

Quality of HE Teaching

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan

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Executive Summary

The project explored perceptions of teaching quality in Higher Education in Pakistan. It used a mixed-methods approach, employing a survey of HE staff together with focus groups and interviews with Higher Education Commission senior staff, university staff and students.

The project focussed on teaching resources, teaching and assessment practice, the use of technology and Continuous Professional Development, but allowed participants to raise other issues relevant to learning and teaching.

Various examples of good practice came through and there was evidence of pride in the staff and students at the two universities visited, namely Allama Iqbal Open University and COMSATS University. Innovations in teaching methods were in evidence, supported by increased use of technology for learning and teaching. However, there were also areas of concern raised by the full range of survey and face-to-face participants around the consistency, access and availability for students to high-quality teaching and assessment.

Issues raised by staff include the need for additional pedagogic training and support, the lack of reward and recognition for excellent teaching and the lack of openness in appraisal systems. In addition, it was concluded that in line with global good practice, Pakistan may benefit from a more open culture with a stronger student voice, peer observation practice for learning, a Professional Standards Framework for HE, training in teaching methods as part of PhD studentship and forging stronger links with industry and employers.

HEC and the newly-established National Academy for HE have key roles in promoting and supporting changes, in order to modernise and enhance learning and teaching in Pakistan. Recommendations are presented at the end of the report, for national and institutional level consideration and actions. It is hoped that the findings are shared with participants, as requested by several respondents.

Appendices

- 1 Acknowledgements and thanks
- 2 Schedule of visit

Tables

- 1 Classroom resources
- 2 Library resources
- 3 Approaches to curriculum design
- 4 Curriculum for skills development
- 5 Skills development activities
- 6 Assessment methods used
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- 8 Teaching culture

Abbreviations

AIOU	Allama Iqbal Open University
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
HE	Higher Education
HEC	Higher Education Commission
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HoD	Head of Department
LMS	Learning Management System
LO	Learning outcome
L&T	Learning & Teaching
NAHE	National Academy for Higher Education
OB	Outcomes-Based
ODL	Open & Distant Learning
PSF	Professional Standards Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
QE	Quality Enhancement
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
VC	Vice-Chancellor
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

1. Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

The Objective was to:

‘Conduct an audit of national HE teaching and learning practice and provide a comparative benchmark of how this measures in relation to global good practice.’

The audit was designed to cover:

The learner’s journey

The educator’s development and role

Context, culture, process and practice.

2. Context

2.1 Pakistan Context

The Islamic State of Pakistan is the 6th most populous country, with around 200 million inhabitants. It has been projected that by 2025, the estimated population will be 227 million, with over 60% below the age of 30 (QAA Report, 2017). This population is becoming increasingly urban, with Karachi the largest city, followed by Lahore and Islamabad. Urdu and English are the official languages.

The QAA 2017 Report showed GDP of \$271bn, and unemployment around 6%, but with youth unemployment higher. The Human Development Index low ranking reflects the poor adult literacy rates of 59% and particular issues for women’s education and employment rates.

Pakistan Vision 2025 is the country’s current strategy and includes seven key priority areas of action, or pillars:

- + developing social and human capital and empowering women
- + sustained, indigenous and inclusive growth
- + democratic governance: institutional reform and modernisation of the public sector
- + energy, water and food security
- + private sector and entrepreneurship-led growth
- + developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition
- + modernising transport infrastructure and regional connectivity.

2.2 Education System

The recent, more liberal Government has placed a focus on education, including Higher Education (HE) in Pakistan. There are currently around 1.8 million students in HE in Pakistan, increasing to 3.2 million if ODL and colleges are included. For 2017/18, there were 47,135 registered full-time educators and 9750 part-time/ visiting (figures given to the author from HEC Statistics for 2017/18). Approximately 31% of staff have PhDs.

No formalised central student survey is held along the lines of the UK National Student Survey. There is on-going work by Higher Education Commission (HEC) to address the limited data on student progression, achievement and migration, including by gender, ethnicity and disability.

Pakistan's national vision ambitiously aims to double HE by 2025 through the creation of new universities and increased use of online and distance learning (ODL), with a focus on STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) and some increases in public expenditure. However, it is recognised that there will still be resource constraints and the challenge, as one senior interviewee said, is about 'expansion versus consolidation'. There has been a growth in registered public and private universities from 156 in 2014, to 209 at the time of this report (www.hec.gov.pk, accessed 25.11.2019) and a target of 300 by 2025, which will challenge staff capacity.

The HEC was established in 2002, with responsibilities for HE funding, oversight and quality assurance (using peer review). There are 11 'standards' relating to L&T within the quality framework. The HEC Vision for 2025 is to establish a 3-tier system of universities differentiated by their activity on research (tier 1), comprehensive education (tier 2) and affiliated vocational colleges (tier 3). Quality Assurance and Enhancement has been organised on a self-assessment system, using QE Cells within HEIs to formally self-assess every two years.

The HE curriculum design system has been reformed to align with the Bologna process. There is a growing effort in forming and developing collaborations with international institutions, including in the UK, USA, Australia and China.

Attention is also being given to academic capacity-building vital to support the growth in HE. In June 2019, the National Academy for Higher Education (NAHE) was launched. Its role is as 'a centre of excellence for capacity building, skill development, and promotion of academic and leadership competencies through setting standards, cultivating academic quality, and advancing relevant research in collaboration with HEIs, industry, and social sector.' (www.hec.gov.pk, accessed 15.11.2019). As NAHE's future work is of high relevance to this Report, its aims and functions are reproduced in full below:

'Specific aims will include:

- + Developing and promoting academic and governance and leadership competencies of HEI faculty and management.
 - + Conducting and promoting research/action research on capacity building
-

- + Providing support for the establishment of institutions and/or programmes focusing on capacity building of faculty and management of HEIs.
- + Creating and promoting sustainable partnerships with international development agencies, NGOs, civil society and social organizations
- + Providing inputs to the HEC for relevant policy development.

2.3 Functions

NAHE's functions will include:

- + Designing and delivering generic and need-based capacity building and training programmes in teaching and research for faculty, and academic governance and leadership for faculty and management.
- + In partnership with HEIs, developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as well as Continuing Education requirements for faculty and management of HEIs.
- + Providing training on: (a) designing and implementing online courses, (b) creating communities of practices (online forums), and (c) developing the role of alumni in networking and mentoring for teaching/learning.
- + Developing systems to monitor and regulate standards of similar capacity building institutions and/or programmes.'

There is no national Professional Standards Framework (PSF) for HE professionals (www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukspf) nor generic Codes of Conduct for staff. At the time of writing, the NAHE leadership position was not yet filled.

3. Audit Methodology

3.1 Methods

A two-stage, mixed-methods approach (Bryman, 2009) was taken to this project, to provide opportunities for triangulation, complementarity and extension of data findings.

The design was for a first-stage survey instrument, created by Advance HE and using feedback from the British Council in discussion with Pakistani stakeholders. The questionnaire was comprehensive and included closed and open questions to gain quantitative and qualitative data from a range of respondents. Similar questionnaires have been used by Advance HE in other countries. It was considered to be quite lengthy and covered background information; teaching resources; teaching and assessment practice; use of technology in teaching; and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Whilst positive comments on the structure and content of the questionnaire were given by many respondents, a few did comment on the lengthiness.

