Evaluation of quality of education in higher education based on Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Model

Mohammad Hossein Yarmohammadian*1, Mina Mozaffaryb, Sekineh Saghaeiannejad Esfahanc

*Associate Professor & Head, Health Management and Economic Research Center (HMERC), Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Isfahan, Iran
bM Sc student, Medical Records Department, ), Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Isfahan, Iran
cLecturer, HMERC & Medical Records Department, ), Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Isfahan, Iran

Abstract

Academic quality improvement in higher education has recently been considered in many universities over the world. Aim of the study was investigating quality of medical records courses in 4 medical universities and comparing them according to 9 dimensions of AQIP model. Selected university consisted of Isfahan, Shahid Beheshti, Tehran and Iran. Participants of this study comprised academic staff, graduate students as well as scientific board members. All four universities were relatively favorable in 9 dimensions and there is not any difference among them. But there is difference between view point of students and scientific board members.

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1. Introduction

In changing world, which increasingly is adding to uncertainty, all higher education institutions should provide favourable responses to social needs. Experience has proven that universities can provide best services to the community if they have concerns of continuous improvement in the quality of their services (Yarmohammadian, 2004; Weber, 2003). Hence evaluation is one of the strongest tools for strategic development in higher education environment (Saad, 2001). Evaluation of various courses of higher education is a necessity today, and also is the way to improve and increase quality of educational courses. In the United States, medical records specialists are known as health information management (Dixon-lee, 2005). Dramatic changes in health information management are requires new thinking in relation to training tomorrow's professionals. Due to changes and increasing dependence on information and communication technologies, students training should enable students to learn critical thinking, creative problem solving, data recovery management, effective communication and continuous learning (AHIMA, 2010). But there is no consensus on the definition of quality in higher education (Sun, 2002; Yarmohammadian & Haeri, 2003; Yarmohammadian, Bahrami & Foroughi Abari, 2008). Planning and evaluation are

* Mohammad Hossein Yarmohammadian. Tel.: +98 311 6501633; fax: +98 311 6684799.
E-mail address: yarmohamadian@mng.mui.ac.ir.
two important tasks of university administrators. Through evaluation, managers can get valuable information about effectiveness of programs; failures, strengths and weaknesses and compliance with setting quality standards and put the decision makers and educational planners in a better position to adopt the necessary measures to improve the methods to achieve goals and increase efficiency (Wild, 1995; Foroughi Abari, Yarmohammadian & Toroqi, 2004; Yarmohammadian et al, 2009).

Expectations for better performance in teaching and production of efficient and competent graduates are growing. Increasingly, students frustrated from their experience as customers there is urgent and essential need to change in higher education programs (Hogg and Hogg, 1995). A researcher proposed alternative approach with the ability to change perspectives of quality from focusing to control activities to focusing on improvement of activities (Houston, 2008). Other researcher in a research titled” The phases and paradoxes of educational quality assurance” refers to quality assurance applied strategies in Singapore education system. This study describes the quality assurance of fuzzy model of Singapore education system (Ng, 2008). Another research concluded that there are seven dimensions, that employees are used to evaluate faculty and educational administrators. It consists of leadership for teaching, leadership for research, fair and efficient management, vision and strategy, participative leadership, developmental, recognition and interpersonal skills (Shrestha, 2010).

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) is a modern form of accreditation designed to assist higher education with the quality assessment of programs and services to ensure student success, it’s provided by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) which is part of the North Central Association of Higher Education (NCAHE). AQIP provides the process for colleges and universities to create and maintain their own regional credits. It is based on the 9 scales that enable to evaluate and improve programs (Brua-Behrens, 2003). So AQIP scales, create conditions that programs can be classified. Nine scales of AQIP come below:


Successful quality assessment enhances awareness about weaknesses and strengths. It also influences organizational the decisions. Evaluation process should be lead to transparent results (Brennan and Shah, 2000; Dodd, 2004). Carroll in his study showed that, using method of AQIP can enable nursing faculty to promote their validation in comparison to other model of continuous quality improvement (Carroll et al, 2006). There are some other researches that emphasized on different dimensions of quality in higher education (Lagrosen et al, 2004; Avdjieva & Wilson, 2002).

Universities have a major role in the growth and development of scientific, cultural and human resources. Professional higher education planners should evaluate university programs to identify their weaknesses and strengths and accelerate scientific developments, and be responsible to educational needs in national and global level as well as to improve quality of educational processes and programs continuously. This study evaluated the quality of education through AQIP model in department of medical records in 4 medical universities across Iran.

2. Method

Research method is descriptive – analytic and instrument of research is questionnaire adopted from modified scales of AQIP in two different version for students and scientific members; 36 and 41 items respectively based on Likert 5 degree spectrum (The AQIP Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, 2006). Statistical population of the study was all faculty members of medical records department in 4 medical universities of Iran; Shahid Beheshti, Iran, Tehran, Isfahan. Questionnaires validity confirmed by experts and possess content and construct validity, to determine its reliability, Chronbach Alphas were obtained = 93.6 for students and 96.7 for faculty members.

