University Evaluation, Myth or Reality: A Pakistani Perspective

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Abstract:
University evaluation is the key component of quality management movement in higher education. The concept of accountability is mainly linked with the origination of quality models in the leading countries like America, Europe and in Asia Pacific region. In addition to responsibility, competition, privatization, and insertion of professional managers are some of the factors that make an institution responsible for their actions. The question of institutional independence seems to be meaningless without accountability. Like knowledge diffusion and knowledge production, university evaluation is also becoming a philosophical foundation of higher educational institutions. Regular evaluation can either eliminate or at least minimize the ongoing malpractices in an educational organization. Many international agencies are ready to help the novel countries to take the initiative in this field because higher education has become a global subject. Although the developing countries showed their interest to adopt this culture but they are still in the age of infancy in the discipline of university appraisal and the dream of institutional evaluation can come true only when the government will pass the law. By this step universities will be obliged to conduct the process in reality. But still it is a myth for the country like Pakistan due to lack of information.

Keywords: University evaluation, Quality management, Accountability, Higher education institutions, Privatization, Models of evaluation.

I. Introduction
Education by nature is an evolutionary and a continuous process. That is why any organism with such characteristic has a natural slower growth rate. The French philosopher and educationist, Edgar Morin (1990) has described education as “the living organism” in a sense that it shares information with its surroundings, influences the environment and in return modifies the atmosphere. Since education has an ability to change the environment that is why, this is considered as a living organism. Although each branch of education: primary, secondary and tertiary, has an effect on the society but higher education has a strong impact as compared to other two. In the early period of higher education, there does not exist complex phenomenon, like total quality management (TQM), ISO certification, quality enhancement, university ranking,
university accreditation, university evaluation etc, because things were simple and higher education institutions (HEIs) have limited functions to perform e.g. transfer of knowledge. The university responsibility was the preparation of functionaries for public services and later universities incorporated a new function i.e. the production of knowledge. So in the beginning, the mandate of HEIs was limited and they were not as heavily populated like the universities of today. The increasing enrolment has affected quality of higher education and a wave of panic started among policy makers. To sustain the value of education, intellectuals around the globe worked together and tried to introduce some quality indicators for HEIs. The quality issue was first addressed seriously by advance countries because for professional expertise, local and overseas students get benefit from the professional colleges and universities of international repute. Although this activity provides good revenue to the governments but at the same time to maintain it they focused on the quality as well. For example to secure the admission, students from different parts of the world have to fulfill certain value measures, like 16 years of education, a good CGPA, a standard TOFEL or IELTS scores etc. These measures have made quality in higher education a hot cake for discussion around the globe. Since quality is a universal subject, higher education is considered a common dilemma for developed as well as developing countries. So to cope with the challenges of excellence in HEIs, experts have incorporated certain feature borrowed from the corporate and commercial world.

Other than excellence, human nature of curiosity to evolve systems and the consideration of world as global village are some of the reasons to introduce quality in HEIs. The competition among institution to attract foreign and local students and productive research may also be an impulsive factor to start evaluative phenomenon in the universities. The university evaluation is a process to sustain quality in HEIs and it is also a way to make an institution held responsible for their action. It is the process of comparing the performance of an institution with itself in the preceding years and Bellon defined it as, “The university evaluation compares its “production” with its own goals and means, as converse to its counterparts’ (Bellon, 2007, p.133)or it is the mechanism by which it is judged whether an institution has achieved its prescribed goals. The evaluative phenomenon in higher education is the performance accountability of the leader, as institutions have certain inertia and this is the leadership that increases or decreases the velocity and gives recognition to an organization through its vision (Victor, 2007).

Naturally advanced countries from Europe, the Asia Pacific region and America have an edge over university evaluation as compared to other countries that are offering higher education. In the recent past, China has made its contribution to the educational world by publishing a university ranking. This is also based on university evaluation by considering certain indicators. With the publication of university ranking, universities of leading countries maneuver it and they used this effort to attract international students to increase the revenue of the institution in general and country at large. As a result there is a menace to convert this noble cause of imparting education into profitable business like a supermarket: higher you pay, better you have. The concept of education as an industry has emerged due to three basic phenomena; first one is the creation of private universities, second is the insertion of professional managers on top management and the third one is to hold the university president responsible for their actions i.e. by introducing accountability. This is a term generally used in synonym with evaluation.
Experts are agreed that it is the “answerability” for performance or it is “the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer the question about how resources have been used and to what effect” (Trow, 1996, p.310). Romzek has identified four basic types of accountability: hierarchical, legal, professional, and political. The university appraisal can be studied under professional and political evaluation (Romzek, 2000).

