



Assessment Reform and Global Rankings: Exploring Academia Narratives within Pakistan's Universities

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ABSTRACT

This present study explores academia perspectives on assessment reforms in the context of increasing global university ranking pressures, particularly within Pakistani Universities. Many of the international ranking systems such as QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education (THE) have intensified the emphasis on research output, graduate employability, and measurable learning outcomes. In this competitive Era of the ranking, the universities across Pakistan are revisiting and restricting the assessment process. They are developing the policy framework and blue print for their assessment. The said purpose, mixed methods approached is applied for the collection of the data. The federally chartered six universities, were taken for the said purpose. The study surveyed academia from six federally chartered public and private universities to investigate how these global pressures of the ranking help in shaping institutional assessment strategies, academia autonomy, and pedagogical culture. The findings of the said study reveal a growing tension between globally driven accountability metrics and the need for authentic, student-centered evaluation practices. It is evident from the findings While rankings have prompted some positive institutional reforms, they have also led to increased administrative workload and reduced academic freedom. The study concludes with a call for context-sensitive assessment reforms that balance international competitiveness with Pakistan's cultural, pedagogical, and developmental realities.



Introduction

The 21st century, is the century of innovation and reforms, in this era, world is skewed, in the form of global village. This globalization is performing key role in emerging the trends of education across world. Many of the world leading institution is working on the exchange and measurement

of the ranks of the educational institutions. The present study is also founded on the basis of these fundamental. As the study, global university rankings have emerged as pivotal drivers influencing higher education policy and institutional practices. Prominent international metrics such as the QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), and Shanghai Rankings emphasize indicators like research output, faculty-to-student ratios, and graduate employability (Hazelkorn, et al., 2015).

As described by Khan et al., (2024) that benchmarking of ranking are reflecting the scan of the universities, how they are at worldwide. These also giving though provoking process to the assessment strategies, for the Pakistani universities to map their assessment with the top ranked world universities. These benchmarks have a cascading effect on how universities worldwide, including those in Pakistan, design their academic and assessment strategies. In the Pakistani context, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has emphasized the alignment of the quality assurance of the education. For the said purpose, the Quality Assurance Department of the Higher Education working on the alignment of the universities with the quality and accreditation of the program with the international standards (HEC, 2023). Meanwhile the Similarly, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training of Pakistan also supports the said initiative of the HEC.

However, this transition poses challenges related to contextual relevance and academic autonomy. The present study explores the academic assessment reforms, for the quality education, which leads toward the world ranking. This study, therefore, seeks to explore academia perspectives on assessment reforms introduced in response to these global ranking pressures, with a focus on their implications for learning outcomes, institutional credibility, and alignment with national educational priorities.

Rationale of the Study

The rapid globalization of higher education and the growing influence of global university rankings have led to substantial reforms in curriculum and assessment practices across institutions worldwide (Usher et al., 2020). It is further explored from the research studies, that minimum, researches focus on the empirical data. Moreover, this scope is limited in case of Pakistan as well. As the academia is front line force of the delivery as well as the assessment of the learner. Thus, the academia shifting is helpful for meeting the given criteria of the Higher-Ranking approaches as describes by the world (Altaf et al., 2023). Their perspectives are crucial in designing assessment policies that are inclusive, pedagogically sound, and responsive to local educational needs (Ahmed & Anwar, 2021). Furthermore, institutions such as the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training have advocated for the integration of quality assurance and outcome-based assessment frameworks, signaling a need for deeper academia engagement in reform processes (HEC, 2022). Understanding academia insights offers a bridge between global accountability measures and culturally relevant academic practices that enhance student learning and institutional credibility (Khan et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Assessment in the Age of Globalization

As in the current era the current era every aspect of life is affected by global trends, with the same, pattern, the higher education is also affected by these trends. Each and every change is approachable to everyone in the world, same all the newly trends either the pedagogical skills or the assessment phenomena its globalized (Hazelkorn, 2015). Many of the Higer educational

agencies are working on the ranking of the universities, these practices are also influencing the third world countries, as the learner is aware from the global trends. The Time Higher education and QS, ranking proposed the benchmarks, of the ranking, those are linked with the outcomes of the educational institutions. These are measuring with the objectives-based education. These trends are influencing the faculty and administration of the universities as question by the learner. Academia working in the universities needs to be trained on the new trends of assessment as opted by the top ranked universities (Rafiq et al., 2024).

However, these progressive shifts of the competitive environments of the universities as describe by the Rafiq et al., (2023) pointed out that, if faculty are not trained for the matching of this benchmark, then the phenomena of tick box, may be adopted, that leads toward the ranks, but defiantly, it will adversely affect the academia and educational outcome, on the basis of assessment.