The survey was administered by the British Council in Pakistan, in conjunction with partners at HEC. The survey was sent to key contacts for onward distribution across the universities. It was open for five weeks during October and early November 2019. Responses were

collated and the quantitative data was analysed by the Survey Team at Advance HE. Statistics are presented using Excel. Qualitative data and narrative comments from open questions were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (King, 1998).

A four-day research visit to Islamabad was undertaken during November 2019, in order to undertake interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders to elicit richer, qualitative data. Draft questions were prepared for different stakeholder groups, allowing for deeper exploration of issues arising from the survey data. Comprehensive notes were taken during the meetings and reviewed the same evenings. The full set of qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis and findings assimilated into this report, allowing for a degree of member-checking. Initial findings and recommendations were summarised to the HEC Chairman and his team on the final visit day.

3.2 Primary Data Sources

Survey responses came from 748 respondents across 31 universities. Cross-checking with the HEC register, it was determined that respondent universities were mainly shown as 'public', with top response rates from NED University of Engineering & Technology (254 responses), Dow University of Health Sciences (101 responses), University of Gujrat (94 responses), NUST (74 responses) and COMSATS (59 responses). Responses were predominantly from lecturing staff including those in Associate Professor and Professor positions, but management/administrative roles were also represented. The majority of respondents were from STEM subjects, but there were also responses from English, Modern Languages, Linguistics, Business, Communications studies and Sociology. 47% of respondents held PhDs and for 41% of respondents' their highest qualification was at Masters level. Experience covered the full range, with a narrow majority (37%) in the 4-9 years bracket. The majority of respondents (56%) had international experience, through studying, research and/or teaching, mainly in USA, UK, other EU countries, China and South Korea. Only 24% showed 'no pedagogical qualification', with 11% having Masters teaching qualifications, and 40% indicating they have undertaken short courses for teaching.

Interviews and focus groups were initially undertaken with seven officials from HEC to gain a national-level insight into learning and teaching (L&T). Two full-day university visits took place, incorporating a series of focus groups with VCs and senior managers; Deans/ Heads of Departments (HoDs); lecturing staff; and student groups. The institutional visits were to the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) and COMSATS University in Islamabad. In total focus groups were held with two VC/ Rectors, eight senior staff, 23 Deans/ HoDs, 40 lecturing staff and 44 students (across different levels and ranges of experience and subjects). In addition, a focus group was held with 12 VCs (including 3 remotely through video-link).

Appendix 1 makes explicit the thanks and acknowledgements to all participants for their valuable contributions to this study, while Appendix 2 gives details of the visit schedule.

3.3 Data limitations

All research methods carry strengths and weaknesses and it is therefore important to articulate the recognised limitations to the specific approach taken.

The survey, interviews and focus groups used the network of contacts known to the British Council and the Pakistan HEC. A high number of survey respondents and focus group participants were PhD-holders from higher-ranking universities, teaching/ researching STEM subjects. The visits were to two well-esteemed universities in the capital city, one focusing on ODL and the other on STEM subjects. These therefore cannot be considered as truly representative of the HE sector in Pakistan as a whole.

The survey was undertaken during October 2019, a busy period at the start of the semester and this may have affected completion rates. Completion of the survey and participation in groups is more likely to have come from people interested in improving learning and teaching.

The focus groups and interviews were observed by university and HEC staff, which would most likely have an impact on responses, despite assurances of anonymity.

The report is made with recognition of these limitations.

The project methods did not include opportunities to visit universities outside of Islamabad, to observe teaching practice or to examine any student work, so it is necessary here to make explicit that the report is based on selected participants' perceptions of and insights into the quality of teaching in HE in Pakistan. Further recommendations regarding this are made later in the report.

3.4 Final comments

The survey was generally welcomed by respondents who saw it as 'precise and covering all requirements'. Several asked for the results to be shared with them, including members of the COMSATS staff and student groups. Survey respondents expressed their hopes that it would form the basis, as one said, 'for corrective actions sooner rather than later'.

4. Findings

Findings are presented following the structure of the survey, namely:

- + Teaching Resources
- + Teaching and Assessment Practice
- + Use of Technology in Teaching
- + Continuing Professional Development

The survey findings are discussed alongside the interview and focus-group findings and reference made throughout to benchmarking of good practice from a global perspective, using relevant literature and Advance HE experience. These will cover the learner's journey,

the educator's development and role, with reference to context, culture, process and practice.

4.1 Teaching Resources

Responses to the survey indicated the majority use a general multi-purpose classroom, with whiteboards and pens, and most had screens for presentations. Other teaching spaces included laboratories (34%), computer labs (35%), workshops (23%), simulation suites (18%) and studio spaces (4%). This response probably reflects the STEM focus of respondents. A high number (84%) of respondents said they had access to the teaching spaces that they needed, where the remaining 16% looked for more specialised, well-equipped classrooms. Open comment requests made by respondents included for more counselling rooms and facilities for 1:1 discussions.

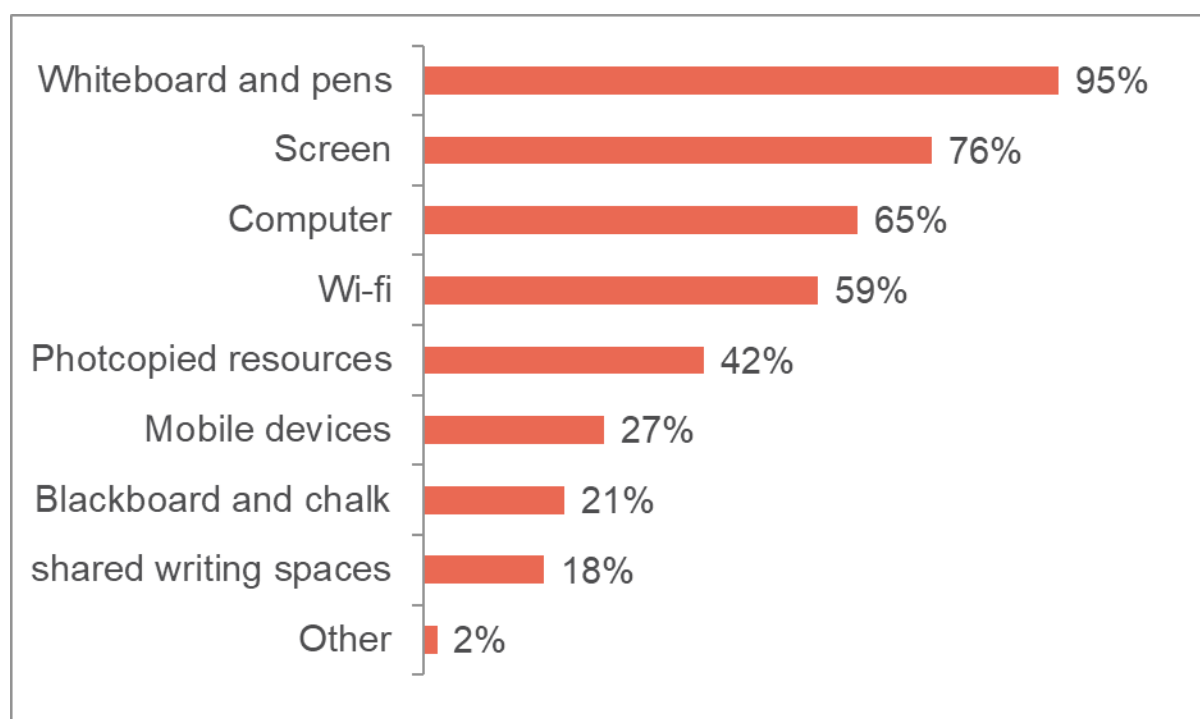


Table 1: Classroom resources

58% of the survey respondents said that their classrooms had movable tables and chairs, while only 12% reported a fixed-tier lecture theatre learning environment. However, in open comments it was found that some still needed better furniture and arrangements to facilitate round-table discussions

as part of teaching. Only 18% of respondents had access in normal teaching spaces to shared writing resources for use with students (e.g. flip-charts).

