Demystifying the Aspect of Quality in Higher Education: Insights From Saudi Arabia

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Abstract
The aim of this study was to investigate the factors of quality in higher education in the eyes of stakeholders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A total of 151 respondents were taken for this scientific research. Biographical Information Blank and Quality in Higher Education questionnaires were administered to the respondents to explore prevailing factors in higher education to maintain the realm of quality. Through factor analysis, the investigation revealed six factors that the stakeholders perceived as contributory factors existing in terms of quality in the higher education. It is suggested that leaders and policymakers of higher education in the Kingdom must focus on six factors obtained in the current investigation to enhance the effectiveness of quality in the higher education.

Keywords
quality, higher education, teaching, learning, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Introduction
Quality is a buzzword which is capable of providing solace in the current volatile, uncertain, and challenging work environment. This is true in the case of education sector too. Quality is all the more important in education sector as it can be considered as “one of the basic needs for human development and to escape from poverty,” which is essential for the holistic growth and development of any society (Sivakumar & Sarvalingam, 2010). This task can be accomplished only through quality education. Although the concept of quality in not new to the education sector in general and higher education sector in particular, it emerged as a key issue since the 1980s. Ever since, many researchers and academicians have attempted to identify its need and implications, as well as mechanisms to evaluate it. However, in higher education, quality still remains vague and challenging (Harvey & Williams, 2010). It has also been observed that academics became entangled in the web of quality terminologies and processes that their knowledge about it became blurred. Although, in higher education, the “standards” and “criteria” considered for the purpose of measurement truly denote quality (Cheng, 2011), the term became a form of oxymoron for the academics.

However, educational administrators and all other stakeholders are deeply interested in exploring the various facets of quality in higher education, as the future of humans solely rests on the outcomes from the students, on whose shoulders the future rests. Quality education is the sole contributing factor essential for developing sustainable livelihoods, achieving economic development and societal progress and growth. To be aligned with the rest of the world in providing quality education, the Government of Saudi Arabia is also striving hard in this direction. They aspire to provide quality higher education to compete in the globally challenging market and to handhold the youth to adjust in the dynamic environment. In line with this, the Government has opened several new institutions of higher learning, wherein varied programs in different disciplines are provided (Alfawaz et al., 2014).

Toward enhancing the quality of higher education in the Kingdom, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) was established in the year 2004, with the responsibility of ensuring high standards of quality, at par with global standards, in the higher education sector. In line with the market requirements, NCAAA introduced the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in the Kingdom. The framework is intended to enhance the quality of higher education and the
service providers, so as to be in par with the quality and excellence of other developed countries. The NCAAA is envisaged to act as a think tank in higher education in areas like policy-making and planning, in alignment with the rules, regulations, and stipulations of the Ministry of Higher Education (Alfawaz et al., 2014; Azevedo et al., 2012; Chakroun, 2010; Onsman, 2010; Young, 2003, 2005).

Although the concept of quality in higher education is a widely researched topic and volumes of literature are available in this area, only few studies have been conducted in Saudi Arabia. The literature about this topic pertaining to Saudi Arabia is scant, and the current research aims to put in a moderate effort to contribute toward this direction. The main objective of the study is to identify the factors that are responsible for attaining quality in the field of higher education in the Kingdom.

**Review of Literature**

As stated earlier, literature is replete with investigation about the impact and importance of “quality” on various variables such as performance, employability, growth, development, satisfaction, stress and burnout, attitude transformation, involvement, commitment, competencies, motivation, leadership style, role ambiguity, efficacy of mentoring, higher education, and engagement and observed that quality has an impact on these variables directly or indirectly affecting effectiveness (Al-Kahtani & Allam, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Al-Kahtani & Syed, 2018; Ali et al., 2004; Allam, 2007, 2013, 2017a, 2017c; Allam & Harish, 2010; Briukhanov et al., 2010; Gorondutse et al., 2018; Harvey & Green, 1993; Newton, 2010; Nicol, 2010; Sunanto et al., 2007; Wimshurst et al., 2006). However, most of these investigations have been made in other parts of the world. A few studies conducted in Saudi Arabia include that of Allam (2018), Allam and Ahmad (2013), and Gorondutse et al. (2018).

Quality in higher education should produce graduates with appropriate civic sense and responsibility, with the required moral characteristics, so that they can contribute and achieve the desired results and take the vision of the country ahead. Supportive learning environment, accuracy and accessibility, improved communications skills, teaching and learning, personal development, and effective and availability of information are vital and reliable sources of quality in higher education (Blessinger & Carfora, 2014; Tang & Hussin, 2011).

