Analyzing the Challenges and Opportunities of Quality Enhancement from the Perspective of Faculty and Staff at Logar Institute of Higher Education

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Abstract

This research examines the challenges and opportunities of quality enhancement at Logar Higher Education Institution from the perspective of its faculty and staff. The study employs a quantitative research method, utilizing a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to collect data. The results of this study indicate that the quality enhancement process at this institution faces several challenges. However, some opportunities can be leveraged to mitigate these issues and improve the overall situation. The findings suggest that the faculty and staff at Logar Higher Education Institution are generally aware of their responsibilities in the area of quality enhancement and are familiar with the relevant criteria. On the other hand, certain issues, such as a lack of financial resources, insufficient attention to the professional development of faculty and staff, weak financial autonomy, and the copying of quality enhancement criteria from foreign countries without considering the local context, are major obstacles that hinder the progress of quality enhancement. However, the research also highlights that institutional support from leadership, the presence of relatively adequate infrastructure, and faculty and staff awareness of the quality enhancement processes are important opportunities in this context. Furthermore, the results suggest that strengthening international relations could play a significant role in improving and advancing quality at this institution.
Keywords: Quality Enhancement, Opportunities, Logar, Faculty, Staff

1. Introduction

Improving quality in any institution or organization is considered one of the key factors for its success and sustainability, especially in educational institutions where enhancing quality in various aspects, including teaching, research, and others, is one of the most important goals. On the other hand, improving the quality of training skilled and competent human resources plays a vital role. Without attention to this, the progress of society and national self-sufficiency will not be achievable. The topic of quality improvement has been addressed since the establishment of educational institutions; however, in recent years, the Ministry of Higher Education has paid more attention to this issue. Proper implementation of quality improvement strategies can have significant positive impacts. However, studies show that the issue of quality improvement in

different countries and even within the educational institutions of a single country faces various challenges due to different conditions and resources. Moreover, each educational institution has its unique opportunities, and if these are utilized effectively, they can help reduce the challenges. Therefore, this study aims not only to identify the challenges faced in improving quality in educational institutions but also to explore the available opportunities. By recognizing both the challenges and opportunities, effective measures can be taken to enhance quality.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To identify and examine the challenges and opportunities in the process of quality enhancement at Logar Higher Education Institute

1.2 Research Questions

1. To what extent are the challenges in the quality enhancement process at Logar Higher Education Institute?
2. To what extent are the opportunities for quality enhancement at Logar Higher Education Institute?

2. Research Background

Akbari, Hossein; Roshani, Reza; and Eskandari, Mehrdad (2020) in an article titled "Pathology of the Evaluation and Quality Assurance System: Case Study of Imam Ali Military University" used a case study and descriptive research methodology to analyze the quality assurance process. The research findings indicate that the lack of innovation and creativity in educational management, the absence of participatory thinking in the evaluation and quality assurance process, the lack of strategic planning in the educational system, and the absence of educational assessments are among the factors that have led to the current issues.

Jafari Sani, J., Jafarzadeh Rad, S. M., & Shahson, Z. (2018), in a study titled "Challenges and Problems of Quality Assurance in Higher Education with Emphasis on Iranian Universities and Higher Education Centers" examined the issues and challenges of quality assurance in educational institutions in Iran. The results show that the lack of a comprehensive information system at the national level, the lengthy process of announcing and providing feedback on provincial council decisions, challenges in recruiting faculty members, and the decreasing number of students in some fields and institutions, unclear organizational structure and interrelations between departments and central administration at the provincial level, outdated facilities and equipment, the absence of strategic development documents and operational plans, shortage of faculty members, lack of evaluation of faculty performance, the absence of a comprehensive evaluation system, and the mismatch between some programs and the institution's mission are key challenges facing the quality assurance process.

Fahemi, Mohammad Zaheer (2023), in an article titled "Status and Challenges of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education," has investigated the major challenges in quality evaluation in higher education in the country. The findings show that the quality assurance process is facing issues in both policy-making and strategic planning as well as in the implementation mechanisms, which require fundamental revision in both areas.

