

Building World-Class Universities in Pakistan: Opportunities and Constraints

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Abstract

The article explores the issues of academic excellence in higher education to pursue a position in the world class universities. Two universities in Pakistan have been chosen for the site of this qualitative study, one which has achieved the status, and the other still aspiring. The triangulation has been reached by document analysis of the quality reports submitted by the two universities, semi structured interviews with the senior and middle management of the universities, deans, and director for Quality Enhancement Cells, and head of the departments of the selected universities. The primary data obtained has been compared and contrasted with the quality characteristics marked by standards for academic excellence. Research findings inform us that unawareness of the international quality standards, and its potential benefits, disinterest of university leadership are the main problems, due to which Pakistani universities are lagging behind. The study proposes if proper understanding and meaningfulness is created through quality professionalism, it would become much easier to pursue quality assurance process to meet international standards. The findings of the study will be a unique contribution to the body of literature creating a point of interest to policy makers and quality assurance practitioners of the developing countries who are concerned about the academic excellence of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to accentuate in the significant areas which make any university, a world-class university.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, university rankings have become a popular phenomenon. The league tables have initiated and built up discussions about the quality standards and competition in the higher education sector around the globe; Pakistan also joined the club after formation of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. 16 years have passed but the number of universities included in first 500 has not reached double figures; moreover, none of Pakistani university is included in first 100 universities of the world. Many people will call this pursuit a frivolous rat race but joining this competition has become inevitable in globalized knowledge economy, which counts persistent pursuit of research as a basic parameter of excellence for building world-class university (Salmi, 2009; Salmi & Altbach, 2016).

World-class universities (WCUs), generally known as the most esteemed research universities, are crucial to develop the competitiveness of any nation in the global knowledge economy. The proliferation of international league tables has intensified this policy concern all over the world (Salmi, 2009; King, 2009; Bassett & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2010). As these universities are at the apex of the higher education hierarchy, therefore serve the needs of society through: the creation and dissemination of knowledge along with producing an extremely skilled workforce for technical and intellectual leadership (Wang, Cheng, & Liu, 2012; Altbach, 2015; Bejinaru & Prelipcean, 2017). Hence the development of WCU is highly prioritized by the policy makers in the policy agenda (Altbach & Balán, 2007; Huisman, 2008; Song, 2018), which resulted in a range of reforms and development strategies at both institutional and national (external and internal) levels in Pakistan (Arif, Ilyas, & Hameed, 2017; Arif & Liaqut, 2019). However, the determination to become a world-class university is rooted not just in financial contemplation but also in the symbolic position of these universities (Niland, 2007; Wang et al., 2012; Bejinaru & Prelipcean, 2017; Tan, 2018).

Salmi (2009) suggested three complementary sets of factors in The World Bank's Report, as the pre requisite for a WCU. Firstly a high concentration of talent (faculty and students) Secondly abundant resources for the provision of learning environment that is conducive for teaching and advanced research and thirdly a governance structure with a strategic vision

that encourages innovation and flexibility and provides autonomy to institutions in terms of taking decisions as well as managing resources (Altbach & Mathews, 2015; Paul & Long, 2016; Salmi & Altbach, 2016). Researchers like Salmi (2009); Mok (2014); Bejinaru and Prelipcean (2017) have further highlighted the significance of mobilization of national and international talent (faculty and students) to enhance the knowledge networking.

Rosovsky (2014) have pointed out essential six elements for a research university regarding their management and governance; they are: Shared governance with a collegial administrative style; Academic freedom; student and faculty selection on merit; significant human contact - real as opposed to virtual encounters between student and teachers; preservation and transmission of culture as one of its missions; and non-profit status. However, technical resources and infrastructure are also equally important, since Stanford and Massachusetts Institute of Technology are best known for their technological development, fruitful business collaboration and business innovation. On the other hand Princeton's distinguishing attributes are, open campus, liberal approach, academic freedom and quality life of students (Princeton University Strategic Framework, 2016).

University of Tokyo is ranking among top 20 because of its continuous efforts for globalization of curriculum and programs offered in the university and facilitating student mobility (Masako, 2014). Although there is no thumb-rule for making a world-class university or a fixed criterion to be ranked as the world class university, the highest ranked universities are the ones that make significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge through research, teach with most innovative curricula and pedagogy under the most conducive circumstances, and ensure successful employability of their graduates (Pan, 2013; Mok, 2014; Schendel & McCowan, 2016).

The ultimate goal of a WCU is to provide with the quality education and training that the higher education system is expected to satisfy (Pan, 2013; Yang, 2019) so that universities are not stuck into 'mid-rank trap' (Da Wan, 2015). It is deemed, therefore, that every country is free to choose from a range of pathways, a strategy that plays to its strengths and resources. A long-term vision for creating world-class university and its implementation should be closely articulated with 1) country's overall economic and development strategy to supply most appropriate graduates

to fulfill the mission, and 2) institutions to build an integrated system of teaching, research, and technology (Morshidi, Azman, & Wan, 2017).

