



NATIONAL BUSINESS EDUCATION ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

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Increasing the Impact and Relevance of Business Schools in Pakistan

Conference Report



**DEANS &
DIRECTORS**
CONFERENCE 2022



14th - 15th MARCH, 2022



MARRIOTT HOTEL, ISLAMABAD

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Day 1

Inaugural Session

Opening remarks of Dr. Farrukh Iqbal (Chairman - NBEAC)

Dr. Farrukh Iqbal, Chairman of NBEAC, welcomed participants to the Conference, noting that this was the first face-to-face Conference held by NBEAC since the onset of the Covid pandemic in March 2020. He noted that the pandemic could have been detrimental to NBEAC if its routine accreditation and training activities had been interrupted for long. However, due to the agility of staff, the disruption was managed very well. Many training events were shifted online while the accreditation workload was rescheduled so as to be completed after Covid restrictions were lifted. Last year's

DDC was conducted online as well. As a result of these adjustments, targeted activity levels for FY21 were maintained and financial results were satisfactory. Participant feedback on training events was very positive while accreditations continued to rise. In retrospect, NBEAC had come out stronger because of the challenges faced in the last two years. Its service delivery infrastructure was now hybrid and so more flexible. Dr. Iqbal took the opportunity to thank all those who had helped NBEAC navigate the last two years successfully.

He then turned to the current DDC whose theme was the impact and relevance of business schools in Pakistan. He noted that it was abundantly clear that business education is enormously popular. There are over 200 such programs in the country. This suggests that people find a business administration degree useful for jobs and professional growth. That is why they flock to business schools and why a wide range of tertiary institutions, including medical schools, have started business and management programs. This impression is corroborated by evidence taken from employers. A survey commissioned by the HEC in 2015 showed that degrees in business and management were the most preferred qualifications sought by Pakistani employers from job applicants. This suggests that employers feel that such qualifications are worthwhile in terms of potential impact on their businesses. So, what is the problem? Why should we not just declare victory and move on? We cannot do this because only 33 business schools in Pakistan are currently accredited for quality. This suggests that there remains much room for improvement. The current conference was about the room for improvement.

Dr. Iqbal then introduced the Chief Guest, Mr. Hussain Dawood, Chairman of Dawood Hercules Corporation and Engro Corporation. He made a special point of noting that Mr. Dawood came from a family that had not only shown great business acumen but had also contributed significantly to higher education in the country.

Mr. Dawood spoke via a teleconference connection. He highlighted the role of integrity in business. He noted that, without integrity, other skills do not count so much. It is integrity that enables an individual to meet the needs of this world as well as the hereafter. This, he said, was the key lesson he had learned in his fifty plus years of experience in business.



Panel A: Impact & Relevance of Business Schools: Empirical Perspectives

Moderator:

Dr. Farrukh Iqbal, Chairman NBEAC

Panelists:

Mr. Moazam Shahbaz, Country Director, Kotler Impact, Inc. and CEO, Naqeebz

Dr. Faheemul Islam, Rector, GIFT University

Dr. Zahoor Hassan Syed, Professor Emeritus, LUMS



Mr. Shahbaz noted that a survey he had personally undertaken in 2018 showed that 70 percent of employers were unsatisfied with the quality of the graduates they were seeing. Among issues identified in the survey were the mismatch of GPAs with job interview performance, the lack of soft skills, and the lack of a positive can-do attitude. He also emphasized the need to understand the local business context, as illustrated by his own recent co-publication of a book with a well-known international marketing expert which contained, for the first time ever, sixteen Pakistani business case studies.

Dr. Faheem acknowledged that certain policy and governance issues had hindered the pursuit of quality in Pakistan. Nevertheless, he thought that good teaching and relevant programs could go a long way towards improving graduate quality. In particular, he thought that the

MBA Executive Program, in which prior business experience was necessary for enrolment, provided a bridge between business schools and industry, between theory and experience, that should be expanded.

Dr. Zahoor added three perspectives to the discussion. First, he noted that there is usually a big gap in perceptions of graduate quality between universities and employers. This gap appears in developed countries as well as in low-income countries. Second, he noted the difficulty in bringing about change and innovation in curricula because elite schools are complacent and lack motivation, mid-tier schools lack resources and lower tier schools typically do not have impact and prefer to run new programs using old pedagogical models. This could only be overcome by working on the three 'R's: relevance, reach and respect. The first refers to linkages with industry matched by flexible curricula. The second refers to contacts with industry and the third refers to a mind-set which respects students, employees, and society as partners.