Within the classrooms, only 59% reported reliable wi-fi internet for students and lack of IT equipment was raised at several points of the survey. The issues raised included the need for updated software, basic projectors to use for presentations, reliable internet, student

access to laptops and mobile technology. For rural areas, even access to reliable electricity proved a barrier to learning. AIOU is considering how to make technology more available to its students in poorer areas.

HEC has funded the pilot use of SMART classrooms in up to 15 HEIs, and one lecturer at COMSATS enthusiastically spoke of the benefits of the new technology in her teaching. She confirmed that the classroom was in good use and suitable training was available.

Marshall (2018) suggests that learning spaces to enable more student-centred and interactive learning affirms the continued role of the physical campus in an expanding digital world. He offers simple solutions of more flexible furnishings, such as swivel chairs, in a tiered environment to allow student discussions. More radical and expensive changes include major re-configurations of rooms with flat surfaces and no teacher-centred focal point, with modular furniture that can be easily re-configured for group work. Plentiful power points and reliable and fast wi-fi capability create an environment more conducive to group- and peer-learning in a technological environment.

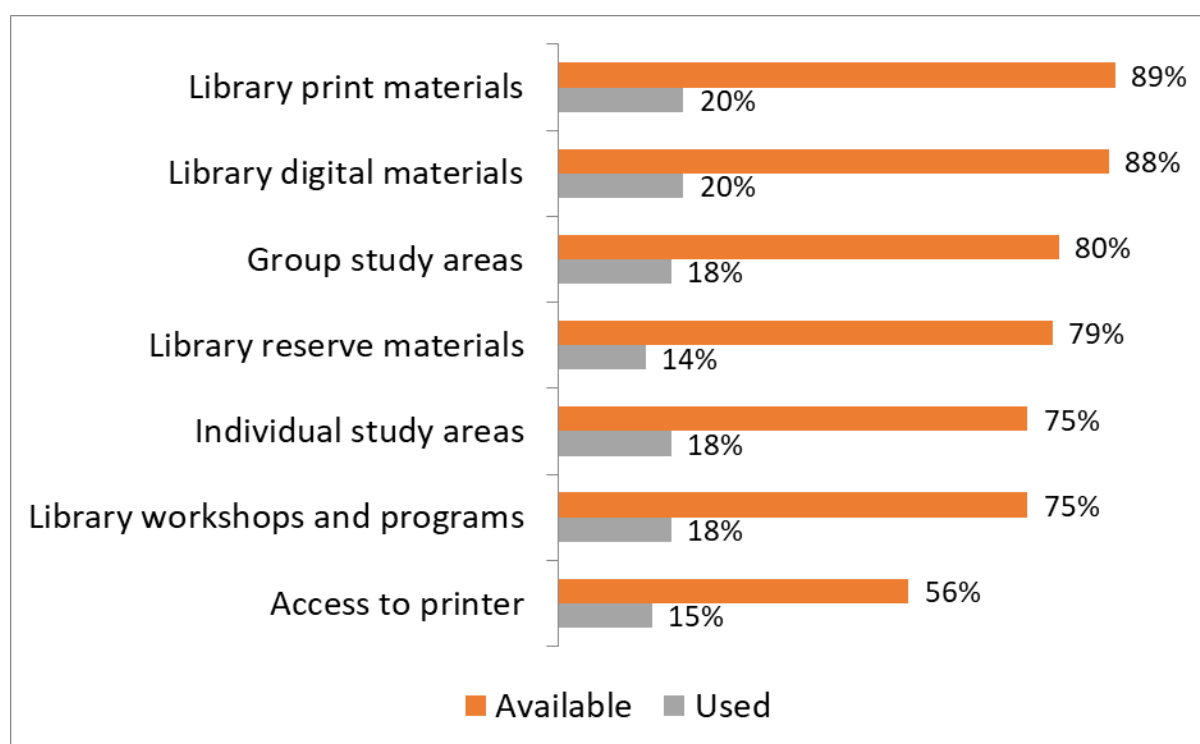


Figure 2: *Library resources*

Figure 2 demonstrates a significant gap between survey respondents' perceptions of the availability and actual use of library resources. Whereas the majority saw a high level of availability, one survey respondent noted that 'the human and digital library resources are not enough to develop practical and technical skills'.

When asked about the gap between availability and student usage, one student said that generally the library was too small, with only floor-space available at busy times, such as

just prior to exams. They would also appreciate more search tools and support in accessing and using e-resources. The AIOU offered a range of e-resources but the question of access to these was raised in respect of some off-campus students. Some staff in the two focus groups reported a general lack of Pakistani case studies and this was confirmed by the student groups, although specific staff in Management Sciences at COMSATS had been tasked with producing more case studies, including on local and national-based practice. Good practice for students suggests a mix of local and international resources for a rounded student experience.

4.2 Teaching and Assessment Practice

The HEIs covered in the survey offer courses from undergraduate through to doctoral level and included specialist institutions, so it is not surprising that class sizes vary. The majority reported classes of 25-49 (39%) and 50-74 (37%), which matched the students' reports of the average class size being around 40-50. Only 8% of survey respondents had classes with over 100 students, while none reported fewer than 10.

Feedback in the survey and during focus group discussion suggests that large classes provide a challenge to some teachers and students. In Pakistan, there is not a practice of large lectures accompanied by smaller tutorial groups, as is found in many international universities, e.g. in UK, US, Australia. Students reported an average of 24 hour contact time per week, mainly in large groups, which is a higher contact time than is common internationally. Large class sizes bring L&T challenges, including managing a diverse range of student abilities, using active learning techniques, giving and receiving feedback, and ensuring that students remain engaged and are not distracted e.g. by social media. Consideration should be given to the use of staff/ student contact hours to maximise student learning, whilst maintaining efficiencies in staff deployment in a resource-constrained environment.

On curriculum design, a variety of approaches is used.