In the past, the role of govt. was not a crucial factor for building WCU. It is unlikely that a world-class university can be rapidly created without a favorable policy environment and direct public initiative and support, if only because of the high costs involved in setting up advanced research facilities and capacities (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Altbach, 2015). According to Wang et al. (2011) three basic strategies can be followed to establish world-class universities: 1) government could consider upgrading a small number of existing universities that have the potential for excelling (picking winners); 2) government could create new world-class universities from scratch (clean-slate approach), and 3) government could bring the various universities under one umbrella to put joint effort in the area of their own expertise to transform into WCU. Wang et al. (2012) also reinforce balance among three active forces in the arena of higher education, i.e., academic institutions (A), governmental agencies (G) and industries (I), which is known as AGI model. The race to be included in the list of WCUs is common among developed as well as developing countries (Hazelkorn, 2016). However, especially speaking in Pakistan's reference, the universities are situated in various higher education systems (public and private) and are bounded by various cultural, social and historical origins and conditions.

Although there is a significant improvement in number and status of universities ranked in QS Asia ranking, still there are just three Pakistani universities, which have been able to find their place in first 1000 universities (Times Higher Education World Universities Rankings, 2019). Alarmingly Pakistan's position on the ranking list is shrinking drastically. There were seven universities in the top 1000 THES rankings list in 2017, which dropped to four in 2018, and sadly further dropped to three in 2019³.

Research findings revealed that Pakistani universities are lagging behind in the world class rankings due to unawareness of international quality standards in higher education. Therefore an in depth study is immensely considered necessary to highlight quality standards in higher education to excel in research and academic performance to compete internationally in Times World Ranking and QS Ranking. Thus if proper understanding and meaningfulness is created through quality

³ Source: <https://academiamag.com/pakistan-the-world-universities-rankings-2019/>
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professionalism, it would become easier to pursue quality assurance process to meet international standards which are a pre requisite to make any university, a world-class university.

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges of building world class universities in Pakistan. The study identifies the major quality standards which are the prerequisite of a world class university and highlight challenges faced by universities to pursue a position in the world class ranking, as well as best practices opted by the university to successfully achieve the status.

3. Research Questions

Q1. Why Pakistani universities have been unable to achieve world class status?

Q2. What are the key challenges in achieving world class university status for universities in Pakistan?

Q3. How barriers in achieving world class university status can be overcome?

4. Theoretical Framework

Resource dependence theory postulated in 1970s by Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) provided a useful theoretical framework for the present study. The proposition of the theory is that organizations do not exist in isolation rather exist within an environment; the environments are subject to change; an organization's efficiency is less crucial to its survival than an organization's effectiveness in meeting stakeholders' demands (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). Availability of resources improves organization's ability to compete with others as well as determines its independence. The criticality, magnitude and use of a resource determine its importance to a particular organization. Thus, relationship of universities with the external environment is significant for the attainment of core functions of teaching, research and community engagement (Peters & Besley, 2018) to achieve the status of WCU. The framework given by Wang et al. (2012) will be further explored in context of Pakistani situation to find out best strategy for becoming WCU.

5. Methodology

The present study followed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach using interpretive paradigm and constructivist epistemological lens. This methodology was selected to capture the lived

experiences of university management/faculty members through their perspective. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and according to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is used, when a little research is done about a concept or phenomenon and/or to understand the meaning constructed by individuals about a social or human problem. Following Creswell (2013), this design is chosen because the phenomenon related to challenges faced by universities of Pakistan to pursue a position in the world class ranking has not been investigated in depth in the context of Pakistan. The phenomenological approach was used to identify the emerging phenomenon of building WCUs as perceived by the faculty and management of two universities of Pakistan. Research revolving around Higher Education Institutions mostly rely on quantitative lens for statistical predictability (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), the inductive approach of present study intends to elucidate the intricacy of a social phenomenon through identification of patterns emerged in the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The population for this study was the senior faculty members of one university, which has already reached the status of a world class university and a university which is still aspiring for the status. Data was collected from the senior and middle management of the universities', head of the departments, deans, director for Quality Enhancement Cells and senior faculty members of the selected universities. Selection of University was based on purposive sampling. Only those universities were selected which are recognized by HEC in W4 category and were operational for more than 10 years, the universities were leading in local ranking, and had one regional ranking as well. Pseudonyms have been used to identify universities, XXN for the university that has already achieved the status of WCU, and XXT for the university which is aspiring to be a WCU.

Interviews are considered to be the most effective and efficient way of obtaining sufficient information within a short time period (Kvale, 2008) while using multi-sensory channels: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Through in-depth semi structured interviews with the faculty/management of universities, participants were enabled to re-examine their experiences for the construction of meaning about major quality standards which are required to be a world class university. Moreover participants also highlighted challenges faced by universities to pursue a position in the world class ranking. The interpretive

data was analyzed in an evolving manner for the explanation of social meaning (Creswell, 2013; Brinkmann, 2014).