Panel B: Experiential Learning as A Way of Promoting Relevance

Moderator:

Dr. Zaki Rashidi, Chairman, Faculty of Business Administration, IQRA University, Karachi

Panelists:

Dr. Sumaira Rehman, Rector, Superior University, Lahore

Dr. Irfan Hyder, Vice Chancellor, Ziauddin University, Karachi

Mr. Danish Imtiaz, Senior Manager, CDC, Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi

Mr. Zia ul Mustafa, President, Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Pakistan (ICMAP)



Mr. Imtiaz noted that experiential learning at IBA was conducted primarily through corporate internships. These provided undergraduate students exposure to business environments at an early stage. Dr. Sumaira Rehman said that the model followed at Superior University comprised 3 years of college-based work followed by 1 year of placement in a business establishment. This enables students to become job ready. Dr. Irfan Hyder emphasized the 'learning by doing' aspect of experiential learning, like case-based learning in law and medicine and project-based learning in engineering. He thought that such learning was not being provided at an optimal level because of the view among many faculty that education is best conducted through formal classes and exams. He called for business education to adopt a mix of classroom and apprenticeship-like practices instead.

Mr. Ziaul Mustafa said that experiential learning was an important part of professional education in his area, accountancy. This was arranged through professional certification bodies and not through higher education institutions. He thought that HEC could help in two ways, first, by creating ladders of equivalence across programs run by universities and certification bodies and second, by negotiating such equivalences across country borders.

Panel C: Collaboration Across Business Schools to Promote Impact

Moderator:

Dr. Usman Ghani, Joint Director, Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar

Panelists:

Dr. Shujaat Mubarak, Dean, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi

Dr. Ali Imtiaz, Head of Research Center SIL, Bahria University, Islamabad

Dr. Hadi Hassan Khan, Chairperson & Associate Professor Department of Management Sciences, BUTEMS, Quetta

Dr. Osama Nasim Mirza, HoD, Lahore Business School, University of Lahore



All panelists recognized the potential benefits of collaboration among business schools. Dr. Osama noted that this had become easier because of advances in communications technology and the greater familiarity with such technology fostered during the Covid pandemic.

Several panelists pointed to challenges as well. Dr. Shujaat Mubarak noted the heterogeneity among business schools that made it difficult for them to collaborate. Dr. Hadi Hassan highlighted the special disadvantages faced by schools in rural and remote areas. Dr. Osama noted the limited funding available at many schools for training. Several noted the lack of incentives for schools to collaborate.

Several ideas were put forward in the search for solutions. These can be classified in four groups: curricula sharing, training, exchange of information and incentives for collaboration. Several panelists thought that it should be relatively easy to share curricula, readings, and case studies. Others emphasized the need for arranging training sessions outside the bigger cities. Some suggested that groups of schools hold periodic online meetings among themselves to discuss possibilities for collaboration on teaching, research and projects. It was noted that NBEAC could generate a stronger incentive for collaboration by giving more weight to this in its accreditation standards. There was some discussion as well about allowing students from disadvantaged locations and universities access to tier-1 business schools, possibly through summer programs.

An immediate outcome of the discussion was that Dr. Zaki Rashidi, Chairman, Faculty of Business Administration, IQRA University Karachi volunteered to prepare a working paper proposing a mechanism for collaboration among business schools of the country.

Day 2

Opening Session

Remarks of Dr. Shaista Sohail

Dr. Iqbal introduced the Guest of Honor, Dr. Shaista Sohail, Executive Director of HEC. He noted that, prior to her HEC assignment, she had had a distinguished public service career in which she had also represented Pakistan at global trade institutions such as the WTO and ITC in Geneva. He made a special reference to the fact that she had taken the opportunity, when in Geneva, to get a doctorate in international relations.

Dr. Shaista Sohail emphasized three points in her remarks. First, she highlighted the importance of jobs for youth. She said that she had focused on this when she was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Industries. Second, noting that only 33 business programs were accredited by NBEAC, she urged other business schools to emphasize quality in their programs and get accredited as well. Third, she advised students and youth to appreciate the importance of both technology and soft skills as both were necessary to have good jobs and careers. She also spoke a bit about the importance of universities and industry linking up. She said that she had visited various chambers of commerce and industry in recent months including Quetta, Lahore and Karachi. She noted programs offered by various universities related to the study of locally-produced raw materials and minerals. She thought that such efforts were encouraging and more should be done along similar lines.



