I think, there are still lacks in our recruitment process. This creates sometimes issues in the quality of faculty"*. Besides this, members of PEC mentioned that PEC is strict about standard of faculty but agreed that there is lack of professionalism. A member explained that *"PEC strict to its standard on faculty, in which qualification, strength, experience, credit hours, involvement in research and development, ratio of faculty and students, and continues development in profession. PEC while conducting its visit, grace the faculty pyramids and if an institution does not have those of amount of faculty, it will deprive of accreditation. Another very important factor that PEC generally does not encourage the institution to hire visiting faculty"*.

Role of NACTE/PEC to Bridge Gap Between Graduates and Industries

NACTE members explored that NACTE is not responsible to bridge gap between graduates and industries. A member stated that *"There is no role of NACTE to bridge the gap between them all these rules and regulations are made by the government. The government should have to keep all these matters in mind. But government use parallel option against the graduates of teacher education"*. The member of PEC explained that *"In case of PEC, who authorize PEC to remove this gap? No one. Even not government helps the PEC to enable our engineers to compete in working world. Even government does not implement PEC buildings codes, earthquake codes and precautions and others. Then what PEC does"*?

Challenges of NACTE/PEC to Assure Educational Program Quality

The NACTE members disclose that there is lack of accreditation awareness which is the biggest challenge for council. One male member said that *"The NACTE is an international phenomena and people do not accept change immediately"*. A member of NACTE explained that *"Now, we are only 3 to 4 persons (who) working in NACTE, who looking after accreditation in all over the country and there are 5 to 6 hundred institutions who engage in teacher education programs"*. The members of PEC explained the

challenges of PEC in various perspectives. One senior member explained that *"PEC implements all its initiatives is a biggest challenge".* He also added that *"to limit the excessive numbers of engineers in Pakistan is another challenge".* He further stated that "*Conflict of interests, in my point of view is the biggest challenge to the accreditation committee which is EANQEC. They get this challenge. Sooner or later we will come out of this dilemma and we need to have very neutral place. At last, no merit system is the also biggest challenge in this entire country".* A senior PEC's member stated that "*The research and development side is also neglecting in Pakistan".* The PEC's member said that *"The another, which is real challenge, a homogeneous set of inspection profession also. We need more professional, expert, and experiences accreditors".* Another member added that *"more training of the evaluators".*

Majority of directors are agreed that the biggest challenges are: additional charges of directors, lack of institutional corporation, resources, and trainings. One of director also criticized the institutional administration and said that *"The proposal of QEC is not compatibility to the administration. The grouping and nepotism in our public sector is also main hurdle of QEC".* One of director from the pioneer QEC of public sector said that *"The biggest challenge is that society must realize and care about quality of higher education. They must have to realize how much quality of higher education is important for future. So, to disseminate this is a biggest challenge".*

Institution cooperation with QECs

The findings disclosed that most of the departments in HEIS do not corporate with the directors of QECs in QECs practices. A senior director from private sector strongly emphasized that *"This is true the departments are not cooperative in most of the universities. It is a hassle work. It is not that much easy to convince heads of the departments and people of department to write SARs".* It is found that directors in HEIs have limited authorities to work independently.

Accreditation Councils and QECs

It is found that there is no direct links between NACTE/PEC and QECs. Accreditation councils do not have any straight contact to the QECs for evidences program evaluation. QECs only encourage the departments for accreditation as facilitator. An experienced director of QEC from private sector said that *"It is very limited. HEC just provide guidelines and forced institutions to establish QEC. Nevertheless, QECs try to guide the department for program accreditation as mediocre".*

Discussion

This study sought to analyse the dynamics of accreditation and quality enhancement regarding program quality and graduate attributes. The current study investigated the role, influential factors, and challenges of NACTE, PEC, and QECs. It is found that the mechanism of NACTE was very effective as it was improving the teacher

education programs' quality. However, members of PEC added that full signatory status of Washington Accord (WA) made PEC more effective. These findings are related to the studies of Ard, Beasley, and Nunn-Ellison (2017), Hegji (2017), and Mendoza (2013) that accreditation was one of the most effective mechanism to evaluate educational programs. As, directors of QECs appreciated the mechanism of QECs, yet, they also mentioned there were many challenges to implement QECs' framework in HEIs. Findings from QECs, relate to the study of Haider, ul Husnain, Shaheen, and Jabeen (2015), as, they pointed out that QECs policy unsuccessfully implemented in higher education institutions.