An interview protocol was used to interview with the research participants based upon guidelines provided by Kvale (2008). The interview protocol is attached in Appendix A. The protocol included 10 leading questions with some probes attached with it. The questions included in the interview protocol were derived from the extensive literature review, gathering information about faculty's knowledge about: the vision, major characteristics and strategies for building world class universities, overall efforts for quality improvement, and the challenges and barrier they face which block their way to reach toward the goal of building WCUs in Pakistan. The protocol was expert reviewed to ensure content validity, and was further reviewed by a language expert for the use of language and its understanding. Then the approved protocol was pilot tested with 3 faculty members of the University of Punjab.

A total of 30 interviews were personally conducted (15 from each university). Consent letter (including purpose of research, and protocol) was sent to official emails of more than 25 members from faculty and management. The interviews were conducted with those who agreed to share their views on the agreed topic. Since the interviews were semi-structured, some unpredictability was expected; therefore, interviews varied in content, depth, and length. All interviews ranged from an hour to one hour and fifteen minutes approximately. Interviews' data provided access to knowledge about interviewees' understanding of world class universities and the challenges attached with the phenomenon.

All data was screened, transcribed and organized for final analysis according to the suggestion of Meriam (1998), and constant comparative method was used to derive themes from the data. Following Meriam's guidelines 9 themes were derived discussed in the next section. The researchers ensured that derived themes were: 1) reflecting the purpose of research, 2) provided in-depth thick descriptions, 3) distinguished from each other, 4) sensitive to particular content of the theme, and 5) conceptually congruent. This categorization helped the researchers reach deep meanings associated with the phenomenon WCU and various resources it was dependent upon (Miles, Huberman, Huberman, & Huberman 1994; Richards & Hemphill, 2018), thus realizing the purpose of the study. Thematic analysis was performed manually by researchers serving as critical partner to each other; researchers went to the transcribed interviews

again and again, took notes, cross checked each other's explanations, and after repeated discussions finally settled for the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon WCU in an inductive-deductive way.

The responses of the participants were coded and given pseudonyms: The internationally ranked university is given an ID 'XXN' and participants from this university are named XXN (1-15). Similarly, the university aspiring for international ranking is given the ID 'XXT' and participants from this university are named XXT (1-15). All data analysis has been done using these IDs consistently in the document.

6. Thematic Analysis

Nine themes were generated according to the guidelines discussed in previous sections. While explaining these themes not only constant comparison has been made among individual views but similarities have also been drawn to reach a consensus for making a WCU in Pakistan.

Theme no 1: Vision and Mission

Most of the respondents at XXN emphasized that they believe in hard core research, national/international collaborations and training students, so that they can undertake cutting edge research benefitting enriching local knowledge culture and thus contribution into world economy. XXN7related: *my university aims to strive at exploring scholars' intellectual level to meet the 21st century requirements. Mission statement should be followed in true spirit.* XXN2emphasized: *Our vision is to prepare well equipped and skilled graduates, innovative and progressive for the development of region.*

Similarly most of the respondents at XXT were of the same view that university must emphasize the; importance of publications based on multi-disciplinary cutting edge research and student and faculty exchange as the vision of their university. XXT5 claimed: *(Our core purpose is to educate generations and produce students who will become future leaders in all walks of life.*

Many participants talked about the purpose of selfless service to the humanity. They were of the view: *University should never think of money generation but quality* (XXN4; XXN8, &XXN12; XXT7 & XXT15). While talking about positive effects of vision of WCU on the economy of Pakistan, participants shared:

Improved growth rate of economy in Pakistan proves that universities play major role in development (XXN2). *Promoting*

entrepreneurship and local art and craft and regional trade industry can prepare competent workforce for the economic competitiveness, world class graduates produce world class engineering landmarks/ milestones. Innovation brings economic prosperity (XXT8).

Theme no 2: Major Characteristics of a World Class University

It was agreed by many that *the overall approach of the policy makers is the main contributing factor towards building a WCU (XXN2, XXN7&XXN11; XXT4, XXT9 & XXT12).* Respondents from XXN identified that tech savvy faculty competent in latest research methodologies is the key success factor of a WCU. Teachers empowered with autonomy, enthusiastic students, and overall approach of the policy makers, industry linkage and industry funded projects are the basic ingredients to build WCUs, and *it depends how well you mix these ingredients to satisfy the taste of global culture (XXN6).*

Although majority of XXN participants agreed that number of high impact factor research publications play a vital role in securing marks but they identified the need of raising *a motivated team of highly qualified faculty playing as mentors, intrinsically motivated students, well equipped rich libraries, focus on practical application of knowledge and skill building, conducive environment in building culture for quality research (XXN3).*

According to XXT2 the major characteristics of a WCU are: *Research programs offered, International collaborations, industry linkage, industry funded projects and students exchange program.* XXT9 shared similar views about the major characteristics of a WCU:

Global level curriculum, preparing students for global market, faculty and student exchange, internationalization, entrepreneurial culture are the prime characteristics of WCU, but surpassing these customer satisfaction and drive for quality of work life, being able to attract quality students and quality faculty are prime needs of WCU today.