The philosophy behind the Bologna process was that “Euro should not be the sole identity of Europe” and they also identify the higher education as one of the potential areas that can hold them together. That is why, they introduced and signed the Bologna accord. By this agreement they transformed the region into the European higher Education area (EHA). The basic component of this agreement is the “university evaluation” in which experts from other countries participate. This helps them to promote their higher education system. However, there are people who believe that university appraisal is a myth and it is just a formality and it has nothing to do with the university progress. The second school of thought is of the opinion that for universities to grow, the highway of success is the process of evaluation. The article is an effort to probe what kind of function the university evaluation can perform and an attempt will be made to determine whether it is a myth or a reality?

II. Objectives and Methodology

The primary objective of this article is to describe the importance and functions of university evaluation in present scenario. Second, this may provide the food for thought to the policy makers of higher education in Pakistan. The third objective illustrates whether university is taking this culture seriously or it is just a fairy tale. The reason to write on this topic is that in Pakistan a university is governed by the vice chancellor who is responsible for the university to progress or vice versa. The selection of competent person improves the working of the institution whereas incompetent choice pulls the university back and the process of progress or lagging lasts for four years. Furthermore, there are no mechanism and process for the incoming vice chancellor to indicate what has been done and what to do in the coming days and this dialogue is possible through the process of evaluation only. The investigators are serving in a public sector university and are witnesses of different management styles of more than three vice chancellors. The method used for this piece of writing is descriptive mainly based on analysis of relevant documents and existing literature specifically evaluation models developed for universities. This is a concept paper

III. Origin of Accountability in Higher Education (Review of the Literature)

The question is important as to where and when the accountability in higher education came from. This subject has gained emphasis with the publication of Carnegie classification, the introduction of accreditation in the U.S.A. and this can also be seen in the early 1980s in Europe. Although teachers are evaluated in terms of annual confidential report from the date of appointment and these methods are the traditional form of university evaluation (Malicet, 1997). Keeping with this line the institutional evaluation in Europe was termed as “evaluative state” by Neave (1988) in the late 1980s. This term demonstrates that universities are like the states and their institutional heads are responsible for administrative decisions and actions taken for university progress. Experts are also agreed that global model of quality in higher education is the product of professional gathering such as international conferences on various disciplines of education, global circulation of professors and the influence of professional organization
that are working to attain the quality like international quality assurance agency for higher education (INQAAHE), Asia pacific quality network (APNQ), Organization for economic corporation and development (OECD), European university association (EUA) and European Quality Assurance Agency(ENQA) at present and many others local institutions monitor quality in higher education. The other reason for quality in higher education institutions (HEIs) is the diffusion of quality assurance models in USA and Europe. The quality assurance in Europe and in other parts of the world has started in 1980s whereas USA had started it in the 1800s (Currie, 2004). In Europe, Netherlands and England have started to develop their own unique brands on quality assurance system. This is due to difference in need: geographical and historical concept because each region has its own measures for quality assurance. For this purpose, each country in Europe has established the quality assurance office which is independent from the state influence. The other big thrust behind the quality measures is the radical shift in higher education i.e. from public to private sector. The evaluation of higher education institution is based on four fundamental questions and these questions are based on a ‘fitness for purpose’ approach. These questions include:

i. What the institution is trying to do?
ii. How the institution is trying to do it?
iii. How do we know that the system is working?
iv. How does the institution change in order to improve?

IV. General Objectives of University Evaluation

The general objectives of university evaluation vary from one region to another and from state to state. The countries having a well established system of higher education use the instrument of quality in a different way, whereas states that are struggling to improve the HEIs will use this tool of quality like an armature. The former will use this technique as quality management whereas the later will go for quality improvement. When we talk about quality, basically one wishes to improve three broader areas: input, process and output factor. The beginner will simply focus mainly on the input side or they will consider process factor whereas countries that are ahead in higher education will focus on product factor.

In our daily life, we conduct and pass through various types of evaluation. This shows that the term evaluation is not limited to the student appraisal rather this idea is used in a broader scope like accountability. The well known concepts of accountability are: “evaluation and improvement”, “evaluation and transparency” and now the process of evaluation is recognized as necessary measures for the betterment of universities. It is well known saying that the process of evaluation is to improve and not prove. It means that evaluation is the process of helping an individual or an organization to do its best.