Fazlollahi Ghomshi, S., Khoshgoftar Moghadam, A. A., & Salehi, P. (2021), in an article titled "Factors Affecting the Assurance of Learning Quality in Universities: A Case Study of the University of Petroleum Industry," examined the primary and secondary factors influencing quality assurance. The study's statistical population included faculty members, administrators, staff, and students of the university, with interviews conducted with 21 faculty members and questionnaires distributed among 386 students. The results of the data analysis revealed that management factors, technology, teaching methods, teaching experience, and educational content are all significant factors affecting the quality assurance process.

Rahimi, A., & Ayobi, M. O. (2023). in an article titled "The Role of Aligning Quality Assurance and Accreditation Criteria in Knowledge Production" explored the impact of aligning quality assurance criteria on the development and creation of new knowledge. The findings indicate that the application of the eleven quality improvement criteria of the Ministry of Higher Education can provide a suitable environment for strategic planning, goal setting, investment in scientific production, and the gathering of modern resources, thus enabling students and researchers to contribute effectively to societal development through research, publishing books and articles, and addressing challenges, opportunities, and community needs.

Shams, G. R., Farastekhah, M., Reza, M., & Miarakhound, Z. (2015). in a study titled "Investigating the Factors Affecting the Quality Assurance of Educational Management Programs Using the Shannon Entropy Technique" identified the factors, criteria, and indicators influencing the quality assurance of educational management programs. The findings indicate that students, faculty members, educational and research facilities, the organizational position of department management, the teaching-learning process, conducted training programs, and graduates are involved. Among these, the organizational factor—department management and organization—has the highest priority with a weight of 0.51 and an importance coefficient of 0.17.

Fakhteh, I., Esghaei, S., & Reza Mohammadi, R. (2020), in an article titled "Employability of Graduates and Quality Assurance in Higher Education," discussed the role of quality assurance in graduate employment. The findings suggest that internal quality assurance actions enhance the credibility of universities, indirectly impacting graduate employment. The direct connection comes from the fact that quality assurance strengthens the relationship between universities and labor market representatives, leading to closer connections between the curriculum, training outcomes, and future employment needs.

Rashidi, Zahra (2020) in her research explored strategic ways to improve and enhance the quality of university systems as a path to graduate employment. The study indicates that learning from global experiences is crucial, and policymakers in higher education must understand that educational institutions, due to their institutional nature, must maintain independence to respect university values. Any improvement plan for the performance and functioning of educational institutions should emerge from the internal needs of the institution, not external pressures.:

Maaref Vand, Z., & Nochesar, H. R. (2020). Ma'aref-Vand, Zahra and Nochnasaz, Hamid Reza (1399) in an article titled "An Analysis of the Similarities and Differences in Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education in Developed Countries and the Middle East"

examined the quality assurance systems in higher education, focusing on systems in developed countries such as the U.S., UK, Japan, France, and Middle Eastern countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and India. The results indicate that governments always strive to align their educational policies with global developments. However, the study of quality assurance systems in the mentioned countries shows both complete and partial similarities as well as differences between them.

Lazik, Zyt; Durdaavid, A; and Gazizoulain, A (2021) in an article titled "Improvement of Quality of Higher Education Institutions as a Basis for Improvement of Quality of Life" proposed a quality evaluation model for higher education institutions in the technical and technological fields, along with a system to support decision-making and management strategies to improve quality. The findings show that, "Through monitoring and research in the field of higher education and analyzing the existing literature and current state of the higher education system in developing countries, it can be concluded that there is no single method for evaluating the quality of higher education institutions. This knowledge was a good starting point for the research presented in this article. The results include the development of a system for evaluating quality and ranking higher education institutions. Moreover, the evaluation of key performance indicators of higher education institutions from the perspectives of various stakeholders is critical. However, the development of a decision-support system and selecting the optimal strategy to improve the quality performance of academic programs and higher education institutions is feasible."

Nicholson, K (2011) in a study titled "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature" addressed key issues related to quality assurance. The findings suggest that there is optimism that learning outcomes at the program level, identified within degree expectations, provide a framework for accountability, strengthening curricula, and measuring the added impact of higher education on student learning and development. The quality assurance framework is described as "much simpler, more effective, clearer, and more accountable than existing quality assurance processes."