Almost all respondents acknowledged the role of publications for the economic competitiveness of a country. XXT6 reiterated: *exchange of knowledge makes people aware of global standards and advancing knowledge and technology. It creates a dialogue between academia around the globe.*

Theme no 3: Strategies for Building WCU

Mixed responses emerged from XXN participants, such as upgrading existing institutions, mergers as well as making new universities emerged as the strategies for making WCUs E.g., *making new universities is need of the day due to huge flux of students in the existing setup but we need to upgrade the existing universities as well.* (XXN4). But XXN2 opined: *Stop making new institutions, close money making institutions, and raise bar of performance through scrutiny of private institutions... relentless pursuit of academic quality should continue.*

While talking about financing the transformation, respondents came up with mixed responses. Some respondents believed that government provide sufficient funds to universities but institutions lack the ability to utilize funds effectively. *Current financial allocation to Higher Education (HE) is already sufficient. In fact institutions lack absorption capacity* (XXN1). While others were of the opposite view:

Government/HEC, funds generation by universities (through additional seminars, social and cultural activities can help improve finances of a university (XXN2) *Crowd-funding i.e. Community donations, by industry, through public private partnership and foreign aid by international organizations could be another option* (XXN3).

According to XXT4, *Focus on publications, applying for research grants as well as new courses on internationally approved standards were some of the actions taken by the management for building WCU.* On the other hand XXT9 shared:

My university is seeking many local and international accreditations. Moreover following international standards for Quality Assurance, promoting research, innovation and entrepreneurship culture, industry-academia linkage, getting NACTE accreditation, benchmarking courses and programs, PhD faculty, quality improvement efforts suiting student expectations and setting new goals for continual improvement and MOUS for student and faculty exchange with international universities are some of the actions taken to build XXT as a WCU.

Some respondents also talked about the industry academia linkage and the importance of entrepreneurship while talking about the actions taken by management for building WCU. XXT9 remarked: *Through public private partnership, by giving incentives to faculty, by rewarding research culture, by providing infrastructure and resources, increasing state budget for HE and regulating price for private HE.*

Theme no 4: Governance and Management Arrangements

Quality assurance and accreditation, appointment of academicians in decision making positions, self-assessment and regular audits, HR development, funds for research, application of modern tools and ideas for the achievement of the mission and vision emerged as the key improvements needed in governance and management of Pakistani universities. The participants opined that these conditions must be put in place to reach the status of a world class university.

Some respondents emphasized the training of local faculty through a well-designed succession plan instead of hiring foreign faculty for the administrative posts. XXN2 advised: *Nurture faculty to take administrative positions in the later stages of life - Stop hiring any Tom, Dick or Harry for key administrative positions.*

Quality assurance emerged as the major theme for governance of WCU, but mixed responses emerged about the role of QEC in a university. Participants from XXN rendered their QEC Cell performing better than the same in other Higher Education Institutions. XXN6 remarked:

The QEC is essentially a key role segment of a university. International standards are to be kept in view to enhance quality and standards of a university. At XXN it is good but overall in Pakistan HEIs, it is merely a post office.

On the other hand, some respondents were not satisfied with the performance of QEC and believed that QEC can play a better and more effective role in terms of facilitation and monitoring of teaching and learning activities, only if it is implemented thoroughly. *The role of QEC is facilitation and keeping check and balance but it will be effective only if implemented properly and thoroughly (XXN4).*

Teamwork of management, faculty and administration to accomplish goals and faculty autonomy emerged as the major governance and management themes at XXT. XXT8 remarked: *Institutional autonomy, teamwork, management by objectives, quality enhancement, development of ORIC and focus on transformative quality should be emphasized to be ranked as WCU.*

Almost all the respondents were not satisfied with the performance of QEC in XXT and believed that QEC can work effectively only if people working in QEC are well educated, trained and experienced in their work. XXT9 stated, *QEC can play a key role if people working in QEC are well qualified and trained for the purpose.*

The respondents from both universities were not aware of either about the budget allocation for the fulfillment of requirements of WCU rankings or the exact amount and the process through which the budget is allocated.

Theme no 5: Internationalization and Globalization

Respondents from XXN agreed that globalization caused cut throat competition among WCUs. Use of ICTs, participation in international events of research, and student/ faculty exchange with other WCUs was identified as the major processes to trigger globalization. They believed that collaborations with international universities, development of international office, student/ faculty exchange program, inviting foreign professors and offering scholarships will help to achieve internationalization of the university.