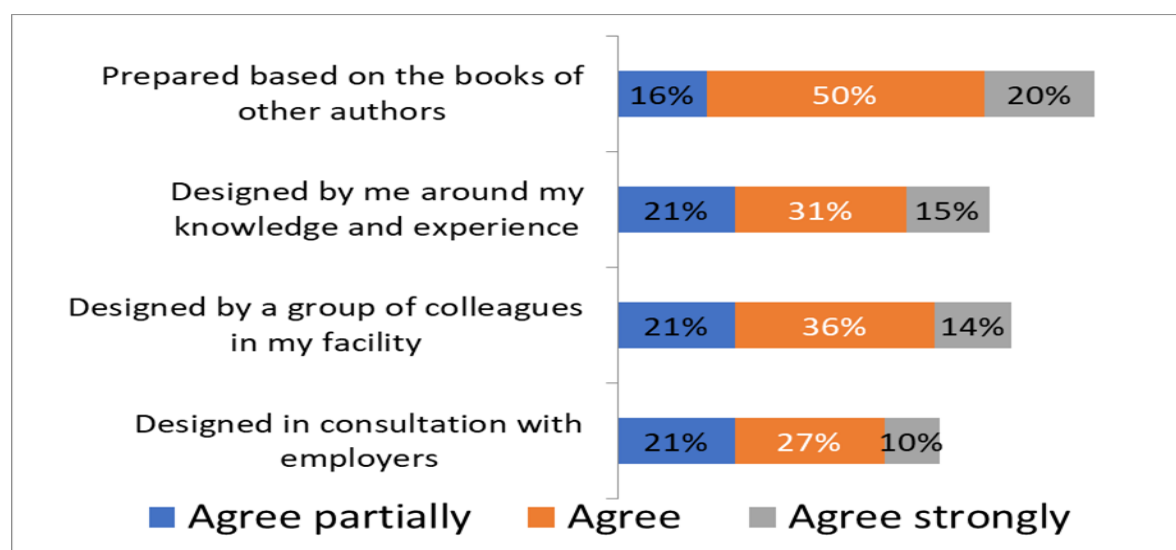


Table 3: Approaches to curriculum design

The majority of teachers responded that they design the syllabus/ curriculum based on books of other authors, with one member of teaching staff saying that he just tends to look at other universities' programmes and copy them. One respondent specifically identified issues around curriculum linkage and mis-alignment with pre-requisite courses.

The student groups reported that they had general induction sessions when they first started their programmes of study and information on the curriculum was available to them early. However, they said that there was little or no counselling on course options and most students follow subjects recommended by parents and teachers, rather than ones in which they held a close interest or found enjoyable. Although information was provided on the option modules, some students reported that they could not study the module of their choice and that content sometimes changed. Induction included social events to meet other students, but there are no Students Unions in Pakistan where they are currently illegal.

71% of survey respondents report that they work on curriculum design as a group activity but only 58% do so in consultation with employers. In an era when universities worldwide tend to focus on employability (<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education>; accessed October 2019), and given the focus on STEM subjects, this is a surprisingly low number. One respondent stated, 'there should be academia and industry linkage and this linkage should be developed by HEC for the development of practical and technical skills'. Few industry visits were made by staff or students. Indeed, employer representation in university life seemed generally lacking compared to international practice. An exception is in Engineering at COMSATS, where they work closely with an Industry Advisory Board. They expressed that 'there is a traditional disconnect at national level – we're trying to bridge that gap... but we're not there yet'. COMSATS some Departments work very closely with employers and professional bodies. Supported by the Washington Accord, engineering staff have devised curricula using an Outcomes-based model, with Programme and Module Learning Outcomes (LOs) and principles of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2007). When asked if they were familiar with such terms, the majority of staff present in the focus group did not know about or use such an approach.

In discussions with PhD and Masters research students, the students reported that they thought that often employers do not appreciate their findings and discoveries. It was clear, however, that employers were only being consulted towards the end of the research projects. These same students asked for more sophisticated resources at the university, while acknowledging to the university staff present at this meeting that resources had to be justified.

The survey also covered skills development, by asking how much respondents agreed/ disagreed that the teaching in their discipline helps students develop a range of skills. Findings are presented in Table 4 overleaf.

The importance of developing skills in students and not just teaching knowledge was acknowledged by staff and students alike, even while one survey respondent claimed that

‘many students use rote learning rather than analytical puzzle-solving’. Even at doctoral level, it was asserted, many students prefer to ‘regurgitate and re-present existing data sets’, rather than doing first-hand practical projects. The claim was made that using quantitative methods was more straightforward and less nuanced, and more likely to result in the publications needed for academic credibility.

Nevertheless, the responses indicate that the teachers believe that they are developing a range of student skills. The students reported that whilst they believed their skills were developing in some

areas, notably teamwork and critical thinking, other skills areas were neglected, e.g. creativity and decision-making. One respondent added that students ‘have not been intellectually challenged enough and therefore do not gravitate towards self-study, independent research and creativity’.

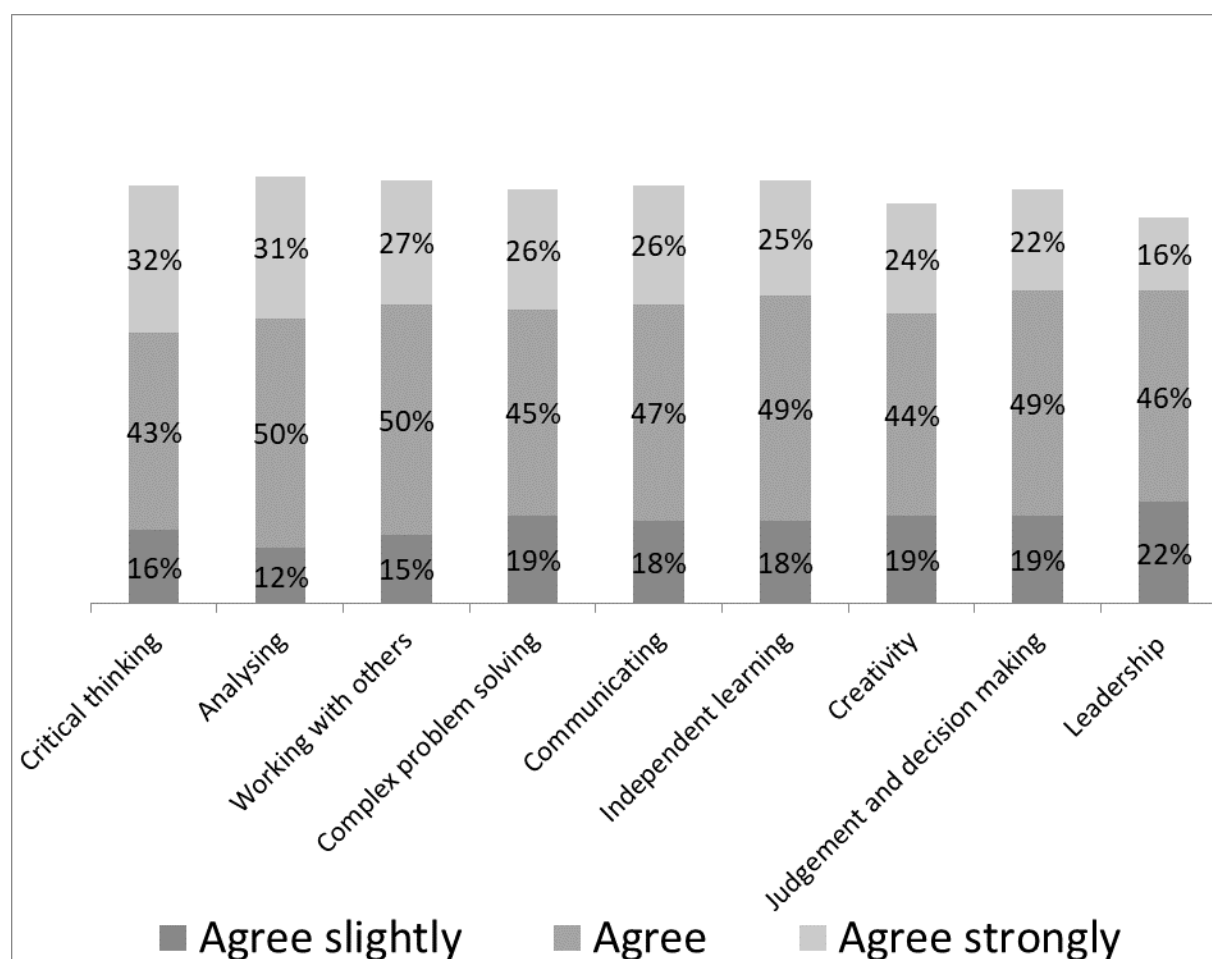


Table 4: Curriculum design for skills development

There are few or no opportunities for students to develop graduate skills through participation in the wider university life, although one student presented himself as a ‘student rep’. On questioning, there had been no process for him to be instated in this position and

he has no role in any university or faculty decisions. Generally there is no student representation on any university deliberative committees within governance structures, although some departments reported having students in their faculty meetings. A notable difference between HE in Pakistan and the global HE experience is that in Pakistan the student voice is generally neglected, including in curriculum design and delivery, and assessment processes. Globally, it is increasingly common to see students as part of ‘co-production’ or ‘partnership’ in the educational process. The student has particular insights into how whole programmes are experienced, and whether there is coherence to progression through modules and years. Teaching staff tend to just see their own modules in isolation or broader course outlines. This could partly explain why one lecturer reported that in their opinion pre-requisite modules did not often align, which would lead to a disjointed learning experience for those undertaking the modules.