V. Evaluation for Improvement

The basic purpose of university evaluation is to improve university governance in all areas and to fix the responsibility in case of non deliverance and to award certain when there is an achievement. The evaluation may be in academic, research and administrative areas of HEIs. The universities use this means to improve the academic and research culture. In other words the process of evaluation is considered as the conscious of an organization that helps in making decision of right or wrong. This improvement will ultimately give an institution a sense of recognition among competitors. This means the process of evaluation is used for improvement. In future, it
will be no longer acceptable by any university or its departments to avoid the concept of evaluation both internal and external. Sooner or later HEIs will have to accept it either willingly or through legislation for improvement. In advance European countries after every five years, each institution has to submit an evaluation report through external evaluation and gradually the universities funding is going to link with the external evaluation. Although this will create disparity among institutions but this may bring the culture of positive competition as well.

VI. Evaluation as a Part of Social Accountability

There exists another dimension of improvement by evaluation. According to this aspect, one can see a strong connection between society and evaluation. In society everyone has to perform his/her social role. Individuals, working institutions and organizations are answerable to certain social circles for their assigned tasks. This belief may bring improvement in the society. Similarly universities are answerable about what they are doing for the betterment of the society in general and for the welfare of a common man in particular because public institutions are being run by the tax payers. That is why universities are bound to solve the problems of society that arise from time to time.

At the beginning, universities were established to train the person to perform public functions. This means that the primary philosophy of the higher education institutions was to transmit knowledge to the young generation, later with the arrival of Humboldt model, the research culture came in the universities and the society of the present age, demanded from university to accept challenges of the contemporary era to find the solution of the social problems as well. This mean universities should do something more than that of knowledge transmission and knowledge creation. Now the community development is a third well known function of the universities. This development may be direct or indirect. For Indirect development universities address those problems that hinder a society to grow, like our society is facing the problem of energy crisis, unemployment, terrorism, pollution and polarization. Some sections of the society may feel that universities should have been engaged in research and have produced sufficient results and they have completed their responsibilities by finishing certain projects. But this is not true, because universities are not formed to publish only research articles which is a prerequisite for the promotion of a university teacher, whereas the indirect community development helps the people of certain locality to improve their living standards. For example, with the arrival of national and international students in a certain area may bring a positive effect on that part, and this may consequently increase economic activities in certain region. That is why, one can observe the trend that a university has different campuses in various cities.

The evaluation may help to assess whether university is contributing to the society or there is any shortfall. That is why evaluation is necessary in knowing whether efforts are being made in the right directions. So in a broader sense, this can be said that actually university evaluation reflects the standards and the norms of the society. This also gives a message to the taxpayers that their precious wealth is being properly spent to improve institutions of the society. One may be able to conclude that developed university means a developed society and vice versa.
VII. Evaluation for the Improvement of Infrastructure

In HEIs, effective learning is impossible without the development of the proper infrastructure and this is hard to imagine without continuous evaluation. The infrastructure can be considered as the facilities given to both teachers and students in the form of resources to facilitate their teaching and learning. The facilities may include well-established laboratories, upgraded libraries both traditional and digital, qualified and experienced faculty, inscription of reputed international journals, learning atmosphere for students, teacher training, continuous development of faculties, publication of journals, numbers of national and international conferences conducted or attended and the facilities given to students and teacher in the form of residence and security. The nature of infrastructure may vary, however certain norms are universally accepted. The question arises as to why it is important to consider the infrastructure facilities while conducting the process of university evaluation. Basically when an evaluator plans to carry out the process of evaluation, he/she may keep in mind three fundamental factors: input, process and product. All those institutions that are in the age of infancy, mainly concentrate on the primary factor that is input factor. When an institution feels confident that the basic facilities have been acquired, they move towards the advance stage of evaluation, i.e. process and product. No doubt the developing countries are improving their universities and advance countries are evaluating the process and output factors. For example the quality office in Sweden NAHE is now trying to calculate the cost of the course per student. Likewise there are other quality offices in Europe that are trying to evaluate the output of an institution.