NACTE was improving quality of teacher education programs in teacher education through NACTE's standards. While, members of PEC stated that PEC was contributing not only in improvement of engineering programs but regulate professionalism through its standards. The directors of QECs demonstrated that QECs were only implemented guidelines of HEC to enhance quality in HEIs. Some of members of NACTE believed that quality of programs is not fully reflect in our students. These finding are against the study of Hegji (2017) that framework of accreditation should shift to evaluate students acquired learning skills. On the other hand, majority of member of PEC believed that quality of program reflects in students through the implementation of PEC standards. Directors of QECs believed that there was lack of quality reflection in graduates. These findings relate to the study of Yingqiang and Yongjian (2016), and Theobald, Gardner, and Long (2017). They pointed out that quality assurance in higher education should go beyond traditional assessment and needs reflection in their stakeholders on through innovative procedures.

The members of NACTE admitted that NACTE was not observe graduate attributes in accreditation process. Whereas, members of PEC explained that PEC was very serious to implement the graduate attributes adopted from WA. The findings showed that members of NACTE declared that NACTE neither responsible nor playing any role to bridge the gap between graduates and working world. Whereas, members of PEC agreed that there was criterion on industrial linkages but PEC was limited to play its role about bridging skill gap. Likewise, directors of QECs expressed that QECs conducted graduates and employees' feedback surveys but there was nothing in practice to bridge the gap. These findings relate to the study of Filippetti and Savona (2017), and Garfolo and L'Huillier (2015). They discussed this gap as shortfall of accreditation bodies. They pointed out that accreditation should provide assurance of program quality which aligned with working world. Majority of members from NACTE and PEC agreed that conflict of interest influenced accreditation practices and decisions as well. This finding against the ethical considerations as mentioned in the study of Neill (2016). He suggested that practitioners should pursue accreditation which provide training of ethics in practice. The findings from NACTE and PEC regarding conflict-of-interest, were identical to the study

of Hegji (2017). He critically reviewed that conflict of interest was biggest shortfall in accreditation process.

Meanwhile, majority of NACTE members admitted that academic corruption influenced both accreditation practices and decisions. Most of members of PEC disclosed that to some extent corruption influenced accreditation practices and decisions. This was one of major finding which was similar to the studies of Capasso & Santoro (2017), Feday (2017), and Tierney & Sabharwal (2017). These studies discussed that academic dishonesty and corruption greatly influenced the structure of higher education. Additionally, Martin (2016) suggested that quality assurance organization should prevent corruption in its procedures. Furthermore, it is found that NACTE needs transparency in their accreditation process and practices as well. Similarly, the study of Hegji (2017) criticized accreditation that it should have potential to be transparent and well informed to their customers. Majority members of NACTE and PEC stated that politicians indirectly influenced the accreditation process. This finding related to the study of Ibad (2017) that politicization in HEIs was the destruction of our learning outcomes. The members of NACTE mentioned that council engaged in self-evaluation process through annual review system to the members. While, PEC was not only review the activities of accreditation annually but also conducted Annual General Meeting (AGM) consists of members and governing body. As (Garfolo & L'Huillier, 2015) criticized that accreditation bodies needed greater accountability process to review their own findings and activities.

Hence, the members of NACTE identified that there was standard on teacher education curriculum but there was need of proper presentation, upgradation, and revision of curriculum. Similarly, members of PEC pointed out that PEC was assuring the quality of engineering curriculum through its standards and criteria, but curriculum should be upgraded and revised. These findings were associated to the study of Ashraf, Muhammad Azeem, and Hafiza Iqra Ismat (2016), who reviewed that outdated curriculum decreased educational quality. The other findings exhibit that members of NACTE stated that there was standard on quality of faculty. But it was only documentational and numbering type criteria. There was lack in practices to assure the quality of faculty. Besides this, members of PEC mentioned that PEC was strictly looked at the quality of faculty. However, members of PEC agreed that there was lack of professionalism in engineering faculty. Such as, study of Ahlem (2016) explored that ensuring quality of teaching should occupy in quality assurance organizational structure.

