

**Enhancing Higher Education in the Muslim World:
(Quick Win Project and Successful Ranking through Quality Assurance)**

By

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Introduction

Quality refers to the standards that must be met to achieve specified purposes to the satisfaction of customers; whereas quality assurance is a process to guarantee the customer/client that the products/services will meet standards consistently. Undoubtedly, quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. Quality also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances. (*UNESCO, Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education*). On the other hand, one may posit that quality assurance is an ongoing process that ensures the delivery of agreed standards. It uses evidence to check that goals are being achieved and that goals and practices are being reshaped to bring about improvement. To be meaningful it needs documented standards and best practices; the often-quoted yardstick is “fitness for purpose”. (<http://www.nzvcc.ac.nz/>)

The present paper examines the importance of quality assurance to meet the demand for world class scientists, linkages with private sector and ranking of universities in enhancing higher education in the Muslim world. The paper posits that the more is our quality assurance effectiveness the better are our chances for strategic alliances with private sector and high ranking. It outlines the general vision for the enhancement of quality assurance in higher education in the

Muslim world paving the way for capacity building. On the other hand, the paper puts forward recommendations on how to enhance quality assurance which will lead to high impact linkages and ranking within the OIC model and other world models.

I- Higher Education in the Muslim World: Observations on Quality Assurance

The paper takes quality assurance and corporate strategy building of Muslim universities as indicators for the development of excellent higher education in the Muslim world. These two elements are among the crucial aspects of building a quality higher education which can ensure, on the one hand, the success of Muslim universities in producing quality graduate, make societal impact, enhance high impact research, produce creative and innovative ideas and products and building capacity and readiness for ranking on the other hand.

On the basis of the above explanation, the paper argues that strategic thinking and planning and quality assurance can assist Muslim universities to move towards quality education. However, looking at the real situation of education in the Muslim world one can note that: “most universities in Islamic countries have a starkly inferior quality of teaching and learning, a tenuous connection to job skills, and research that is low in both quality and quantity. Poor teaching owes more to inappropriate attitudes than to material resources. Generally, obedience and rote learning are stressed, and the authority of the teacher is rarely challenged. Debate, analysis, and class discussions are infrequent.”¹

Below are some important observations on quality assurance in the Muslim world:

1: Generally speaking and based on the above three aspects of higher education namely quality assurance, institutional autonomy and strategic thinking and planning capacity building, universities in the Muslim world vary

¹ Pervey Hoodboy, Science And The Islamic World Aug 07, 2007, http://ptonline.aip.org/journals/doc/PHTOAD-ft/vol_60/iss_8/49_1.shtml#bio

tremendously. Using these three aspects as a measure one can classify universities in the Muslim world into:

- Pre-quality and strategic thinking and planning stage: There are many universities in the Muslim world which manage their activities without any quality assurance or strategic thinking and planning capacities. In other words, they have not yet implemented the quality assurance and strategic thinking mechanisms to build their intellectual, human, financial and intangible capacities and assets.

- Quality and strategic thinking and planning stage: there are also many Muslim universities in Middle East and North Africa, south East Asia, West Asia, Africa which undergo the transformation towards enhancing quality assurance and strategic thinking and planning. In this category universities vary according to their efforts to achieve high level of quality and strategic capacity building.

- Post quality and strategic thinking and planning stage: there are some universities which have already made tremendous efforts towards quality and strategic capacity building. Indeed, there are few universities which are striving to go beyond local and regional bar of quality attempting to rank them internationally and globally.

2: There is a need in the Muslim world to benefit from the western, European and Asian experience and expertise in quality assurance, institutional autonomy and strategic thinking capacity building. As a matter of fact, the contemporary and modern expertise in higher education is huge and what is required in the adaptation of what is suitable for the Muslim world's milieu and situation.

3: There is a need for studies to investigate the expertise of universities in the Muslim world on issues of quality and strategic thinking. This would provide information about the real situation and capacity of the Muslim universities to develop them towards high ranking in world arena.

4: The need for exchange, sharing and dissemination of expertise among the Muslim universities is crucial at this stage of development. This would assist in

saving time, energies and resources and enable the Muslim universities to transform themselves towards greater quality and high performance.