Panel D: Enhancing Impact via Social Responsibility Programs

Moderator:

Dr. Naveda Kichlew, Associate Professor University of Management Technology, Lahore

Panelists:

Dr. Fazal Jawad Sayyed, Professor, LUMS

Dr. Asfia Obaid, HoD Management Sciences, NUST Business School

Dr. Niaz Bhutto, Professor, Sukkur IBA

Mr. Faisal Azeem, Managing Director, Pakistan Global University Systems



Dr. Naveda opened by asking the panelists for their understanding of the concept of social responsibility in the context of higher education in Pakistan. In his remarks, Dr. Fazal noted that a commitment to address societal problems is not only a stakeholder demand but also a moral imperative for universities and colleges. This commitment needs to be stronger in a low income country like Pakistan whose social challenges are acute. Dr. Asfia noted that the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN provided a good framework for thinking about social responsibility. She felt that while Pakistani universities had started late they were making good progress in incorporating social responsibilities into their vision and strategies. Dr. Niaz Bhutto concurred with this view and noted that Sukkur IBA had long been active in providing access to students from underprivileged areas and communities in Sind. Other panelists also referred to relevant initiatives taken by their institutions in recent years.

In further remarks, panelists discussed how best to put social responsibility into the DNA of higher education institutions. Dr. Fazal emphasized the need for this to start with the governance system of individual institutions, winning top management around to this point of view. Dr. Asfia thought that schools needed to find ways to involve stakeholders in their social initiatives. Mr. Azeem highlighted the importance of incentivizing both students and faculty towards this end.

The session concluded with some discussion of the importance of measuring the impact of social responsibility programs empirically. Panelists noted that this was rarely done, possibly because impact was difficult to measure, and no established metrics were available to guide those brave enough to embark on such a task.

Panel E: Emerging Topics for Business School Curricula

Moderator:

Dr. Sadia Nadeem, Professor, FAST-NUCES Islamabad

Panelists:

Dr. Khalid Riaz, Former Dean, COMSATS Islamabad

Dr. Shazia Akhtar, Professor, SZABIST Islamabad

Dr. Farooq-e-Azam Cheema, Provost, Karachi School of Business & Leadership (KSBL)

Dr. Denis Boissin, Director Program, SKEMA Business school (virtual participation)



The moderator asked panelists for their views on topics of emerging importance to business education. Dr. Riaz noted that many such topics were related to the digital transformation that is happening all around. This requires business students to be familiar with the latest technological advances and their application to business. Dr. Akhtar built on this idea and noted that students must also know how to participate in an innovation culture since that was responsible for many of the changes occurring today. Dr. Cheema injected a note of optimism by observing that Pakistani business schools had successfully integrated emerging disciplines in the past, such as human resource management and supply chain management. Dr. Boissin endorsed these views but also drew attention to the emerging field of crisis management. He referred to climate change, climate refugees, global inequalities, and increasing political tension around natural resources as reasons to expect crisis management to rise in importance. Students needed to be trained to tackle these issues in the future.

The discussion then segued to steps to be taken by business schools to develop the needed skills. Dr. Cheema noted that some steps were straightforward. Business curricula could emphasize more IT courses and include more Fintech in Finance courses and more digital marketing in Marketing courses. Dr. Boissin suggested that students would benefit from practical examples of how artificial intelligence and digital technology was changing specific areas of business. Dr. Akhtar emphasized the important role of having the business sector involved in updating and contextualizing curricula since it was at the leading edge of the ongoing change. She noted that a practical route to engaging industry is for schools to set up incubation centers. Dr. Riaz said that the image of data science should be decoupled from the idea of coding. This would help in wider adoption among business schools. Panelists thought that such changes could be integrated faster if top management was on board, if missions and strategies were changed to highlight the importance of the digital revolution, and if accreditation bodies modified their standards to incentivize such changes.

The moderator summarized the discussion as follows: A simple first step is to enrich existing curricula with courses related to the use of digital technology in business. These include but are not limited to data science and analytics, Fintech and digital marketing. Schools should make plans to hire or train faculty in these areas. Other stakeholders should be pulled in as necessary: industry to work with schools to provide curriculum suggestions as well as internships; faculty to provide ideas to industry through cutting-edge research; school managers to approve resources for the needed changes; and HEC to flexibly accommodate fast changing curricular needs.