It is universally accepted that youth in general, and students in particular, form a valued resource of the future. Students form the primary and most important primary stakeholder of any educational institution, and employees, employers, parents, alumni, industry, society, and government are viewed as the secondary stakeholders (Bobby, 2014; Harvey & Green, 1993; Newton, 2010; Ramaiyah et al., 2007). Studies about quality have been carried out from the perception of the students as well as the other stakeholders. Akareem and Hossain (2016) carried out a study among students with an intention to identify the perception of quality of education based on biographical information. They observed that extracurricular activities, age, status of students for scholarship, parents’ education, and university were the factors responsible to significantly influence the quality in higher education. Gorondutse et al. (2018) carried out a research among employees working in higher education in Saudi Arabia, and their results indicate that role ambiguity plays a significantly pivotal role to moderate the association between styles of the leaderships and performance of the employees in the Kingdom. It implies that quality of leadership style is essential in achieving the goal of higher education successfully. As such, to enhance the performance level of the employees, there is a need to eliminate role ambiguity.

The employer, one of the stakeholders of education, opined that teaching and learning and institutional factors are the most important components observed in establishing the quality in higher education (Allam & Ahmad, 2013). Institutional factors of the university were observed as one of the most prominent predictors related to the outcome and assessment variable among two different classes of students studying in same university (Allam, 2018). A fair review of the studies in the field of quality in higher education in Saudi Arabia points to the direction that, there are definite gaps in literature due to the paucity of it. The present work is a moderate, humble effort to fill this gap in literature.

**Method**

**Sample**

The study sample included 151 respondents, who have been selected randomly from Riyadh (N = 31 which includes all employers) and Al-Kharj (N = 120, which consists of 91 students and 29 faculty) areas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The respondents included in the study were male with varying age, qualification, and experience. The breakup of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Special care was taken to see that all associated stakeholders are included in the study. A glance at the above table about demographics clearly shows that the sample is representative in nature.

**Scale**

A scale related to Quality in Higher Education was standardized and developed by Zachariah (2007). Keeping in view the objectives in mind, the items of the scale were modified to suit the requirements of the current investigation. The questionnaire had a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from “most important” to “least important.” The scale, which had 40 items, was classified into six dimensions, namely “admission criteria, institutional factors, curriculum content, institutional
resources, teaching and learning experiences, and outcome and assessment” (Table 2). This scale has been used to collect data for the present study. The paper-based survey method was applied in this investigation to gather the data.

Data Analysis

Since the main objective of the study was to identify the factors responsible for attainment of quality in higher education, factor analysis (FA) was conducted. To check the suitability for conducting FA, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s test for sampling adequacy were initiated. The KMO value was .907, thereby signifying the appropriateness of the sample taken for the study. Since this KMO value is good over stipulation of .6, sampling adequacy can be inferred, denoting that the data are appropriate enough to conduct FA. The details of FA are presented in Table 3. Furthermore, the Bartlett’s test of sphericity is found to have a high chi-square value, which is significant at the value of p less than .001.

FA was done with principal component analysis and varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. There were many items in the scale, therefore correlation was done and the items whose scores were less than .4 were eliminated and the SPSS was rerun to obtain the exact factors.

FA was obtained in the emergence of six factors, and the total 28 items were obtained with eigen values above 1.0 (1.022 and 12.264) along with 67.074% total variance. The total percentage of variance and cumulative percentage are presented in Table 4. Faisal and Sulphey (2018) mentioned in their investigation that Ford et al. (1986) and Hinkin (1995) postulated that criterion of .40 is considered as stipulated, judging factor loading.

It is observed that out of six components, only Component 4 has less than .7 alpha value and rest of the alpha values are more than .7, which is considered to be acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Furthermore, alpha value less than .7 is not taken into consideration for factor loading and the item is eliminated and the rotated component matrix is rerun with the help of SPSS to obtain the relaxation for this factor. This relaxation has been given keeping in mind the earlier research works done (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Holt et al., 2007; Rapoport, 1989).

It is observed from Table 6 that 28 items were again revisited for explicit clarity and minor changes were made as required. The next step initiated in the investigation focused on FA.

The correlation methods were applied between the factors, and a significant relationship was obtained at .01 level in most of the items. Furthermore, the items with values less than .40 (Hinkin, 1995) were excluded in the factor loadings. Overall, 12 items succeeded to load on FA in measuring the quality in higher education (Table 7).