VIII. Evaluation for Management

The concepts of rights and responsibilities go side by side and one cannot separate one from another. So evaluation improves the management of the university as a whole. This serves like a tool of accountability. The process of evaluation is a step to identify the gap that hinders progress. But there are certain cases where evaluation holds someone accountable as well. That is why we see the quality office in different universities. Basically, evaluation of management is an important point and this reveals the accountability of higher management. This is associated with the role of leadership. The University of Harvard or the MIT has its name due to its leader. There are two aspects of evaluation that are associated with the university management style. The first aspect is very simple and common; to improve the university management on the basis of evaluation and the second aspect is reversible to first and is a form of formative evaluation i.e. in future university might recruit their management in the light of the evaluation. That is why we see the concept of search committee introduced by higher education commission of Pakistan to recruit the vice chancellor for higher education institution but in spite of such effective measures, certain other factors like political influence, provincial biases may affect quality of decisions.

IX. Evaluation for Budget/Resource Allocation

There is a strong relation between evaluation and the resource allocation. Governments often use the evaluation report as a fundamental tool for the distribution of annual budgets. Although this is hard to be seen in the developing countries like Pakistan but this correlation has a lot of debate in the advance countries of Europe and USA (Currie, 2004). That is why the phenomenon of evaluation is mandatory in European
countries and universities have to pass through the process of accountability. In Europe, states are also encouraging private HEIs through monetary incentives. Although the amount is not same as given to the public sector universities but the philosophy to pay for quality has come in.

No doubt, evaluation of resource allocation could be used as a stimulator and the excessive use may produce side effects like negative competition, additional and fake enrollment to find better places in university ranking. That is why it is recommended that evaluation for resource allocation should be used only in exceptional cases. The use of evaluation is similar to an antibiotic against illness as long term use of such kind of treatment may weaken the immune system. The internal defense mechanism of the universities is the concept of self evaluation. Verification (external evaluation) can improve the weaknesses of self evaluation. However it may be recommended that some incentive may be awarded to certain universities so that it may improve the culture of self evaluation.

X. Latest Trend of University Evaluation

Although the above mentioned facts are closely associated with the university evaluation but if we deeply analyze the phenomenon, the process of accountability is a vital component in making a university ideal or model. There is a great debate over the model university and the consensus is difficult to do what is best university in the academic circles. However there are certain indicators for a modern university and evaluation is one of them.

According to Kawaguchi (2008), the first modern university is called the University of Berlin also known as Humboldt University. This institution is based on the philosophy of Wilhelm Von Humboldt and the main principles of his philosophy are: education through research, a national university, and autonomy of university.

The concept of teacher as a researcher is the vision of Humboldt. He opposed the conventional role of teacher and stressed research based teaching and learning. He introduced the role of teacher as researcher in universities. He said that research is the only difference between the school/college education and university education. Great development in the field of science and technology is a clear evidence of research based education. The idea of national university was an effort to free the university and its administration from the occupancy of royal families and the Lord of the church to meet their expenses. The Creation of Berlin University was an effort to set up a financially stable university. Basically this was the first step towards university autonomy and this has given the birth to accountability in higher education and without public funds, university evaluation is hard to imagine.

One may think how university autonomy could be possible when funds were provided by the state because the same was the practice when universities were governed by the royal families or the religious leaders. Kawaguchi referred Humboldt, “the state should not interfere in the university and the unwanted intervention is harmful to academic research” (Kawaguchi, 2008, p.6).This statement serves as a strong shield to avoid the state involvement. That is why, Humboldt hold the title as the guardian angel of university economy, freedom and the pioneer in introducing accountability in HEIs.
XI. Evaluation Culture as Foundation of University Philosophy

A Japanese philosopher Kawaguchi (2008) describes that there should be three “As” in the age of any university. These are: autonomy, academic freedom and accountability. According to him Universities having “three As”, knowledge is created, passed down and its contribution can be clearly shown in the community. From here a new role and function for universities is created i.e. the community development through universities. If a university is unable to bring change in the community, the university must review the goals. By the grace of Humboldt’s vision and policies, universities started to welcome the students of common class. He said that universities of the twenty first century should have “openness and depth”. Here openness means university and society have close interaction. The institutions should engage themselves to reduce the social issues as well as the social problems and the isolation from society may diminish the importance of an institution. This simply means that real and practical knowledge should transfer to students. The depth refers to the personality, excellence and the worth of a university. In other word depth indicates the infrastructure of a university. Evaluation culture of a university supports this “openness and depth”. A modern university used “culture of evaluation” as its foundation to flourish knowledge. The autonomy of the universities will be in danger in the absence of an evaluation culture.