5: There is a need to establish centre for quality assurance and corporate strategy which will specialize in research, consultancy and training for the Muslim world.

6: In order to enhance quality and corporate strategy capacity of the Muslim universities there is a need to create conducive environment and platform for Muslim experts on quality and corporate strategy to develop strategies, plans, tactics and solutions to individual universities taking into account their conditions and status quo.

7: A road map for quality assurance and corporate strategy building for Muslim university need to be set up including, objectives, plans, timeframe, experts, logistics, monitoring mechanisms, financial resources, and information analysis and communications channels. For this road map to achieve its objectives and assist in enhancing higher education in the Muslim world, quality and corporate strategy capacity building vision for the Muslim world higher education need to be devised and put in place.

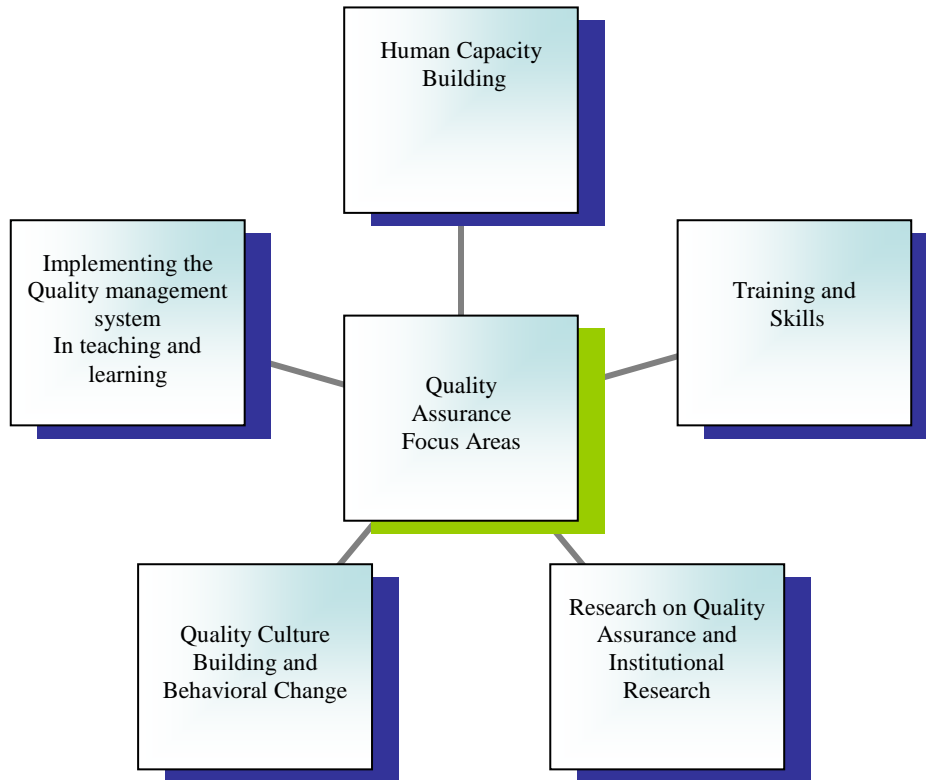
8: Any plans to enhance quality assurance in the Muslim world should take into consideration the following aspects and steps:

1- A study of the current situation of individual universities in the Muslim world. A feasibility study which will outline the real situation, strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threat is in order.