Student rights and responsibilities in Pakistan tend to be ‘vaguely’ presented and there are few universities who publish an agreed Code of Conduct for staff or students, although one VC at the focus group meeting said his university were currently creating one with the students, as he believed up until now they had been ‘given short shrift’ and only had ‘a token voice’. This issue is also raised in another report alongside this one, specifically with Terms of Reference relating to leadership and governance.

It was suggested that there is a lack of input to help staff understand how to develop and assess student competences, an issue dealt with by Biggs and Tang (2007). The majority of respondents to the survey reported that their student skills were actually developed during lectures, which was surprising given that traditional didactic methods are unlikely to foster skills development. However, the lecturing staff explained they tried to give opportunities during ‘lectures’ for student activities, such as in group-work. A range of other learning opportunities were also highlighted, including team-work, demonstrations, simulations, case studies and individual project work, which are more recognised teaching methods for skills development.

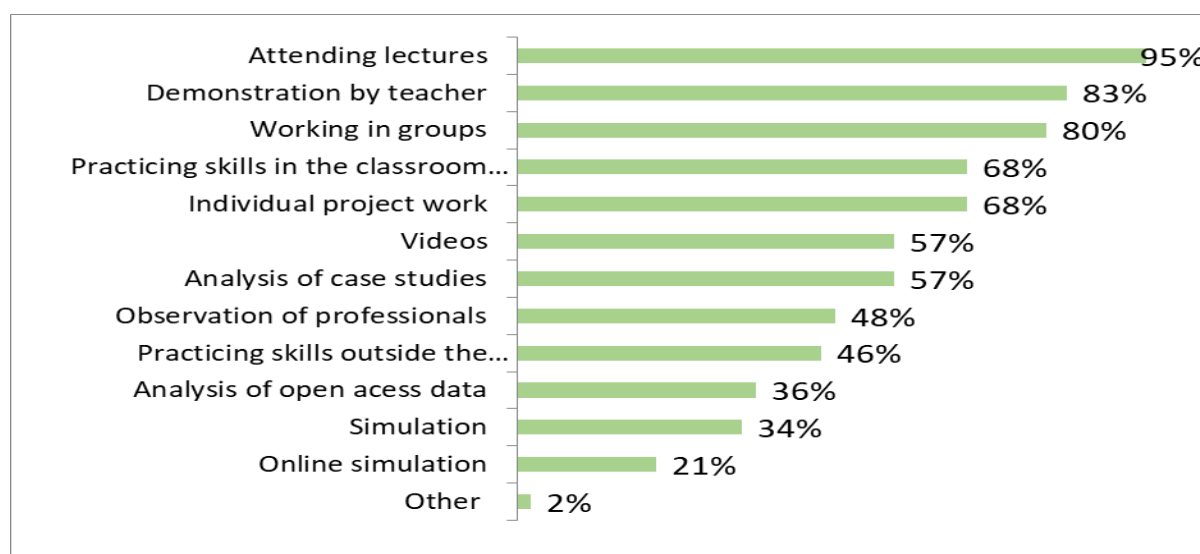


Table 5: Skills development activities

The survey asked about challenges in developing practical or technical skills. Many teachers reported a lack of resources and others mentioned time and workload, language and early schooling deficiencies, large and diverse classes, and lack of outside company engagement.

Many teaching staff saw the students' attitudes and behaviours themselves as the main challenge, especially with regard to lack of effort or motivation. It was reported that students see 'the instructor as gatekeeper to grades only ... rather than focusing on learning'. During the VC discussion, one mentioned that the 'students just want the easy way', indicative of strategic or surface learning to pass examinations rather than to gain deep and meaningful learning of the subject.

Students reported commonly experiencing passive learning throughout their study, although some opportunities for interactivity were recognised and welcomed. Hudson (2017) identifies the didactic

transfer of information to passive student recipients as representative of less developed practice. In Biggs & Tang's seminal work 'Teaching for Quality Learning at University' (2007), they introduce the text with a quotation from Thomas J. Shuell (1986) which is worth reproducing in full:

'If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes ... It is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does.'

Students and staff alike gave examples of classes where they had been subjected to lengthy presentations, whilst a group of COMSATS Psychology undergraduate students applauded the practice in their department of interspersing knowledge-giving with practical work and extended case studies. All the students said their best classes were where they could be actively engaged, with most learning coming when the subject is of interest and linkages made to the practical world and prior learning. Survey respondents recognise this aspect of good practice, with comments including 'you have to go to their understanding level to teach them'.

Moving to assessment, it was clear that Pakistan HE teachers are using a wide range of assessment practices, but that examinations remain the most used.