Private Universities and professional schools are going to appear almost in every part of the world. One may ask whether accountability is a problem of public sector universities only or private HEIs will have to face the same phenomenon. Experts and sociologists have an opinion that a university (both public and private) is a public institution. Such types of institutes are nation’s future. That is why accountability in the form of evaluation culture is vital both for public and private universities. Some universities may claim that they evaluate themselves by publishing the facts either in the newspapers or on the web. Such information is insufficient because this is the viewpoint of unilateral side. The main concern of evaluation is to improve the quality of teaching and research and it is a continuous effort for future improvement and evolution. Now at present society has expectation from the universities that they will try to address the local as well as the global issues. That is why society is demanding a diverse type of a university based on evaluation culture.

XII. Discussion and Conclusion

Evaluation is an important and a diverse activity in assessing the effectiveness of a program, project, personnel, or even an institution and no one can deny its vitality. Since the focus of our discussion is towards the institutional evaluation, this action may helps in evolving the university. Basically the university evaluation is a three-phase activity. The first phase is simply and the focus remains primarily on input i.e. the institutions try to develop the personnel, facilities and the infrastructure. In the second phase the process factor gets attention. This is the middle stage where plans and policies are translated into content and ultimately turned into practice. The implementation of policies in the true spirit uplifts the society, institution and country. The success of process factor leads towards the final step of evaluation. The third factor of university evaluation deals with the question: what universities are producing? This determines the quality of the output. Although it is complex and difficult to measure, however certain efforts are being made to handle this factor. For example the National Accreditation for Higher Education (NAHE) in Sweden is trying to calculate the cost per student for each program. This
phase is tricky in the sense that to concentrate on the last point, an institution must have two or three consecutive successful evaluation reports about the first two factors. Moreover this stage requires expertise and knowledge for proper diagnosis.

Although university evaluation servers various functions such as social accountability, improvement of infrastructure, improvement of management, and evaluation for the allocation of budget and resource allocation. This process is also considered as communication with the government and this provide a nonverbal message to the taxpayers that their hard earned money is being used honestly and properly. The Positive evaluation means the dialogue is well converse, while negative evaluation forces the institution to improve certain areas and ultimately there is a need for reevaluation and this is the symptom of broken dialogue.

Institutional evaluation is a basic ingredient in the process of accreditation as well as university ranking across the world. An effective evaluation indicates true accreditation and classification of universities whereas inappropriate evaluation serves no purpose. Now the question is whether the process of institutional evaluation is a myth or a reality. The answer is quite evident that for developing countries like Pakistan this is a new activity and the word evaluation by default has a psychological fear. Universities may think that negative evaluation can shrink the annual budget provided by the state or this may drop the student enrolment if the reports are available to the press and they publish them without consultation. In both cases this is unknown fear of the institutions. That is why they hesitate to go into the true/real evaluation and some manipulation is there to project the institution as a strong one. Although universities and the HEC have established quality enhancement cells to conduct evaluation but these offices are still at infancy stage. The main focus is still on the program evaluation and working is in progress for institutional evaluation. They are in the process of defining protocols, models, plans etc. So in researchers’ opinion universities are on their way from myth to reality. It will take certain time to conduct a true evaluation.

From the above discussion we can infer that in future universities will have to cultivate the culture of evaluation to gain confidence from state as well as from general public by diffusing their evaluation report on the university web page along with the national press. Moreover, a consensus is to be developed to form a model of evaluation like Europe where four stage model is getting popularity which is based on the European standards and guidelines as compared to other models like peer review, audit model and formative evaluation. The main purpose of university evaluation in Europe is: to enhance quality in higher education institutions (HEIs), to introduce the traditions of accountability and in some part it is the state law that forces universities to conduct evaluation. In certain parts of the world it is due to the growth of higher education in the form of students and discipline. In our national setting, the initiative of university evaluation can be incorporated by passing a law as soon as possible. The main objective may be the accountability because the competent authority has to be answerable of his actions and tenure. The process of evaluation is not a myth but it a reality and sooner or later universities will have to opt this culture. Adopting evaluation culture means that universities are ready to accept the emerging phenomenon like accreditation, accountability, university ranking and the ISO certification. Gradually the myth of university evaluation will transform into reality.
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