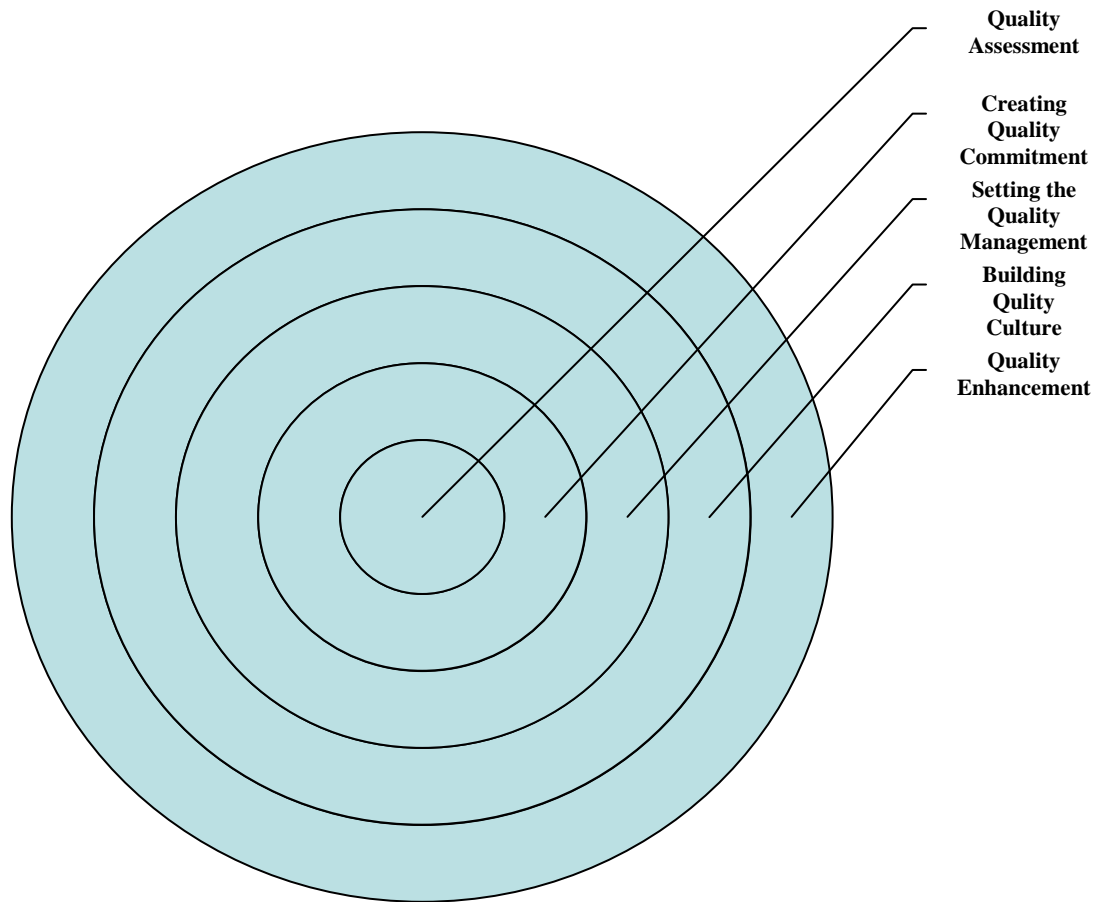
2- Outlining the strategy and plan of quality enhancement for each university or group of universities.

3- Identifying the focus areas of quality enhancement of more priority and impact.

Some vital focus areas are mentioned in the illustration below:



4- Make use of the capacity and expertise of some Muslim world university in assisting those universities which are not yet in the stage of quality and corporate strategy capacity building. In the same token the best universities which possess capacity and achieve high quality should be enhanced to move forward towards excelling at the international level. The diagram below shows the steps towards the goal of building quality capacity:



5- Identifying priority specialization for enhancement; such as sciences and technology universities based universities. To devise an effective quality training plan and mechanism it is important to take into account mechanism the nature of disciplines, university culture and the mind set of its members.

6- Identifying the starting point and focus. It might be with human resources capacity building or management system implementation or information management capacity building or quality culture building or others...

7- Start small and specialized projects of quality expertise exchange in the Muslim world and develop small scale capacity building.

8- Documentation and packaging of the experience of Muslim universities in quality assurance is crucial to other member universities. Therefore, it is

important to develop a packaging and dissemination strategy which will suit the Muslim universities in different milieus and regions.