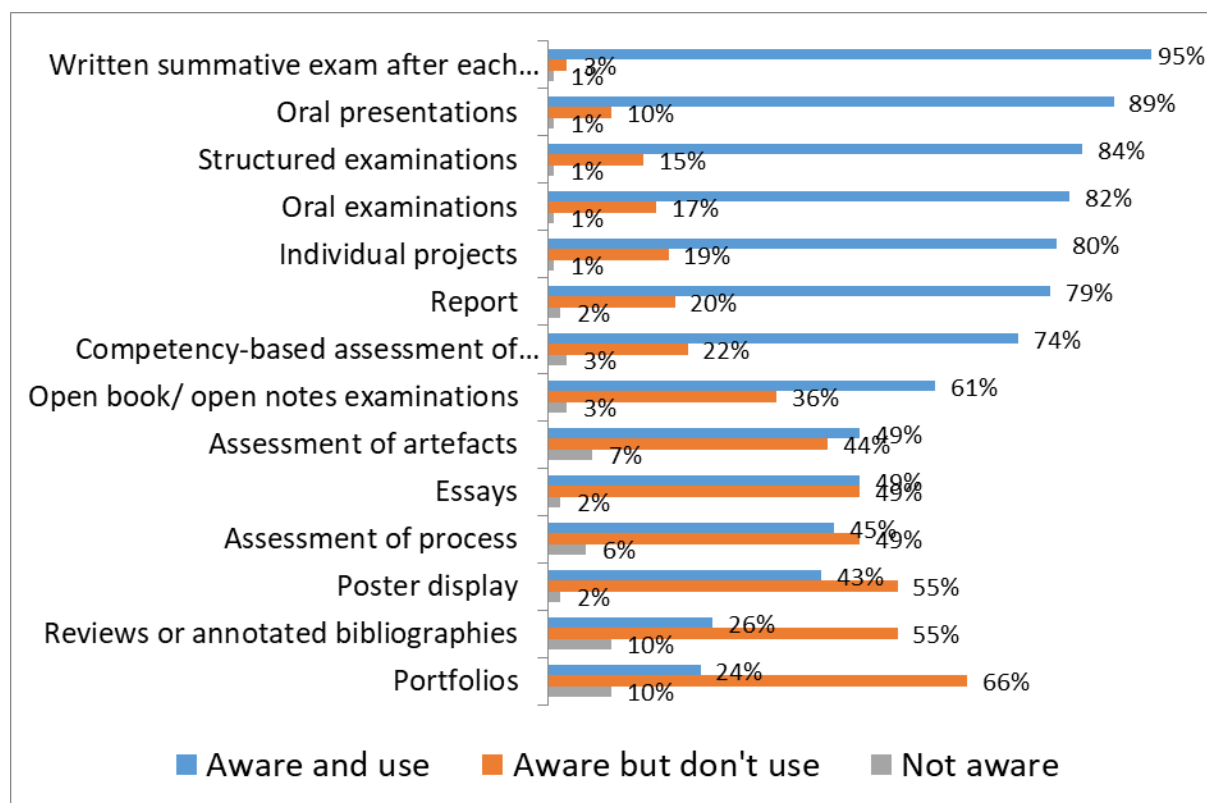


Table 6: Assessment methods used

On further exploration, however, it became clear that there were areas where assessment could be improved in line with global good practice. During the VC discussion, one VC expressed that the 'exam system only assesses knowledge' and is 'shallow'. One teacher explained that the examinations tended to be short and only scantily covered the syllabus, often 'just a one hour test for 8 weeks' worth of study'. In contrast, Engineering teachers using the OB approach with Programme and Module Learning Outcomes (LOs) assessed all key areas of learning. They also assessed skills through practical project-work, including group-work. The general need for more formative assessment and feedback was expressed by one VC.

Assessment was generally seen as a testing of learning rather than a vehicle for learning (Brown, 2015). Turnaround time was seen as a positive feature, with students reporting they got their grades within a week of submission, in comparison to a usual 3-week turnaround time in UK universities. In situations where there are large class groups, such a speedy response seemed impressive. Few students, however, received detailed, meaningful, individual feedback. Generalised feedback was commonly given instead to the whole group during lecture time, so there was little or no personalised learning. The exception was understandably for research Masters and doctoral students, where discussions indicated a high level of satisfaction with the responses received from their supervisory staff.

4.3 Use of Technology in Teaching

Marshall, in 'Shaping the University of the Future: using technology to catalyse change in university teaching and learning' (2018, p266), provides a global model of using technology for online and on-campus learning which encompasses:

- + Formally scheduled learning with a focus on engagement, collaborative and active learning experiences
- + Informal learning, group activities initiated by individual students or as a part of group projects and assessments
- + Individual learning supported by campus facilities such as library, student learning centres
- + Social and community scholarly activities such as meetings, seminars, conferences, exhibitions.

The majority of teachers in the survey do use technology in their teaching:

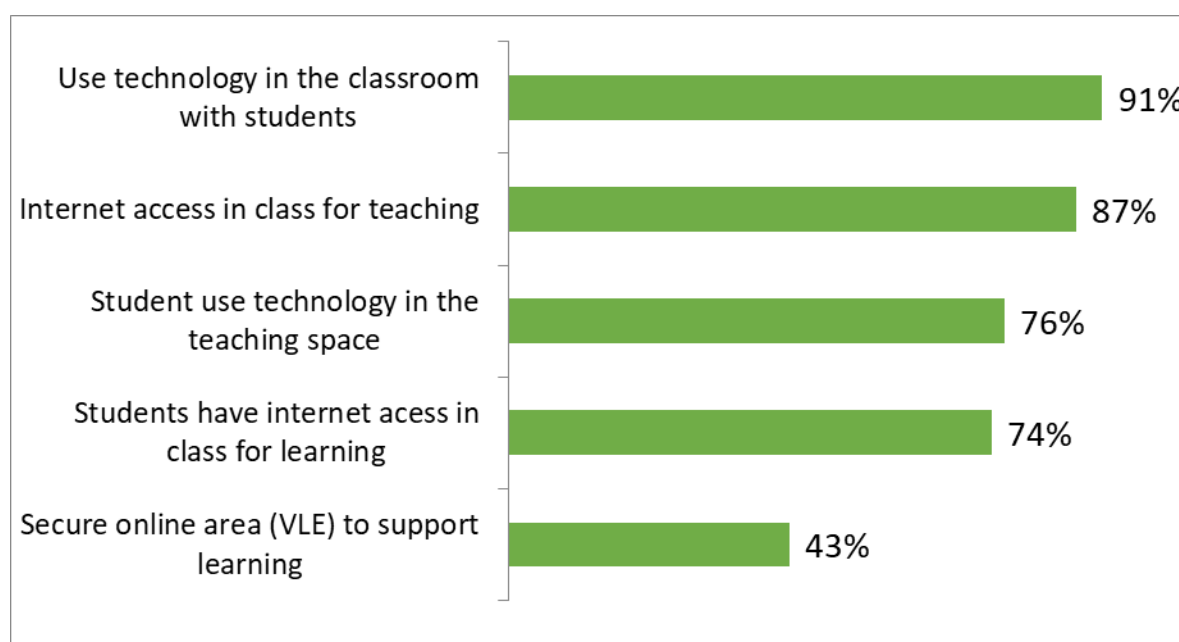


Table 7: Use of Technology

The majority use some sort of technology in their teaching and discussions reveal that the technology is predominantly for presentations. The open questions in the survey show some staff use clicker technology, online quizzes and video clips for student interactivity.

COMSATS staff offered a range of innovative use of technology. The use of SMART classrooms with interactive whiteboards is transforming teaching in some departments. Online teaching and hybrid models are familiar, in some subjects helping to gain industry approval for course recognition. Some students are encouraged to create and use discussion groups on social media, e.g. using Facebook or Twitter. The university is also working on holographic technology for multi-campus delivery of lectures. They said that they

‘can’t wait for resources from government’, but can be innovative and entrepreneurial within their university context.

Virtual learning environments (VLE) are increasingly common in Pakistan, but not to the extent found in more developed HE contexts across the world. The AIOU VC estimated less than 25% of Pakistani universities having a well-developed, comprehensive VLE.

The AIOU, whilst still using some books and paper-based resources for ODL, has an increasing number of online and blended components. With totals of 1.2 million students (of which around 30% are at HE) and 70,000 tutors (including all educational levels), it is a challenge to ensure students receive materials in a mode suited for them. A transformative project is in process, with a move to more technology-enhanced-learning (TEL). In spring 2019, they introduced a new Moodle-based VLE which is in its pilot stage. A new Oracle-based system will provide student data, an audit trail and better learning analytics for management use in improving all aspects of the student experience, including learning and teaching.

COMSATS staff reported their VLE as covering from registration to achievement, with individual student accounts, including access to lecture notes, assessments and discussion-boards. Most did not yet have any lecture capture, although it was recognised that this could help students.

No university in Pakistan can offer ODL programmes without HEC approval. The AIOU VC is working with HEC in drawing up a national ODL Policy, based on their experience and expertise. He saw the British Council as potentially able to help further in this and other endeavours, including liaising with Advance HE and UK HEIs, such as the Open University (OU). The policy would set minimum standards and would form a basis for enhancement and assurance of quality provision.