However, most of the XXN respondents were neither aware of the nomination of a team to work for internationalization nor they could identify any team for this purpose. Only XXN2 talked about the presence of; *CAC (Corporate Advisory Council) (b) ORIC (Offices of Research, Innovation and Commercialization) (c) UAO (University Advancement Office) (d) QEC Quality Enhancement Cell, working to promote internationalization and ranking of the university at XXN* but all other respondents remained silent on the topic. XXN5, however, contradicted with the majority relating: *we do have a team and they have meetings on updates every month. Generally every member of the university can play an active role in this. However HR, faculty and other departments are working as one coordinated network.*

Respondents from XXT affirmed that globalization is the main reason behind competing for WCU status. Research and innovations were identified as the major processes to trigger globalized efforts for learning. Teaching and learning standards, collaborations with international universities as well as faculty and student exchange program were identified as pre requisite to achieve internationalization of the university. Moreover they believed that we need to define specific SOPs to follow such activities.

Mixed views were obtained about nomination of a team to work for internationalization. Majority was unaware of the team but some respondents believed: *yes there is a team but they were not aware of the frequency of meetings of the team; members from QEC and ORIC were believed to be working to promote internationalization and ranking of XXT as the aspiring WCU.*

Theme no 6: Challenges to become WCU

Collaborations with Research Universities in other parts of world was deemed as major challenge in becoming WCU. Majority of the respondents from XXN believed that their university has collaboration with Asian and Non-Asian Universities. Joint research publications, partial funding for research and joint grant proposals were noted as the basic strands of collaboration. XXN4 affirmed: *XXN collaborates with Asian and non-Asian universities for joint research publications, around 100 + MOUs with both Asian and non-Asian universities are signed.*

On the other hand many respondents from XXT believed that there was no collaboration with Asian Universities but XXT3 and XXT6 told about collaboration with a non-Asian university i.e., George Mason university, USA.

Policy making for WCU was another major challenge; respondents of both universities were not aware of the positive or negative role of policy borrowing in building WCU. However respondents related lack of indigenous policies as a major factor resulting in policy borrowing. XXN7 stated: *Top world class universities are the benchmarks since they have already employed and tested their modules which are errorless, so it is better we follow what is time tested and already proven.*

However respondents from XXT believed that inclination to develop new WCUs, and lack of expert governance and policies are the major factors that result in policy borrowing. XXT9 specified: *I believe in globalization: let us think globally and act locally. Lack of expert governance results in lagging in achievement of national outcomes and we are not allowed to experiment with failures.*

Furthermore, general unawareness of the faculty of various criteria of ranking and lack of familiarity with the process and methodology of ranking was deemed as major challenge acting as barrier in way of achieving a WCU status. Only two respondents from XXN (XXN2 and XXN8) could name *THES, ARWU and QS as independent university ranking agencies.* Nearly all respondents from XXT were unaware of the criterion, and could not name agencies, which rank the international stature of institutions. They were also not able to tell which Criterion is followed by their university for quality assurance, as well as, about their exact placement in WCUs' list.

Regarding teaching and learning environment XXN9 shared: *designing curriculum for the particular disciplines, collection of reference material, acknowledgment of duties and role of the faculty and aptitude of*

scholars are the most challenging factors. XXN7 deemed providing a world class teaching and learning as well as the campus environment to the students and faculty is the major challenge. But XXN6 expounded: Accountability/monitoring, generating world class publications from department, recruiting and retaining quality faculty are the most challenging factors in claiming WCU status.

At XXT, some respondents identified lacunas in the process of quality assurance by QEC. *Regulations are weak and subjectivity cannot be rationalized in our context (XXT2). QEC collects retrospective data of quality, the auditors are not trained, they are biased and show personal favoritism (XXT12). XXT1 pointed out: diversity itself becomes a challenge sometimes; our universities' demography is different in terms of budget and faculty intake and student teacher ratio.*

Theme no 7: Best Practices

Majority of the respondents at XXN identified research published, students getting jobs after completion of degrees, feedback of the employers, graduates contributing in national economy, and problem solving of certain regional issues as the best practices. They remarked:

Efforts for getting research published, career counseling and getting graduates jobs after completion of degrees, and obtaining constant feedback from employers keeps you on your toes for continuous improvement (XXN7). Training graduates to make contributions in the economy, solution of problems of the region (XXN3). We ensure that our students are indulged in cutting edge research and come up with solutions solving national and global problems.

Faculty on the whole recognized the role of graduate students in making of a WCU: *Students' projects and research count towards ranking (XXN1); their projects and research count towards ranking and suggesting best solutions for the problems of our country (XXN11).*

While talking about role of faculty in a WCU, respondents came up with different responses. XXN5 envisaged: *My main focus for contributing in the development of the university is to provide best possible tribune and guidance to the students. Faculty must consider all solutions given by their students and help them to improve the ideas for their best implementation (XXN6, XXN15). An academic sincerity and progressive role of faculty's imparting world class ideas and research in disciplining is a worthwhile action (XXN8).*

However, Deans and HODs came up with different responses while talking about most challenging tasks. Respondents at XXT believed that graduate students can play a vital role by striving towards originality and creativity for their projects and research as it counts towards ranking and suggesting best solutions for the problems of our country and the region. They suggested: *Practical application of knowledge in society and further scholarships in the same subject (XXT4); commitment towards research and creation of new knowledge, striving towards excellence (XXT7); acquiring desired academic and professional skills, striving towards originality and creativity (XXT9).*

While talking about role of faculty in building WCU, XXT7 stated that: *Quality teaching, preparing students to meet challenges of unknown future, problem solving skills, creating strong link with industry/ industrial collaboration and enhancing innovative quality research activities.* While XXT3 specified: *Making academia aware of global standards and making them attuned to continual quality improvement.* XXT9 declared ‘*starting international research projects, educating beyond classrooms, and continuous professional development*’ as the best mantra for achieving WCU status.