Dyle, D (2007) in an article titled "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Practices and Issues" examined the quality assurance process from various dimensions. The findings highlight that implementing quality assurance facilitates meeting academic standards, gaining program accreditation, promoting scientific development, improving student learning, enhancing graduate outcomes, gaining international accreditation, supporting university rankings, and improving academic quality as key achievements of the quality assurance process.

3. Research Methodology

This study is applied in nature and utilizes a quantitative survey approach. A researcher-designed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (closed-ended responses) was used as the primary data collection tool. The study population consisted of all faculty members and staff at Logar Higher Education Institute. According to the Morgan table, a sample size of 152 individuals was selected. The questionnaires were distributed using a stratified random sampling method. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through peer review, and its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The data collected were analyzed using frequency distribution tables, percentages, and bar charts.

4. Findings

The findings of the study are analyzed below through tables and graphs.

Table 1
Distribution of Questionnaire Questions

No	Questionnaire Questions	Very High	High	Middle	Few	Very Few
1	How aware are you of your responsibilities regarding quality improvement in this institution?	33 (21.71%)	70 (46.05%)	49 (32.24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2	How familiar are you with the quality improvement criteria?	15 (9.87%)	62 (40.79%)	70 (46.05%)	5 (3.29%)	0 (0%)
3	How available are financial resources to implement the quality improvement process in Logar Higher Education Institution?	8 (5.26%)	15 (9.87%)	76 (50%)	38 (25%)	15 (9.87%)
4	Are deficiencies in technical infrastructure and educational equipment an obstacle to quality improvement in the Logar Higher Education Institution?	10 (6.58%)	35 (23.03%)	61 (40.13%)	38 (25%)	8 (5.26%)
5	How important is effective cooperation between different sections of the Logar Higher Education Institution in quality improvement?	55 (36.18%)	45 (29.61%)	27 (17.76%)	15 (9.87%)	10 (6.58%)
6	Do managerial and structural limitations at Logar Higher Education Institution hinder the effective implementation of quality improvement programs?	13 (8.55%)	40 (26.32%)	55 (36.18%)	34 (22.37%)	10 (6.58%)
7	Does the lack of professional development opportunities for professors and staff hinder quality improvement?	28 (18.42%)	75 (49.34%)	37 (24.34%)	5 (3.29%)	7 (4.61%)
8	Can the presence of experienced staff in the Logar Higher Education Institution contribute to quality improvement?	70 (46.05%)	48 (31.58%)	31 (20.39%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.97%)
9	Can international collaborations provide new opportunities for quality improvement at Logar Higher Education Institution?	93 (61.18%)	38 (25%)	16 10.53%)	5 (3.29%)	0 (0%)
10	Can the use of new technologies positively affect the quality	100 (65.79%)	33 (21.71%)	19 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

No	Questionnaire Questions	Very High	High	Middle	Few	Very Few
	improvement process at Logar Higher Education Institution?					
11	Does Logar Higher Education Institution have strong research capabilities that could contribute to improving academic quality?	20 (13.16%)	45 (29.61%)	62 (40.79%)	20 (13.16%)	5 (3.29%)
12	Can the development of educational programs based on market needs provide an opportunity for quality improvement at Logar Higher Education Institution?	40 (26.32%)	70 (46.05%)	37 (24.34%)	5 (3.29%)	0 (0%)
13	Does Logar Higher Education Institution have clear and systematic criteria for quality evaluation?	10 (6.58%)	63 (41.45%)	66 (43.42%)	8 (5.26%)	5 (3.29%)
14	Are the quality improvement criteria in the Logar Higher Education Institution continuously updated?	5 (3.29%)	53 (34.87%)	61 (40.13%)	23 (15.13%)	10 (6.58%)
15	Is the quality evaluation process carried out transparently and fairly in all sections of Logar Higher Education Institution?	23 (15.13%)	60 (39.47%)	53 (34.87%)	8 (5.26%)	8 (5.26%)
16	Does Logar Higher Education Institution use modern evaluation methods to ensure quality in teaching and learning?	15 (9.87%)	60 (39.47%)	44 (28.95%)	23 (15.13%)	10 (6.58%)
17	Does Logar Higher Education Institution have sufficient educational programs for the professional development of professors and staff?	8 (5.26%)	48 (31.58%)	65 (42.76%)	23 (15.13%)	8 (5.26%)
18	Does the leadership of Logar Higher Education Institution actively support professors and staff for quality improvement in education and management?	38 (25 %)	50 (32.89%)	48 (31.58%)	8 (5.26%)	8 (5.26%)
19	Does the lack of financial independence of higher education institutions hinder quality improvement at Logar Higher Education Institution?	48 (31.58%)	55 (36.18%)	44 (28.95%)	3 (1.97%)	2 (1.32%)