Survey respondents in open questions frequently made reference to the lack of good, reliable resources for IT and quantitative responses showed that staff believed that many students lack their own laptops (47%) and mobile technology. Staff also identified some lack of confidence in using IT with their students and a need for more training.

4.4 Continuous Professional Development

Developing countries with recent political upheaval and resource constraints often have low rates of faculty development (Smith & Hudson, 2017). There are encouraging indicators of infrastructure changes in Pakistan to address teaching quality. Nationally, attention is being given to the development of NAHE under the auspices of the HEC. Institutionally, quality enhancement is being addressed alongside QE Cells.

In the UK, Australia and New Zealand, for example, many universities have what could be labelled as a ‘L&T infrastructure’. This is an institution-wide support mechanism to drive and maintain improvements in L&T and commonly comprises a Centre for Excellence in L&T (including academic staff development), one PVC and departmental Associate Deans specifically with L&T in their title, and departmental faculty roles with clear responsibilities for

improving L&T. Opportunities to fund, explore and share good teaching practice through communities of practice are found at both departmental and institutional level (Kahn & Baume, 2003). The workload of the Centres for Excellence in L&T typically includes the running of annual L&T conferences, regular learning forums and development events; providing platforms for resources and networking opportunities; pedagogical research; teaching excellence awards. Some Pakistani universities have similar centres for faculty development but not all.

At national level, organisations such as Advance HE in the UK act as a hub for L&T, providing similar opportunities on a wider scale and supporting themed priorities, such as for employability, trans-national education and education for sustainable development.

For high-quality teaching, peer review of professional practice has increasingly focused on review as a means of learning rather than as a judgement of teaching. With an emphasis on what the observer has learned from the observation practice, the process becomes less judgemental and instead promotes reflective practice (Schon, 1983) of teaching in action. This represents a cultural shift, where in a learning organisation it is acknowledged that all individuals can improve and all have a responsibility to share their learning within the community. In the survey, only 28% had experienced peer observation. Busy schedules and a 'secluded' practice where sharing problems can be seen as a weakness were put forward by focus groups as potential challenges to more peer observation practice, but it was acknowledged that the opportunity to observe and honestly discuss practice with peers would be a valuable one. Some had been involved in 'micro-teaching' and what was called an 'audit' by the HoD for judgemental purposes.

All universities should consider becoming reflective 'learning organisations' themselves. It would entail a move to much more openness in giving feedback to teaching staff, including on performance and on developmental needs and preferences. Currently the system is not regarded as transparent, with appraisal being through an 'Annual Confidential Report', of which the appraised person has no sight. There is no opportunity to respond to any comments made by the line manager and indeed one lecturer said that they only knew if a good report had been made about them when they got the next salary payment and found out if they had an increment or not. One respondent noted that there is 'no special reward given to the good teachers, so there are no motives for the good teaching, as all the evaluation and reward in the university are based on favouritism'. A more open system would help management put the case against this assertion. During the VC focus group, one VC asserted that there were currently 'issues of trust' and that more delegated leadership approaches and academic involvement in decision-making would lead to higher quality.

Student feedback surveys operate regularly at the end of modules and the data is used by line managers and QE Cells. The students generally had faith in the system and one student said their class had made complaints through the system which they knew had been acted on as the staff member left. Mostly, the timing of surveys seems to be linked to assignment or examinations, with students being mandated to complete the surveys to be able to do the

assessment. Whilst this might improve response rates, it is not necessarily conducive to honest feedback representing student views throughout the learning journey.

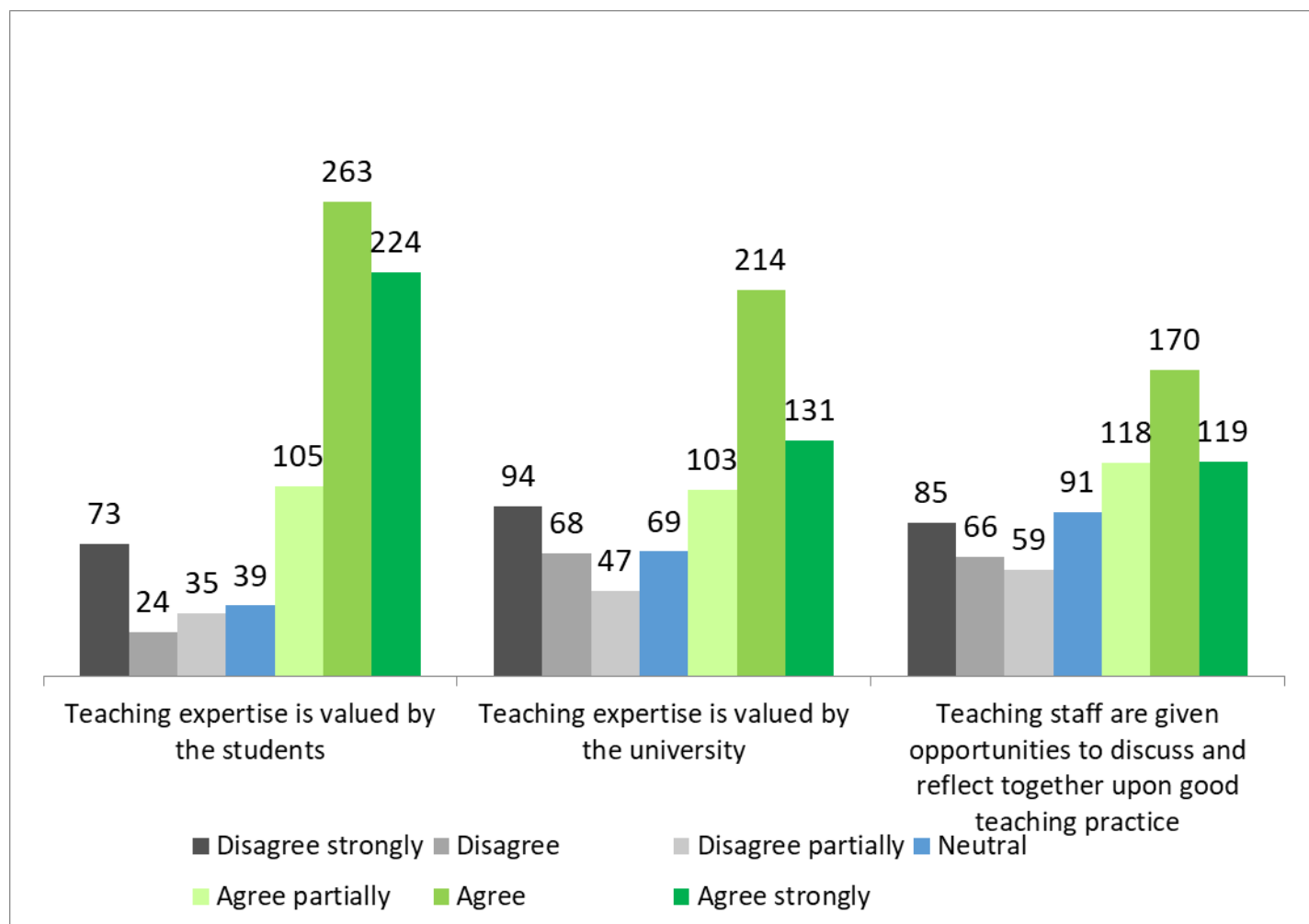


Table 8: Teaching culture

Whilst a majority of survey respondents do see teaching expertise as valued by the university, the proportion was significantly less than how it is valued by students.