Almost all the respondents came up with different responses while talking about the most challenging tasks for a Dean/HOD; they enlisted:

...Team building, quality of education, up gradation of infrastructure and labs, managing resources, international and local research collaborations (XXT3).

... Focus on faculty contribution to research, industry academia linkage, commercialization, road map of courses, getting funds for research, designing quality learning outcomes, motivating students for critical thinking and research, recruiting and retaining quality faculty (XXT10).

...Designing quality learning outcomes, motivating students for critical thinking and research, and recruiting and retaining quality faculty (XXT9).

Theme no 8: International Standards and Criteria of Ranking

Mixed responses regarding satisfaction with the ranking criteria were observed; some were satisfied with the methodology or criteria for university ranking as XXN2 stated: *Research publications or citation, student teacher ratio is quite evident which make basis for the ranking.* Some respondents were not satisfied with the ranking criteria. For XXN6: *Peer review by top universities in young universities ranking list is not fair;*

forXXN2: *They (ranking agencies) do it for financial earning. New and old universities are assessed under the same criteria.*

According to participants from XXT, *XXT follows the HEC criterion (XXT9)*. Majority (XXT4, XXT5, XXT6, XXT7, XXT8 and XXT10) were satisfied with the methodology or criteria for university ranking although they did not come up with a reason for their response. Only XXT3 remarked: *because in this way we can also improve our research and teaching in short time*. However three respondentsXXT1, XXT2 and XXT9 were not satisfied with the ranking criteria and the reasons were unspecified.

Theme no 9: The Role of Government in Building WCU

Most of the respondents at XXN believed that government or HEC can play its role in the process of building WCU, by providing funds. They also suggested that all the MOUs and research programs should be approved by HEC by providing all universities a common platform. XXN3 stressed that HEC must think over *facilitation in improving process and procedures to pursue international rankings and above all make its own systems more efficient. HEC should not compromise on the quality of graduates...should make new strict rules for universities (XXN5 & XXN6)*.

XXN8 stated: *HEC is already doing remarkable job since 2002; the development figures are compatible in Asia and still need further enhancement of all disciplines*. Most of the respondents at XXT believed that government/HEC can play its role in the process of building WCUs, by providing funds for research, training and workshops.XXT9remarked: *Be fair, uphold standards, facilitate universities, and provide funding*.

7. Conclusions

The thematic analysis presented above confirms that Pakistani universities are interested in achieving WCU status, but there is a lack of motivation observed due to unawareness of the approaches and strategies to achieve this objective.

Motivating students for critical thinking and research, recruiting and retaining quality faculty, up gradation of infrastructure, managing resources, international and local research collaborations were found as the most challenging tasks by the top management of universities.

Researcher could not find any remarkable difference between the standards and responses of respondents of a world class university and an aspiring university which somehow makes the ranking criteria used by HEC dubious. The major difference observed in both universities was the role of

QEC. QEC is operating well at the WCU whereas it needs a lot of improvements at the aspiring university. It was suggested that well educated, trained and experienced staff should be appointed to improve the performance of QEC. Policy and allocation of funds for different purposes must be clearly shared with the faculty as the faculty is unaware of the budget which is allocated for the development programs of university. Moreover involvement of faculty in decision making must be enhanced.

Research published, students getting jobs after completion of degrees, feedback of the employers and graduates contributions in the economy to resolve the problems of region, collectively emerged as the main indicators of the success as stated by Resource Dependence Theory that organizations do not exist in isolation rather exist within an environment which means that Higher Education contribute towards the society.

Inefficient rankings by HEC and incompetence of policy makers were considered as major blocks to reach the status of WCU. Policy borrowing is more common among decision makers but they attempt so without considering local context.

Upgrading existing institution dominantly emerged as the strategy for making WCUs. Funding by government or HEC, fund generation by universities, foreign aid by international organizations and academia-industry linkages were suggested as the financing strategies to upgrade the existing institutions, which is exactly in accordance with Resource Dependence Theory when it suggests that availability of resources improves organization's ability to compete with others as well as determines its independence . Furthermore, it was suggested by many participants that institutions need to enhance the ability to utilize funds effectively. HEC needs to review its policies, especially related to strict conformance; it is ruining academic freedom and culling innovation. The universities must be facilitated to make their quality assurance systems more efficient and instead of restricting to quality control, universities must resort to quality enhancement measures. Government can play its role in the process of building WCU, by providing funds, by being fair and by facilitating universities.