Factor 1 (Teaching and Learning)

The six items loaded on Factor 1 represent the faculty qualifications, experiences, personality, emphasis on practical aspects to suit the working atmosphere, varied teaching material provided to the students, potential of faculty members to influence the students’ behavior and attitudes, and ability of faculty to understand the individual differences in the teaching processes. It indicates that these items are mostly related to learning and teaching, thereby Factor 1 was termed as “teaching and learning.” The current finding is supported in terms of stakeholders’ perception that most of the time they use to see certain best qualities associated with the teachers in terms of their potentials in both qualities, that is, personal and profession, to make them comparatively distinct to other teachers (Allam, 2018; Anderson, 2004; Arnon & Reichel, 2007; Isani & Virk, 2005; Sulphey, 2017).
Factor 2 (Institutional Resources)
The five items loaded on this factor are demystifying contribution, which are needed to have quality in higher education in terms of infrastructure, that is, well-equipped classroom, laboratory, attractive campus, recreation, and sports facilities. It reflects that most of the items are pertinent toward the infrastructure of the institute, and henceforth, Factor 2 was termed as “institutional resources.” The current investigation finding has been supported by Akareem and Hossain (2016).

Factor 3 (Admission Criteria)
There are seven items loaded on Factor 3, which include aptitude or ability test to enter the program, students’ interest, varieties of courses offered, and English-language ability required to enroll in the study. Therefore, this factor was designated as “admission criteria.” Allam (2018) and Allam and Ahmad (2013) supported the present finding by providing similar trends in their researches.

Factor 4 (Curriculum Content)
This factor was loaded with four items associated to the relevance of the content as per the demand of the market, practical knowledge, the importance of the program, emphasis given on personality development, the synergy of work, communication, and creativity. Thereby, this factor was designated as “curriculum content.” This finding is supported by Mayaba et al. (2018). They have opined that stakeholder opinion should be taken into consideration to enlighten the curriculum content to put forward in quality of higher education. This topic is found to have been widely researched, and there is enough literature in this regard (for instance, see Entwistle, 2005; Fung, 2017; Hubball & Burt, 2004).

Factor 5 (Outcome and Assessment)
There are four items loaded on this factor, which indicate the final grades of the students, varied methods to assess the

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**Table 4. Total Percentage of Variance and Cumulative Percentage.**

| Component | Initial eigen values | Total Percentage of variance | Cumulative % |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1         | 12.264               | 39.560                      | 39.560       |
| 2         | 2.586                | 8.343                       | 47.903       |
| 3         | 2.025                | 6.534                       | 54.437       |
| 4         | 1.558                | 5.025                       | 59.461       |
| 5         | 1.339                | 4.318                       | 63.779       |
| 6         | 1.022                | 3.295                       | 67.074       |

Note. Extraction method: principal component analysis.

**Table 5. Data Reliability.**

| Component | Cronbach’s α |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1         | .834         |
| 2         | .862         |
| 3         | .910         |
| 4         | .589         |
| 5         | .893         |
| 6         | .857         |
| Overall   | .869         |

**Table 6. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Item-to-Item Correlation.**

| Item no. | M    | SD   | R    |
|----------|------|------|------|
| 1        | 3.71 | 1.225| .639 |
| 2        | 3.70 | 1.269| .755 |
| 3        | 3.73 | 1.280| .670 |
| 4        | 3.44 | 1.263| .664 |
| 5        | 3.63 | 1.209| .662 |
| 6        | 3.49 | 1.385| .488 |
| 7        | 3.83 | 1.430| .699 |
| 8        | 3.43 | 1.454| .655 |
| 9        | 3.22 | 1.423| .641 |
| 10       | 3.05 | 1.406| .728 |
| 11       | 3.60 | 1.387| .585 |
| 12       | 3.47 | 1.106| .495 |
| 13       | 3.44 | 1.374| .509 |
| 14       | 3.89 | 1.175| .523 |
| 15       | 3.74 | 1.122| .503 |
| 16       | 3.71 | 1.214| .691 |
| 17       | 3.88 | 1.101| .657 |
| 18       | 3.81 | 1.048| .591 |
| 19       | 3.93 | 1.164| .662 |
| 20       | 3.77 | 1.173| .650 |
| 21       | 3.80 | 1.083| .664 |
| 22       | 3.58 | 1.314| .740 |
| 23       | 3.49 | 1.221| .575 |
| 24       | 3.58 | 1.267| .301 |
| 25       | 3.36 | 1.339| .414 |
| 26       | 3.65 | 1.234| .460 |
| 27       | 3.74 | 1.220| .673 |
| 28       | 3.20 | 1.244| .672 |
performance of the students, a written test that is considered as best to assess students’ cognitive and affective abilities, and periodic assessments of the students. Thus, items loaded on this factor were termed as “outcome and assessment.” This is in line with the earlier studies of Sulphey and Allam (2017) and Allam (2017b). They have also mentioned that mentoring and engagement could be used to enhance the outcome/performance of the students or employees. Similarly, Wimshurst et al. (2006), Zachariah (2007), and Allam and Ahmad (2013) stated in their investigations that quality can be measured through the mechanism of outcome and assessment to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of their institution where the practices are applied in the form of assessment.