Opportunities to share good practice exist, but primarily at departmental level, where 85% reported some sharing. However, only 15% shared practice with the wider university, but it was clear from focus group discussions that such opportunities would be welcomed. L&T Conferences or regular forums could provide the platform for this and could explore contrasts of which teaching methods work best within their specific discipline and culture ('signature pedagogies'). Some staff had taken advantage of activities such as presenting at pedagogical conferences (35%), attending external L&T events (26%), reading L&T research papers (42%), writing L&T papers (27%) and using social media for L&T discussions with wider academic communities (36%). These figures should be treated with

care as it is likely that they reflect the engagement level of those caring sufficiently about L&T to complete the survey.

Most respondents had engaged in some L&T development, but the practice of formal Postgraduate Certificates in HE for new teachers was not one widely recognised in Pakistan. From open survey questions and from focus group discussions, areas in which participants most wanted further development are:

- + Fundamentals of teaching, including for large-group lectures
- + Using technology in learning and teaching
- + Developing and delivering ODL and blended programmes
- + More modern, student-centred teaching methods
- + Assessment and feedback practice, including for skills
- + Outcomes-based approaches and curriculum design
- + Managing the workload
- + Connecting with society and employers

The request was made for ‘proper workshops and certificated training’. One newish teacher to ODL said that even though she was an experienced university teacher, the new modes of delivery, student expectations and communications were initially a challenge. She would have appreciated earlier support rather than having to find her own way. Mentoring or buddying processes are not prevalent, as is considered good practice in UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia, for example. The VC at AIOU proposed that a national Centre for Excellence in L&T for ODL would be valuable and that his university could contribute as a resource. Many of his staff had had training by the OU in instructional design, scripting and as ‘Master trainers’ to cascade the learning.

PhD students in Pakistan are not usually given any training in L&T approaches, although they are used to help in labs and with student groups. The focus groups of teaching staff generally welcomed the idea that PhD students be supported developmentally for this role, as happens in some countries, as long as that did not lead to them to being exploited. Such training was recommended by the student group at AIOU, whilst the concept of some form of review and certificated recognition for this development was seen as valuable for career and personal satisfaction. One survey respondent suggested that ‘HEC should establish a PhD teacher academy’.

Many suggested that teaching was seen as a low-status activity with low salary and poor job security. Some of the focus group teachers and students, however, expressed their pride in their institution and the quality of L&T. One AIOU teacher voiced her pleasure in how their university promoted HE in an inclusive manner, with specific help for students in poorer regions, and for under-represented groups, specifically mentioning women and transgender.

Balancing teaching with research and administration is increasingly difficult and a key challenge expressed by survey and group respondents. One respondent said it would be nice to get ‘recognition and appreciation at least’ for everything they have to do. A key factor

is the perceived lack of recognition and reward for teaching activities. Although there is a national 'Best teacher' award and some universities run similar institutional systems, they are not widely known about.

Reward systems for good teaching are generally seen as non-existent within a system designed to reward research and publications. The exception from this project's respondents came from a VC from a private university, which had a L&T centre and saw teaching as their 'top priority', whilst stating that in public universities teaching was often ignored. The HEC sets minimum criteria for teaching positions and for promotions, including to Professor. These are checked as part of the self-assessment review.

For professorial appointments and promotions, HEC criteria include the number of publications. The perception among university staff interviewed at all levels is that this system does not recognise the quality of the journal, the number of co-authors or impact of the research. It totally ignores teaching innovations and excellence. One survey respondent argued that 'HEC should equally weight teaching skills alongside research skills' and one VC said that 'HEC incentives are counter-productive to teaching'. He added, 'they talk about quality but the focus is on numbers'. One VC argued that the universities have more freedom in this area than they think and that they had, for example, introduced a new practice-based professorship, with the agreement of HEC.

Indeed, from discussions held, HEC do recognise many of the issues raised and NAHE's functions will undoubtedly help in overcoming some of the various obstacles presented.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has identified many aspects of professional activity, in line with global good practice. Examples include the trialling of SMART classrooms, introduction of VLEs, using technology to reach remote areas, some interactive learning examples, using a range of assessment techniques and staff engagement with teaching methodologies. However, these appear patchy, inconsistent and not widely disseminated.

Opportunities do exist through the work of HEC, NAHE and VCs to promote change at this stage of expansion. This is not an easy task, bearing in mind Slacks' (1998) 'project truths'. He states that out of 'quality, time and cost', usually only two out of the three are achievable. Put bluntly, that means that if an HE expansion project is to be completed quickly and with restricted resources, it is likely that quality will be compromised.

Recommendations are given below for improving the quality of HE teaching through actions at national and institutional levels:

National level:

- + Create and support thematic hubs for networking, sharing resources and providing examples of good practice (e.g. around employability, TEL, ODL, international curriculum, education for sustainable development)
- + Create and support subject-based hubs for networking, sharing resources, examples of good practice and ideas around 'signature pedagogies'
- + Promote employer engagement and links with communities
- + Promote policies for student engagement, with more opportunities for the student voice to be heard and taken into account throughout university life
- + Adopt or adapt a Professional Standards Framework for HE practitioners
- + Provide national CPD structure and recognition opportunities for the staff journey from PhD student, early career academic to academic leadership.
- + Provide support for new, funded PhD studentships researching pedagogical theory and practice as related to the Pakistan context. Such studentships could investigate issues raised in this report but in more depth and across regions, including, for example, on curriculum design, assessment & feedback, peer observation, student evaluations and use of class contact hours
- + Review professorial appointment and promotion criteria to allow for recognition of excellent teaching and other pathways.

Institutional level:

- + Create and support a more open culture, including opportunities for open appraisal systems, peer observation and mentoring
- + Create and support an L&T Infrastructure to research, promote and disseminate good practice
- + Work with HR to ensure that recognition and reward schemes reflect the importance of high-quality and innovative teaching practice

- + Ensure appropriate resources are available and updated to allow for effective learning
- + Provide initial and on-going training and development for all PhD students and staff, including on teaching fundamentals, assessment & feedback, TEL, ODL, working with employers, curriculum design and workload management.

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Web Resources

www.advance_he.ac.uk

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education>

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf

www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx

www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/faculty/NAHE/Pages/default.aspx

Appendix I

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COMSATS University, Islamabad

Professor Dr Raheel Qamar, staff and students

Appendix 2

Schedule of visits

Day 1

Division	Head Name
Quality Assurance Agency	Dr. Nadia Tahir (MD-QAA)
Quality Assurance Division	Mr. Fida Hussain (DG-QAD)
Statistical Information Unit	Mr. Nazeer Hussain (DG-SIU)
Academics and Human Resource Development	Mr. Raza Chohan (DG-Acad & DG-HRD)
Attestation & Accreditation and Learning Innovation	Mr. Tahir Abbas Zaidi (DG-A&A and DG-LI)
Research & Development	Dr. Zain ul Abidin (DG-R&D)
Administration & Coordination	Mr. Awais Ahmed (DG-A&C)

Days 2 & 4

Allama Iqbal Open University (Day 2) and COMSATS University (Day 4), Islamabad

- i. Meeting with VC/ Rector
- ii. Focused Group Discussion with Deans/HoDs (Group of 10 to 20 participants)
- iii. Focused Group Discussion with Lecturers/ Assistant Professors/ Associate Professors (Group of 15 to 20 participants) at 11:30 to 13:30
- iv. Focused Group Discussion with students (Group of 15 to 20 participants)

Day 3

Focus group with VCs

Day 4

De-brief with HEC Chair and selected staff

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