8. Discussion

It is quite evident from the thematic analysis that attaining a world-class status is not an easy task, especially for a developing country like Pakistan, with numerous economic, political, social and academic challenges. It is well elaborated by researchers (Mok & Cheung, 2011; Rosovsky, 2014).

All nations now need a developed higher education system with research capability, stable governance and a standardized financial system (Salmi, 2009; Paul & Long, 2016). Pakistan is not an exception even the Chinese are trying hard to build universities that can participate effectively in the global knowledge network on an equal basis with the top academic institutions in the world (Peters & Besley, 2018; Peters, 2019). Nations unable to interpret understand and create research, find themselves in a position of continuing dependence.

The present study revealed that publications based on multi-disciplinary cutting edge research, industry academia linkage and the importance of entrepreneurship are emphasized at the aspiring university (XXT) whereas preparation of well equipped, innovative, progressive and skilled graduates who can meet the challenges and requirements of 21st century emerged as the vision of WCU (XXN). Quality research publications were collectively considered as the major characteristic of the WCU.

It was agreed by the research participants that exchange of knowledge through publications makes people aware of global standards and creates a dialogue between academia around the globe, resulting in economic prosperity in agreement with leading world researchers (Altbach, 2015; Mok & Neubauer, 2016; Tan, 2018) to create a global system of knowledge (Peters, 2019). It is exactly in accordance to Resource Dependence Theory as it states that relationship of universities with the external environment is significant for the attainment of core functions of teaching, research and community engagement. It means that universities aspiring to be WCU must transform themselves into research universities.

The governments of developed and developing countries look at investing in research and development as their major priority (Paul & Long, 2016). World is opting for various policy frameworks to seek a cutting edge position in global economy, whereas our universities are not clear what policy they would adopt? Whether or not policy borrowing would suit them? There is constant debate upon undermining social research as compared to scientific and technological.

Another cutting edge policy is aimed at acquisition of best talent; for researchers world is at war for search of talent (Ng, 2013; Pan, 2013; Song, 2018), whether students or faculty. Where do we stand in such a warring competition? Where other national policies are aimed at creating knowledge hubs to promote national economy, shall we be able to save our

brain drain? Most of the quality assurance techniques and procedures quoted by HEC are quantity driven measuring retrospective quality (Arif et al., 2017), whereas, Pakistani universities need to concentrate on quality enhancement and enrichment of best practices.

Derrida, Porter, and Morris (1983) had realized the main responsibility of university is to emerge as ‘a new community of thought’ and Peters (2019) states that following Kantian principles the professionalism in a university must be questioned deliberately to assess true place of the university in current market and value of competence of its graduates by their effective placement in the job market as suggested by Resource Dependence Theory that an organization’s efficiency is less crucial to its survival than an organization’s effectiveness in meeting stakeholders’ demands.

This job has been acquired by the international ranking agencies; the methods and processes used by these agencies must undergo constant evaluation. The results of present study signify that quality assurance and system accreditation emerged as the governance and management arrangements in both universities need improvement to reach international standards. Do we need a revision in role of HEC as master hunter of quality advocating more for the academic freedom of the faculty? This debate needs serious attention of future researchers.

There has been a collective agreement among the participants that the role of globalization was to trigger the competition among WCUs. It is commonly believed that collaborations with international universities, development of international offices, students and faculty exchange program, inviting foreign professors and offering scholarships will help to achieve internationalization of the universities in Pakistan (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Altbach, 2015; Mok & Cheung, 2011; Bejinaru & Prelicean, 2017). This principle itself supports Resource Dependence Theory as it states that the criticality, magnitude and use of a resource determine its importance to a particular organization. Therefore the effective use of human resource signifies the role of faculty in developing WCU.

Many offices or councils like CAC (Corporate Advisory Council) (b) ORIC (Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization) (c) UAO (University Advancement Office) (d) QEC (Quality Enhancement Cell) working at the XXN were acting beneficially to promote internationalization and ranking. Establishment of these councils, offices or cells at the aspiring university along with the well-designed monitoring and

accountability mechanism was missed. Mok (2014) has advised that universities must not ignore potent quality assurance exercises such as regular review of teaching and learning process, assessments related to international worth of research, accountability reviews of governance and management policy and action, and performance reviews of the quality assurance councils.

According to the responses, the world class ranked university, XXN has collaboration with Asian and Non-Asian Universities. Joint research publications, partial funding for research and joint grant proposals were noted as the basic strands of collaboration whereas the aspiring university (XXT) lacked in collaborations with the other universities. The developing countries have similar demography and challenges, whereas, developed countries have attained the establishment of WCUs. Therefore, collaborations with the universities of developed and developing countries may result in practical solutions (Bejinaru, 2018; 2019). Such collaborations are endorsed by Resource Dependence Theory as well that organizations do not exist in isolation rather exist within an environment, and environments are subject to change. The newly established universities may get guidelines from indicators of sustainability as given by Liu, Moshi, and Awuor (2019).