This study revealed that NACTE faced several challenges as: stimulating HEIs towards accreditation, developing program quality accreditation culture, implementing code of conduct for accreditors, brings professionalism in accreditors, trainings for institutional officials for accreditation preparation, training for NACTE's staff, improving quality of teaching faculty to make program quality more effective, and transparency in accreditation process. As much as, members of PEC demonstrate challenges of PEC as:

tackling internal and external resistance to implement policies of PEC, encouraging industries to take interest in academia, control on excessive growth of engineering programs, counselling of private higher education sectors, and reducing gap between PEC and government. The findings regarding challenges of accreditation (NACTE & PEC) were associated to the studies of Debono et al. (2017), Law (2017), Sin, Tavares, and Amaral (2017), Ibad (2017), Denisova-Schmidt, (2017), Greenfield, Hinchcliff, Pawsey, Westbrook, & Braithwaite (2013), Islam, Ali, & Islam (2017), Marklein (2017). These mentioned studies also identify the almost same challenges.

Directors of QECs highlighted the challenges of QECs as: permanent charges of QECs' directors, limited institutional interest, enactment of QECs' policy in institution, developing culture of research and development among teachers, cooperation of administration, temporary QEC staffing, independent practices of QECs inside institutions, and meet the minimum criteria of HEC as possible. Additionally, it is found that QECs were neither directly linked with accreditation body nor play any role for accreditation except encourage department to get status of accreditation. Oppositely to these findings, the study of Sin et al. (2017) suggested that internal quality assurance should work in collaboration with accreditation bodies. Jawad, Jamshaid, and Wahab (2015), and Sin et al. (2017) also expressed that awareness of quality assurance in that area should brought change and improvement in quality assurance practices.

Conclusion

This study investigated that the role of NACTE is very limited to assure quality of curriculum and faculty, reflection of accreditation in graduates, and promoting graduate attributes to bridge skills gap. NACTE is rarely eliminated negative factors that affects the NACTE process such as, conflict of interest, political interference, and academic corruption. Present study concluded that NACTE faced various challenges such as: conflict of interest, academic corruption, and politicians influence, lack of transparency in accreditation process, developing program quality accreditation awareness, training and professionalism of accreditors, trainings of institutions for accreditation preparation, improving quality of teachers, encourage industries to take interest in HEIs, and control on excessive growth of programs. The PEC played limited role regarding expanding accreditation standards with outcome based education, removing gap between academia and industries, implementing graduate attributes by WA, and assurance of curriculum and faculty quality. PEC is faced various challenges as, encourage industries to take interest in academia, control on excessive growth of engineering programs, counselling of private sector, reducing gap between PEC and government, encourage industrial interest of academia, eliminating academic corruption, clear cut policy on conflict of interest, training of accreditors, developing resources for accreditation, including attributes in accreditation and institutional outcomes. QECs' contribution is limited to meet standards of HEIs, act as per HEC's guidelines, making

SARs, and prepare IPE documentations. Nonetheless, the directors of QECs faced various challenges to promote quality enhancement as, additional charges of directors, lack of departmental corporation, limited resources, counselling of vice chancellors to take interest in QEC practices, dominant behaviour of administration, mushroom growth of programs, untrained QECs' staff, and awareness about quality assurance and enhancement. This study also concluded that there is lack of direct relationship between accreditation and QECs which causes gaps in program quality and graduates attributes improvement. However, accreditation and QECs are integral parts of QAA but both have minimal real contacts and work in isolation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that QAA should framed quality assurance practices in which accreditation councils directly contact to the QECs. As well as, this framework privilege QECs to work incorporation with national accreditation councils to enhance and assure program quality. The triangular relationship of accreditation councils, QECs, and HEIs deliberately improve the program quality with equal priorities of internal and external quality assurance. Moreover, this linkage may greatly contribute in development of graduates' attributes for working world. Furthermore, HEC and QAA should also play a role of facilitator to build successful relationship between higher education and industries. Accreditation and QECs should take place to provide benefits for institutions with identification of weak areas for improvements.

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