9- The plan for quality training capacity building purpose should include areas such as:

1. Quality management training
2. Establishing quality assurance units in universities
3. Preparing universities for ranking.
4. Integrated ISO training.
5. Mind and behavior change training
6. Quality culture building training
7. Creative thinking and quality initiatives
8. Strategic planning
9. Key performance indicators and quality measurement
10. Quality audit
11. Academic review
12. Continual improvement
13. Benchmarking
14. Universities Ranking
15. Creative and innovative groups
16. Academic reviewers, examiners. Advisors...
17. Human resources development
18. information capital capacity building
19. Leadership and governance training
20. Integrated skills for academicians and administrators.

10: For those universities which have already built their quality assurance and corporate strategy capacity should plan for strategic alliances and linkages with the private sector and position for the ranking at local, regional, OIC, international arenas to ensure continuous improvement towards global excellence. We need also to take seriously the total absence of the Arab world universities as well as the majority of other Muslim universities except for very few like some Malaysian

universities in the 2007 rankings as a signal that Muslim university should develop a clear strategy for the world ranking in case they opt for that. The nature, vision and mission of some Muslim universities particularly the one infuses the Islamic values might create confusion and some sort of ideological labeling. Therefore, this issue should be tackled properly to avoid losing points.

2- Recommendations for Effective management and enhancement through Quality Assurance Capacity Building

To begin with, the following comment by Dr. Pervey is in order:

According to a recent survey, among the 57 member states of the OIC, there are approximately 1800 universities.⁵ of those, only 312 publish journal articles. A ranking of the 50 most published among them yields these numbers: 26 are in Turkey, 9 in Iran, 3 each in Malaysia and Egypt, 2 in Pakistan, and 1 in each of Uganda, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, and Azerbaijan. For the top 20 universities, the average yearly production of journal articles was about 1500, a small but reasonable number. However, the average citation per article is less than 1.0 (the survey report does not state whether self-citations were excluded). There are fewer data available for comparing against universities worldwide. Two Malaysian undergraduate institutions were in the top-200 list of the Times Higher Education Supplement in 2006. No OIC university made the top-500 "Academic Ranking of World Universities" compiled by Shanghai Jiao Tong University. This state of affairs led the director general of the OIC to issue an appeal for at least 20 OIC universities to be sufficiently elevated in quality to make the top-500 list. No action plan was specified, nor was the term "quality" defined.²

Given the above mentioned situation, the following recommendations would be helpful in enhancing Muslim universities' for future undertakings:

1- General Recommendation

² Pervey Hoodboy, Science And The Islamic World Aug 07, 2007, http://ptonline.aip.org/journals/doc/PHTOAD-ft/vol_60/iss_8/49_1.shtml#bio

- 1- The promotion of the university in western, Asian as well as the Muslim world should be done very professionally and on well planned and continuous manner ensuring clear and quantifiable outcomes and results.
- 2- Creating peers' perception through networking and collaboration with western, Asian and Muslim world universities in various joint projects and initiatives.
- 3- Effective packaging of information and achievements of the university should be done and made available in any possible channels such as; internet, media, sending information to specific universities, writing in western journals likes (weekly newspaper of universities...)
- 4- Expediting the process of establishing the rank among the Muslim countries and regional countries as a step towards building the world ranking capacity.

2- Specific recommendations

- 1- Enhancing the benchmarking and networking with the Western, Asian and Muslim world universities.
- 2- Inviting western, Asian and Muslim world scholars and experts to attend our activities, conferences and events.
- 3- Enhancing the world research collaboration in real and practical joint projects to ensure our presence in other's space.
- 4- Developing a yearly agenda to enhance all the internal processes such as; quality research, quality services, quality supervision, quality alumni, quality employability and quality teaching and learning.
- 5- Enhancing the quality of recruitment of staff and postgraduate students in order to ensure quality products.
- 6- Ensuring the dynamic development of human resources through providing skills and capacity of international standard.
- 7- Developing ranking capacity in small scale and vital selected areas to ensure the readiness of the university for future world undertakings.

- 8- Enhancing the leadership and governance qualities and capacities of Deans, Directors, Deputy Deans, Deputy Directors, and Heads of departments...etc.
- 9- Studying the strength of the top universities and their strategies of ranking.
- 10-Building the collective capacity, culture and awareness about ranking among the university community in order to ensure commitment of everyone in this undertaking.