Academia Roles and Institutional Pressures

Moreover, the academia, either from national or international universities, they are the core responsible for the deferment or acceptance of the new trends. In university, the new trends only be initiated with the help of academia. The academia, only can opted that, if they are trained and fully equipped. The higher education in evolving rapidly and new innovation are continuously emerging in it as also described by the Noor et al., (2024). It is also evident from the practice of other higher educational institution that the assessment reforms only be adopted once the academia is willing and fully trained for the adaptation of these trends. Moreover, (Chaudhry et al., 2017) in his study job stress of academia in the universities also pointed out that, that lack in the autonomy of work is lead toward the stress at university.

Most of the world developing countries having the policy to drop down the decision, that negatively effect, and in case of Pakistan, this is also one of the approaches to apply the policy by force. It important to note that the willingness of the academia is very important for the adaptation of the policy. The participatory approach is mandatory for the adaptation of the policy. This approach is also supported by the (Junaid et al., 2021).

Challenges of Local Relevance

Diversity is the beauty of the nature, and every region, or society having their own values, that s the biggest barrier of the for the implementation of the standardization. This also described by the altbach and Salmi (2011). It is also proven from the many researchers that the imported policy or documents often rejected, due to the diverse approach. The biggest reason of this rejection is the cultural, spiritual, religious, differences of the individuals that reflects on workplace as well as in the society to. In Pakistan, Raza (2010) also warns that such superficial reforms, primarily aimed at improving universities' visibility in global rankings are not mapped with the approached od the academia as well the learner to.

As evident from the above discussion about the multiple difference as well the willing for the readiness to adopt the imported policy, reject the new changes. These findings also supported by the (Ahmed & Zafar, 2023).

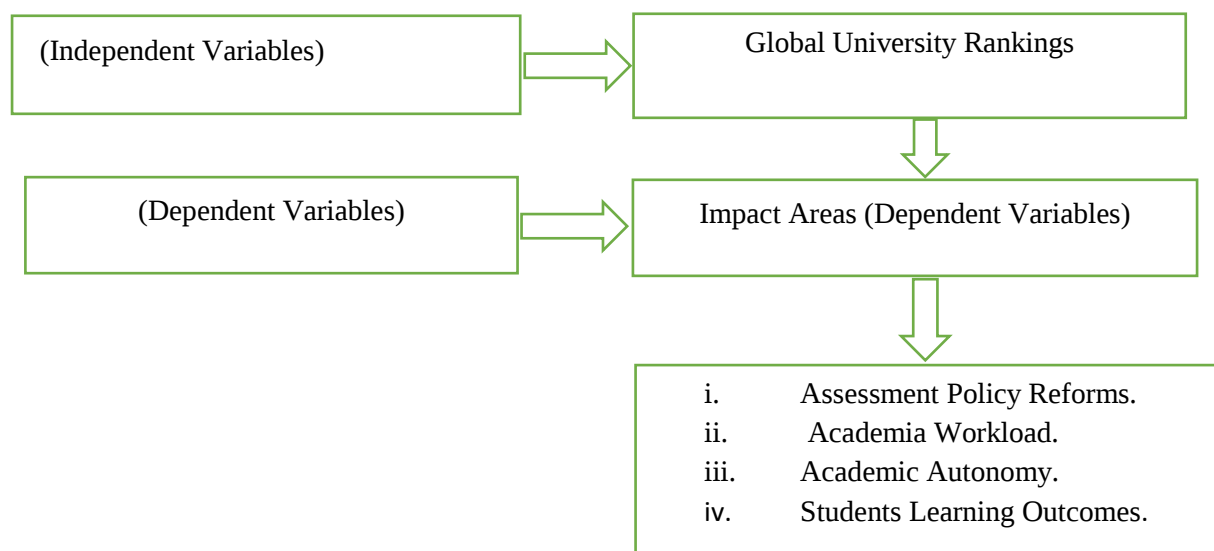
Pakistani Higher Education in Transition

Pakistan Higer Education Commission (HEC), which is the regulator of the Higher education in also linked with the new trends. They have designated department of Quality Assurance for the said purpose. The have already taken multiple steps for the said purpose. One of the its initiative is

the manual development for the standardization of assessment at national level (HEC, 2022). In compliance to increasing global pressures, Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) has un multiple initiatives to reform assessment and strengthen quality assurance. In response of this concurrently, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has also prioritized capacity-building in assessment, literacy, and institutional governance and many others aspects for the productive outcome.

Government is taking multiple steps, but the implementation is still in question, that is only due to the lack of participatory approach of management. The lack of participatory approach is the biggest barrier in the standardization of the assessment aspect. This is also supported by the finding of the study conducted by (Mahboob et al., 2023). As Pakistan's higher education sector continually growing and adopting the new trends of the word. But it's worth mentioning here that the HEC is failed to conduct the ranking of the universities at National level.

Conceptual Frame work of the Study



Objectives of the Study

- i. To explore academia perspectives on how global university rankings influence assessment reforms in Pakistani Higher Educational Institution.
- ii. To examine the impact of ranking-driven reforms on faculty autonomy, workload, and student learning outcomes.
- iii. To recommend context-relevant assessment strategies that balance global standards with local educational needs.