No	Questionnaire Questions	Very High	High	Middle	Few	Very Few
20	How challenging is it to copy quality improvement criteria from foreign countries without considering their adaptability in the Logar Higher Education Institution?	28 (18.42%)	48 (31.58%)	63 (41.45%)	10 (6.58%)	3 (1.97%)

Graph 1

Graph Related To Questions
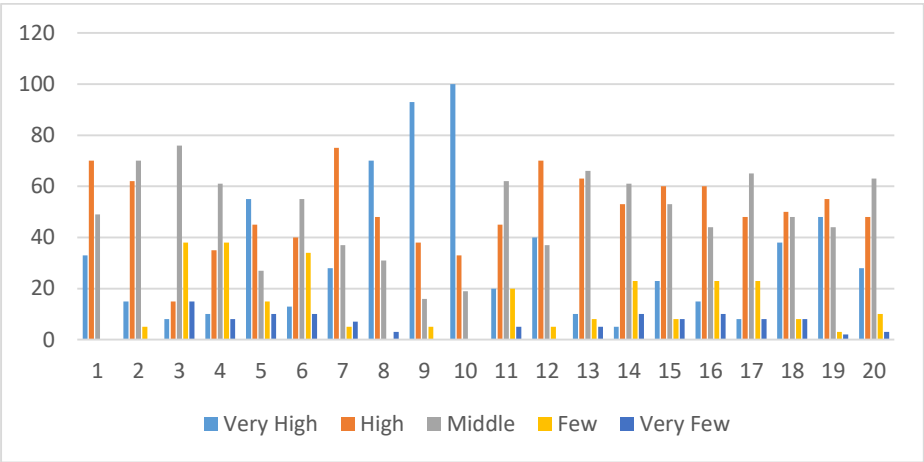
Based on Table and Graph 1, the respondents' awareness of their responsibilities in the area of quality enhancement is about 67%, while only 33% considered their level of awareness to be average. In this regard, approximately 50% of respondents rated their familiarity with quality enhancement criteria as high or very high. Regarding the financial resources allocated for quality enhancement in the institute, only about 12% of respondents were satisfied, considering it to be high or very high. In comparison, around 26% rated the financial resources in the quality enhancement sector as average. When it comes to the impact of the lack of necessary infrastructure and equipment on quality enhancement, the majority of respondents (40%) chose the "average" option, considering the available infrastructure and equipment to have a moderate impact on quality enhancement in the institution. In terms of coordination between different sections of the institution and its effect on quality enhancement, about 60% of respondents stated that the lack of cooperation among various departments has had a negative impact on quality enhancement. Meanwhile, approximately 20% of respondents considered the lack of inter-departmental collaboration to be of little importance in the quality enhancement process.

The research findings indicate that around 30% of respondents believe the management approach in the quality enhancement sector of the institution has a significant impact. The rest considered the management's influence to be average, low, or very low. In another section, the majority of respondents (68%) believed that the insufficient attention

to the professional development of faculty and staff is a major obstacle to quality enhancement. Regarding the role of international cooperation in quality enhancement, approximately 86% of respondents stated that it plays a very significant role in improving quality. Similarly, around 86% of respondents emphasized the importance of technology usage in quality enhancement at the institution. When asked whether Logar Higher Education Institute has strong research capacities that positively impact quality enhancement, most respondents disagreed. Only 42% of them confirmed the presence of strong and effective research capacities that contribute to quality enhancement in the institution.