The participants of this research reckoned that role of graduate students and faculty is critical in striving towards originality and creativity for their projects and research as it counts towards ranking. Therefore the efficient use of talent or the human resource definitely leads towards attaining the goal of becoming a WCU, since the magnitude and use of a resource leads to ultimate success of the organization. Lindblom-Ylänne and Breslow (2017) openly warn that pedagogy must not be founded on anecdote or intuition; pedagogic foundations must be evidence based, innovative and focusing more upon interpersonal engagement than linear dialogue (Omar & Arif, 2018). Failure to do so will cage us in ‘middle-income trap’ (Da Wan, 2015), i.e. poor investment in pedagogy and research will keep our graduates restricted to low to middle income groups, restraining their entry in high income groups. This would be a double jeopardy causing personal and national loss.

Unawareness of the international quality standards and ambiguity in following practical guidelines to follow the spirit of quality has been found the main issue obstructing way of aspiring universities towards acquiring the status of WCU. Once understanding and meaningfulness is created, it becomes easier to pursue standards. Dissatisfaction for the ranking criteria

was observed as it is considered that our universities' demography is different in terms of budget and faculty intake as well as in student teacher ratio. It is believed that subjectivity cannot be rationalized in our context and retrospective data of quality is collected for ranking. It is surmised that auditors are not trained, they are biased and show personal favoritism. Faculty is the important stakeholder in the attainment of mission and vision. Therefore all quality criteria should be clearly shared with the faculty members.

9. Suggestions for Improvement

i) Awareness about Criterion for Ranking: Lack of awareness about the international quality standards results in inability to follow the practical guidelines. It will be easier to pursue standards as well as satisfaction about the university ranking if each and every member of the university has developed a meaningful understanding about the methodology and criteria of ranking.

ii) Meritocracy: Academic integrity and strict adherence to meritocratic standards is a major characteristic of world-class universities. Therefore, universities need to adhere to meritocracy strictly at the time of students' admissions, recruitment of faculty and promotions. Moreover, internal audit and accountability mechanism of the universities must be improved to develop measures that would ensure strict adherence to meritocracy.

iii) Relevance of Research and Teaching to Industry and Society: Relevance of research and teaching, to industry and society will contribute to the development of industry, economy and agriculture of the country. Centers of Excellence may be established to encourage individual researchers to work in groups to promote and enhance the university's research agenda. It is strongly recommended that universities should establish Technology Development and Transfer Centre (TDTC) at ORID (Office of Research, Innovation and Development) to bridge the gap between academia and industry.

iv) Interdisciplinary Research: The interdisciplinary research works beyond the conventional limits of one discipline resultantly leading to novel discoveries. Therefore research universities of developing countries need to emphasize the interdisciplinary research.

v) International Recognition of Journals: Researchers prefer to publish their articles in internationally recognized journals in order to get citations in other publications. Therefore, collaborations with internationally

recognized journals and writers will result in the increased circulation and publications of the indigenous journals.

vi) Governance: The governance strategy must ensure provision and effective usage of abundant resources and the empowerment of management, faculty and students. The structure of the Academic Board needs to be streamlined so as the processes pick up the pace. Decentralization of management, representation of faculty and students in the matters of university as well as the enhancement of accounting and financial reporting will be some of the supportive measures to ensure effective governance which is the pre requisite of the World Class Universities.

vii) Operationalizing Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC): Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) can play a significant and effective role in terms of facilitation and monitoring only if it is implemented thoroughly. Therefore either the achievements of Quality Assurance (QA) departments must be shared with the faculty through the university Newsletter or the faculty must be required to work with the Quality Assurance team on rotational basis to develop meaningful understanding about the QA requirements of the institution, and teamwork for effective problem solving.

viii) Resources, Funding and Grants: The insufficient funds, incompetence and stringency associated with the utilization of these funds are some of the reasons for the decline of the education system in Pakistan. Universities need to utilize funds to pay better salaries to attract world-class researchers and to reward the more productive researchers and academics. ORIC(Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization) in collaboration with the Public Affairs Directorate of the university should put in more efforts towards the public private partnership for the grants, endowments, sponsorship, projects, consultancies and collaborations.

ix) Internationalization: An office for dealing with the matters of internationalization must be established which would be responsible for all the issues related to: attracting international students, student and faculty exchange programs, organizing conferences and workshops, participation in international conferences and invitation of delegations to the university, bilateral partnerships with other institutions, promoting publications and social media networking.

x) Bridging the Communication Gap: Due to the communication gap between the policy makers and the management/faculty of Pakistani universities, unawareness about the international criterion (THES, SJTU,

QS) of university ranking is observed. It is recommended that the quality standards suggested by Ivy League tables should be shared with the faculty members to bridge the communication gap so as each and every member of the team work together towards a common goal of attainment of the world class stature. Monthly Newsletters can be initiated to share the performance and achievements of Quality Assurance department with the stakeholders.

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