Methodology and Procedure of the Study

The present study, taken under investigation to know about the assessment reforms in Pakistan on the perspective of higher educational institution. The survey methods approach was adopted by the conduct of this study and the six universities faculty are taken as population of the conduct of this study. The details of the universities are as:

- i. International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI).
- ii. PMAS-arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi.
- iii. University of Management Technology (UMT), Lahore.
- iv. Muslim Youth University, Islamabad.

- v. Preston University, Islamabad.
- vi. Alhamd Islamic University, Islamabad campus.

The flexible sampling technique was used for the selection of the population and 120 academia taken from the above universities for the conduct of this study. Their point of views of the title of study were analyzed on the basis of the manual of the HEC, and other bench marking opted for the said study. While the Higher Education Commission (HEC, 2022) has introduced tools such as the Self-Assessment Manual to institutionalize quality assurance, the study found that these reforms are often hindered by inconsistent training, inadequate resource distribution, and limited academic autonomy. These findings affirm the need for context-sensitive assessment frameworks that align with national development priorities and reflect the lived experiences of educators in the Pakistani higher education system (Mahboob, 2023; HEC, 2023).

Data Analysis Summary of the Study

Based on responses from 120 academia members across six federally chartered universities in Pakistan, the average ratings (on a 5-point Likert scale) were:

- i. Ranking Influence: 3.88 (SD = 0.76)
- ii. Assessment Reform: 3.79 (SD = 0.72)
- iii. Academia Workload: 3.59 (SD = 0.83)
- iv. Autonomy Level: 2.86 (SD = 1.05)
- v. Student Outcomes: 3.11 (SD = 0.80)

These results indicate a high perception of ranking influence on assessment practices and moderately positive views on the effectiveness of reforms in improving learning outcomes. However, autonomy and workload challenges persist.

Correlation Matrix

- i. A weak positive correlation was found between *Assessment Reform* and *Student Outcomes* ($r = 0.13$), suggesting a mild association.
- ii. A negative correlation exists between *Autonomy Level* and *Ranking Influence* ($r = -0.10$), indicating that increased ranking pressure may reduce academia autonomy.

T-Test Analysis

A t-test comparing *Student Outcomes* between academia who rated Ranking Influence > 3 and those ≤ 3 yielded:

- $t(118) = 1.31, p = 0.192$

This result is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, implying that higher perceived ranking influence does not significantly affect academia views on student learning outcomes.

Findings

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design using a purposive sampling technique to explore faculty perceptions of assessment reforms in Pakistani higher education. A total of 120 faculty members from six universities, Islamic International University Islamabad, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi, University of Management and Technology Lahore, University of Muslim Youth Islamabad, Bahria University Islamabad, Alhamd Islamic University Islamabad, and Preston University Islamabad, participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire focusing on the relevance, implementation, and challenges of assessment reform.

Results indicated that a majority of faculty members viewed assessment reforms as policy-driven and compliance-oriented, with limited academic involvement in decision-making or implementation. It was also evident from the literature and response of the study, that the assessment policy is imposed on the academia without their capacity building and readiness to adopt the international trend. The administration is not collaborating with the academia. It is also pointed out from the response of the academia, on structured and open ended, as they are not part of the many of the policy, so they felt undermined and unwilling to accept the change. Although in reciprocal of that, the global is growing gradually and new trends and innovation are emerging.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the literature review and the responses of the academia working the selected universities for the said study that, they are facing difficulty due to the lack of knowledge and readiness of for the adaptation of the policy. It is also revealed from the open ended as well from the literature the international bench marks and not mapped with the national values of the community of Pakistan. Moreover, the Higher education Commission is striving on all the newly emerging trends of the world. Both the universities public and private faculty are expressed their concern about the lack of orientation about all the policy, imposed by the higher education in align with the international trends.

Discussion and Recommendations

It is clearly indicated that, the findings and conclusions of the study, reveals that the faculty is lacking in the readiness about the policies, imposed by the authorities, either by the university or HEC. No orientation mechanism are clearly indicated. HEC is taking multiple initiative, due to globalization trends as policy framework about self-assessment, in which one of the Performa is about the employer, but the tic box approach is adopted to fill the same.

To address these issues of unwillingness, the following recommendations are proposed on the basis of result and findings.

- i. Enhance faculty involvement in assessment policy formulation and implementation through consultative processes and academic councils.
- ii. Develop localized training programs in assessment literacy that consider linguistic, cultural, and institutional diversity across Pakistan.
- iii. Ensure equitable resource allocation to support the operationalization of assessment reforms across all types of institutions.
- iv. Balance global standards with local pedagogical values, ensuring that assessment serves as a developmental tool for learners and educators alike.
- v. Monitor and evaluate reform outcomes through continuous feedback loops that include faculty, students, and quality assurance bodies.
- vi. The dire need of the faculty establishment is required at university level.

These above-mentioned measures can help Pakistan's higher education system evolve toward a more inclusive, context-sensitive, and developmentally aligned assessment culture.

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