Regarding the development of market-oriented educational programs as a major factor in quality enhancement, about 72% of respondents selected the "high" and "very high" options. On the question of whether Logar Higher Education Institute has specific and systematic criteria for assessing the level of quality enhancement, around 40% of respondents agreed that such criteria exist. However, only about 13% of respondents indicated that the quality enhancement criteria are regularly updated at the institution.

Regarding whether the evaluation process for quality enhancement at Logar Higher Education Institute is transparent and fair, approximately 54% of respondents confirmed that it is. Additionally, around 49% of respondents mentioned that the institution uses modern evaluation methods for assessing quality enhancement in teaching and learning. The research findings reveal that only about 36% of respondents were satisfied with the professional development programs for faculty and staff. At the same time, the rest considered the attention given to improving the capacity of faculty and staff as insufficient. In this regard, about 57% of respondents stated that the university leadership supports faculty and staff in the quality enhancement process. Regarding the role of financial autonomy in quality enhancement, more than 68% of respondents stated that financial independence could play a significant role in improving the quality of the institution. Finally, around 50% of respondents believed that copying quality enhancement models and criteria from other countries has led to challenges in implementing quality enhancement at the institution.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study align with the results of previous research on the topic in many aspects. In some cases, the results are innovative and not as apparent in earlier studies. For instance, one of the major challenges in improving quality identified in this study is the weak coordination among various departments within the educational institution. This finding is consistent with the work of Akbari, R., Roshani, M., & Eskandari, M. (2020), as well as Jafari Sani, J., Jafarzadeh Rad, S. M., & Shahson, Z. (2018).

Regarding the role of management practices in quality improvement, the results of this study differ from those found in the works of Fazlollahi Ghomshi, S., Khoshgoftar Moghadam, A. A., & Salehi, P. (2021); Shams, G. R., Farastekhah, M., Reza, M., & Miarakhound, Z. (2015); Lazik, Zita; Dordavid, A.; and Gazizoulain, A. (2021).

In terms of adopting quality improvement standards from other countries, the findings of this study are consistent with those of Rashidi, Zahra (2020). The results of this study also suggest that the use of new technologies can play a significant role in enhancing quality, which aligns with the findings of Lazik, Zita, Dordavid, A., and Gazizoulain, A.

(2021). Regarding the existence of a systematic approach for quality evaluation at the Logar Higher Education Institute, the findings of this study indicate that the quality evaluation process is not clear or well-defined. These results are in line with the research conducted by Larik, Zita; Dordavid, Gazizoulain (2021) and Nicholson, K. (2011), which emphasize the need for a clear system to assess quality improvement in educational institutions. Additionally, the results of this study highlight the importance of creating opportunities for international collaboration and the exchange of experiences on quality improvement between this country and others. This finding is consistent with the work of Maaref Vand, Z., & Nochesar, H. R. (2020). Finally, regarding the weak capacity and resources of the Logar Higher Education Institute in scientific research, the findings of this study align with the research conducted by Shams, Gholamreza et. al. (2015) in Iran.

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of previous research on the subject, it is clear that the quality improvement process in educational institutions across different countries faces various yet similar challenges, depending on their conditions and available resources. The results of this study indicate that the quality improvement process at the Logar Higher Education Institute is encountering several issues, primarily due to factors such as: severe financial resource shortages, low financial independence, lack of research infrastructure, insufficient programs for enhancing the capacity of faculty and staff, weak international relationships for experience exchange in quality improvement, the disconnect between the curriculum and the job market, imitation of foreign quality improvement standards without considering the local context, outdated quality improvement standards, and the absence of clear and specific quality evaluation criteria at the institution. However, the institute also possesses several opportunities for quality enhancement, including the presence of committed and knowledgeable human resources dedicated to quality improvement, reasonably adequate infrastructure, access to technology (such as classrooms equipped with LCDs or projectors), and internet access for both faculty and students. Proper utilization of these resources can play a significant role in mitigating the existing challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Higher Education should allocate a specific budget for quality improvement and enhance the financial capabilities of universities.
2. The Ministry of Higher Education should continuously design and implement programs tailored to the needs of faculty and staff to increase their capacity.
3. To facilitate the exchange of experiences in quality improvement, the Ministry of Higher Education should strengthen academic relationships with regional countries.

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