To examine the level of significance of difference between grade averages of academic quality improvement at sampled universities calculated points for each scale score for Match at different scales according to the number of questions per scale change of variable technique was used to convert the scores of all scales to (0 to 100) if the amount calculated points for answers a question 0 to 33 be obtained, the adverse situation, if between 33 to 66 points achieved relatively favourable and if you score between 66 to question 100 is the favourable quality be assessed. Calculating the points of each scale, the situation can be related to the scale outlined.
3. Results

Table 1: mean and standard deviation of 9 scales in medical record departments of Isfahan, Tehran, shahidbeheshti, Iran from view point of faculty members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>university</th>
<th>Isfahan</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Shahidbeheshti</th>
<th>Tehran</th>
<th>All universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helping Learn Students</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>st</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>st</td>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affecting Students</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishing Objectives</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Students’ needs</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing People</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading and Communicating</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Institutional Operations</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Effectiveness</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Collaborative Relationship</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in table 1, in scale valuing people, Isfahan, Shahidbeheshti and Iran universities are in relatively favourable. But Tehran university is favourable level and there is significant deference in scale Supporting Institutional Operations, at universities. Isfahan and Tehran universities are in favourable level and Shahidbeheshti and Iran universities are in relatively favourable. (f=5.89, P-value=0).

In overall there is no significant difference in quality of educational department based on AQIP from perspective of faculty members, and all four universities are favourable.
Table 2: mean and standard deviation of 9 scales in medical record departments of Isfahan, Tehran, shahidbeheshhti, Iran from view point of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>university scales</th>
<th>Isfahan</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Shahidbeheshhti</th>
<th>Tehran</th>
<th>All universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping Students Learn</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>st</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>s.t</td>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishing Objectives</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Students’ Needs</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing People</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading and Communicating</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting institutional operations</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Effectiveness</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Collaborative Relationships</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in table 2, there is significant deference in scale Understanding Students’ Needs in departments (f=3.04, P-value=0.03), and there is significant deference in scale Supporting Institutional Operations Isfahan university is in favourable level, Iran university is in relatively favourable and Tehran, shahidbeheshhti university are in adverse level. (f=16.2, P-value=0). In scale Building Collaborative Relationships shahidBeheshti University is in relatively favourable, and Isfahan, Tehran and Iran are in adverse level. In overall there is no significant difference in quality of educational department based on AQIP from perspective of students, and all four universities are relatively favourable.

4. Discussion

Research finding showed that average scores of quality of education from the perspective of faculty members at the universities of Isfahan, Tehran, Iran, ShahidBeheshti, respectively 74.5, 82, 78.4, 66.6 and the total 75.4, which represents the favourable quality. Views of students, respectively, 53.6, 49, 54.2, 53 and total 52.3 indicate that the situation is relatively favourable. The results showed that there is difference between view point of students and faculty members. Other researchers in their study showed that the average quality improvement of education in Isfahan University faculty is 2.72 on the Likert range (Hoveida et al, 2005). Research findings had suggested that the medical records departments of Isfahan, Tehran, Beheshti, and Iran universities there are significantly difference in average of grades of understanding students’ needs, Supporting institutional operations, building collaborative relationships and measures on this scale should be taken for academic quality improvement. In scale of related to helping students learn experiences of Washington State University includes that has made some changes to the process to evaluation of students’ academic finding. Taking full
revision of assessment processes, particularly for public education is essential to develop a systematic processes to describe students findings and priorities to support student learning (Marietta, 2009).

One of the obstacles in the quality from viewpoint of students is lack of knowledge among some faculty members. Some of faculty members use from their previous knowledge and not aware of new findings. For this purpose it is necessary that faculty members should increase their knowledge and enhance their skills in using appropriate technologies.

Another barrier is making too attention to quantitative aspect regardless to quality. Facilities of department must be considered in accepting students, attention to them, and faculty satisfaction is one of the quality indicators and without consent of students quality of education could not improve (Hogg & Hogg, 1995; Yarmohammadian, 2004). Another barrier of educational quality of department is that the faculty members are not using the appropriate methods in related to course content selection and organization. Researchers have pointed out untrained faculty teaching techniques and educational processes is one of major barrier to quality of education (Hogg and Hogg, 1995) that is consistent with findings of present research. University students are dissatisfied about the courses, lack of access to faculty members, and incidental teaching. Overall importance of continuous quality improvement in universities is that can improve higher education and student satisfaction (Hogg & Hogg, 1995; Yarmohammadian et al, 2008).

Inviting representatives from student in curriculum planning meeting, as well as inviting related experts to transfer experiences, devoting more time to guide students in relevant courses, creating more communication with other universities and the professors together and creating meetings together about departmental problems, allocating enough time by the faculty members for guidance and counselling students, organizing educational workshops for junior faculty members to inform new methods of teaching and assessment are suggestions of this research which help improving quality of the department programs.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Expectations for better performance, in terms of teaching and producing competent college graduates are increasing. So educational planners whether in level of the university, college or department should pay attention to quality? AQIP as a model for evaluating quality is applicable for all universities. It improves strategies and training programs as well as identifies community needs and expectations of students and faculty. According to results of applying AQIP in Iranian universities we concluded that faculty members must constantly updated their knowledge and skills and use various and appropriate methods in teaching and assessment activities. Department should provide context for further communication with other universities and professors in the same string together and formation meetings about departmental problem. It is necessary that the educational programs and strategies be prepared appropriately with society and student’s needs. It should be emphasized on improvement of academic quality instead of quantitative aspects. It is clear that for obtaining ideal level, necessary reformation and changes are needed for quality improvement. So scientific board members, experts and staff of university should try to eliminate their weaknesses and empower their strong points.

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