Closing Session

Extracts from remarks by Dr. Ishrat Husain

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank Farrukh Iqbal for his very generous remarks. I'm humbled by what he described in relation to me. Let me elaborate on the reasons why I joined IBA in 2008. A lot of journalists ask me why I took an academic position after having been governor of the State Bank and a federal minister level Chairman of the National Commission for Government Reforms. My answer was that the earlier positions were jobs, but education was a passion.

I had a dream to establish some basic principles for a higher education institution. What are those principles? Number one, admissions should be given purely on merit. Not on sifarish, not on money, not on any other considerations or connections.

Second, you should have faculty of the highest caliber, both on the teaching side, as well as on the research and applied side. So, the selection process of the faculty has to be very rigorous. And I'm very happy to report we were able to strengthen to IBA faculty to 72 PhDs from all over the world. From the best universities in the world, from Oxford, from Cambridge, from northwestern, from Chicago, from Berkeley, they were all attracted.

The third ingredient was a rigorous assessment system including midterms, surprise tests, and a final examination. And that I think is something which really keeps the students on their toes because they don't know when they're going to be examined. They are not procrastinating for the final exams. They have to be actively engaged at all times.

Furthermore, we introduced the experiential learning project concept for BBA students where one semester was devoted to working in companies on specific business problems. This was a win-win situation. The firm didn't have to engage consultants while the students were able to get their hands dirty. Some students got jobs because of such experience. Employers are also in a very comfortable situation since they have a whole semester to assess a particular student rather than a half hour interview.

The fifth element was that you have to be a good human being before you become a good professional. And a good human being is one who has empathy for those who are not as privileged or advantaged you are. So we introduced what is called a social internship. Students were initially resistant to that...but let me tell you, at least 15% of the graduating class came back to thank me. So at least you have introduced some segment of these privileged students to the poor of this country. And that I think is a worthwhile purpose for higher education institutions.

The sixth element was that we had needs-blind admission. Those who could qualify our exams and interviews were given admission...after admission they could apply for financial assistance. Every student who needed financial assistance was given some amount of assistance in accordance with laid-down criteria...Nobody was ever deprived of an IBA education just because they came from a poor background, or they couldn't afford it.

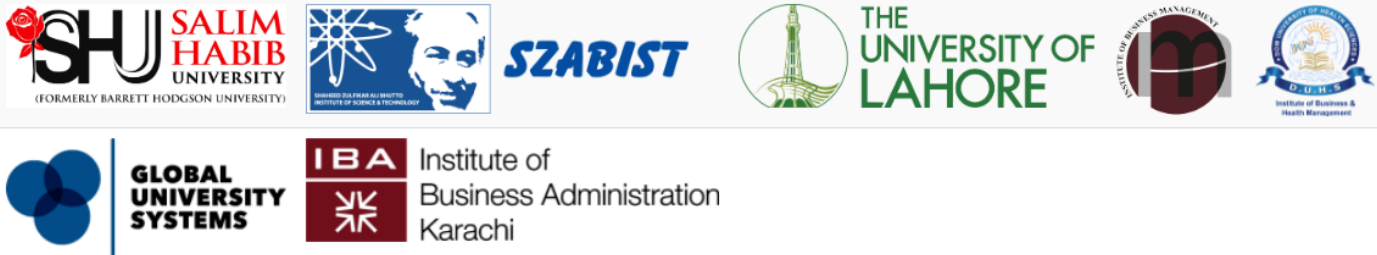


The seventh element was that there were some students from backward areas who needed more help. So, we had these talent hunt programs where we brought intermediate students at our own expense for two summer months to take basic training in English and Maths, but also how to dress, speak, interview, and interact with others. And then they were asked to appear at our exams. There was no relaxation for even these talent hunt program students, they had to qualify, they had to reach the cutoff point. And once they were admitted, they were given full stipends, including pocket money. So, when they go to the cafeteria, they should not feel that their other peers and colleagues are having stuff, you know, tea and coffee and sandwiches that they cannot afford. And I'm so proud that most of them have done extremely well because they had the hunger to do better.

So, my ending remark to all of you, the deans and the directors and others is that please do consider this model of higher education. I'm not saying you have to do all the seven or eight things, but whatever you can do to apply them to your institutions, I would say, please try it. You may not succeed, but failures are the foundations of subsequent success. Thank you very much.

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