Factor 6 (Pedagogy)

This factor was loaded with only two items related to teaching approaches, methods and styles of teaching, and ability to judge the individual differences. Hence, this factor was designated as “pedagogy.” Indeed, pedagogy is considered as an art and science of teaching which reflects the systematic plan of the teacher: what he or she ought to do in the class to bring the quality in higher education. This is in line with the previous researchers Walstad and Becker (2010). They emphasized that teacher must know what course he or she is teaching and its instructional responsibility to instill the quality in higher education. Similarly, Bhowmik et al. (2013) concluded that role of pedagogy is an essential configuration in the teaching and learning process to enhance and establish the quality in higher education.

Discussion and Conclusion

The quality in higher education could be judged from the way it provides benefits to the person economically, politically, socially, emotionally, financially, and cognitively. Whereas, Brennan and Teichler (2008) pointed out that

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Table 7. Factor Loadings.

| No. | Dimensions                   | Factors |
|-----|------------------------------|---------|
| 1   | Teaching and learning        | .776    |
| 2   | .742                         |         |
| 3   | .751                         |         |
| 4   | .778                         |         |
| 5   | .659                         |         |
| 6   | .480                         |         |
| 7   | Institutional resources      | .738    |
| 8   | .787                         |         |
| 9   | .853                         |         |
| 10  | .789                         |         |
| 11  | .670                         |         |
| 12  | Admission criteria           | .739    |
| 13  | .648                         |         |
| 14  | .682                         |         |
| 15  | .409                         |         |
| 16  | .644                         |         |
| 17  | .680                         |         |
| 18  | .645                         |         |
| 19  | Curriculum content           | .723    |
| 20  | .736                         |         |
| 21  | .721                         |         |
| 22  | .547                         |         |
| 23  | Outcome and assessment       | .663    |
| 24  | .718                         |         |
| 25  | .822                         |         |
| 26  | .815                         |         |
| 27  | Pedagogy                     | .410    |
| 28  | .443                         |         |

Note. Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation converged in seven iterations.
higher education plays a very crucial role because the quality pertaining to education will certainly have positive influence on the societal development.

The term “quality in higher education” plays a significant role in developing the nation including placing the institute in the forefront. The institute must have highly qualified faculty members, infrastructure, market-oriented curriculum, and so on, to produce quality output and keep away from defects. In this study, the researcher explored to identify the factors associated with quality in higher education among the stakeholders. However, Rahman and Uddin (2009) emphasized that the responsibility of the government is to provide quality education with the help of the available resources of the country. To align this, education in Saudi Arabia in varied public universities is free to the citizens of the nation, and all the expenses incurred on them are managed through the resources of the nation only.

The current study identified six important factors related to quality only from male participants, honing in higher education in two colleges of a prominent university of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Notwithstanding, it is imperative to mention that factors observed from this investigation can be helpful to all the stakeholders to make cognizance decisions to enhance the quality in the areas of professional effectiveness, student learning and development, establish the brand image, and program quality. Indeed, Akareem and Hossain (2016) suggested the same to create brand image of the university by providing quality in higher education. Jones (2010) stated that higher education institutions should handle the expectations of the students and develop or plan to manage the consumerist culture to enhance the quality in higher education, whereas Briukhanov et al. (2010) declared that concerned authorities of higher education should understand their pivotal role for showing the quality of education to maintain the degree of loyalty pertaining to the stakeholder. However, Sulphey and Al-Kahtani (2018) opined that nudging could be used to enhance the academic excellence of the students enrolled in business program in the Kingdom. Their suggestion can be instrumental in creating quality in higher education.

In glimpse, this particular investigation also has certain limitations that would trigger researchers to probe further investigation in this work area with another varied sample, that is, female, social status, nationality, and so on, and instruments to have better result and explain them in a better way to understand the concept in a different context.

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