

## Students' Perspective on Quality Assurance Practices: A Case of Private Sector University in District Lahore

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### Abstract

*This paper explores students' perspectives on quality assurance (QA) practices at a private sector university in district Lahore. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological approach, the research targeted postgraduate students (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) from the four departments under the Faculty of Social Sciences. Using purposive sampling, ten participants (6 female and 4 male) were selected to provide in-depth insights into the awareness, effectiveness, and areas for improvement of QA practices. Semi-structured interview was developed as a primary data collection tool, with questions validated by two experts' opinions. The interview protocol was finalized accordingly. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze data pertaining to students' awareness regarding QA practices and recognizing the role of the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) in curriculum development, faculty evaluation, and feedback mechanisms. Students highlighted the importance of transparent, timely feedback response mechanisms and advocated for increased representation in decision-making processes. The respondents' suggestions were organizing workshops and seminars, and a more inclusive feedback culture to empower students in QA practices. Key areas identified for improvement were enhancing trust in feedback systems, addressing students' fears of reprisal, and fostering critical thinking, and communication skills among students. Findings underline the need for greater student engagement and awareness in QA practices to bridge gaps in satisfaction and ensure alignment with academic and administrative goals. The study offers actionable insights for the university to refine QA systems, promoting a collaborative and student-centered approach to continuous improvement.*

**Keywords:** *Quality Assurance (QA), Post-graduate Students' Perception, Faculty of Social Sciences, Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC)*

**Introduction**

In an era of rapid globalization and knowledge-based economies, the quality of education has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable development and societal progress. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in preparing individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to address the complex challenges of the 21st century. Consequently, ensuring and enhancing educational quality in HEIs has become a pivotal focus for policymakers, educators, and administrators worldwide. Quality assurance (QA) in higher education serves as a systematic approach to monitor, evaluate, and improve academic standards, teaching methodologies, administrative processes, and student satisfaction. These practices aim to uphold institutional credibility, foster innovation, and maintain competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic educational landscape (Harvey & Green, 1993; Shah et al., 2020).

Globally, QA systems in higher education have been developed to ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in institutional performance. These systems often include mechanisms such as accreditation, program reviews, student feedback, and performance audits. While such practices have been extensively studied in developed countries, there remains a significant gap in research focusing on QA in developing nations, where socio-economic challenges and resource constraints may affect implementation and outcomes (Brennan & Shah, 2021). Pakistan, as a developing country, has taken strides in establishing QA frameworks, with institutions such as the Higher Education Commission (HEC) playing a pivotal role in standardizing practices across universities (HEC, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these practices at the institutional level, particularly from the perspective of students, remains an underexplored area.

Minhaj University Lahore, as one of Pakistan's progressive higher education institutions, has embraced various QA mechanisms to align its academic standards with global best practices. These efforts reflect the institution's commitment to fostering a culture of excellence and accountability. However, the success of such initiatives largely depends on stakeholder involvement, particularly students, who are the primary beneficiaries of these practices. Understanding the students' perspectives on QA is vital, as their feedback provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing practices and the areas that require improvement. Students' awareness, perceptions, and expectations are not only indicators of the institution's performance but also serve as a basis for continuous enhancement of QA systems (Harvey, 2011).

Despite the increasing emphasis on QA in HEIs, limited research exists on the students' perspective regarding its implementation and effectiveness, particularly in the Pakistani context. Students' involvement in QA is critical for ensuring that educational services meet their needs and expectations. Research has shown that students' active participation in QA processes contributes to the identification of strengths and weaknesses in institutional policies and practices, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among all stakeholders (Tam, 2001). The literature on quality assurance (QA) in higher education has evolved significantly, highlighting the integration of innovative practices and the impact of globalization on educational standards. Research by Wang and Tinapay (2022) emphasizes the importance of student-centered quality assurance approaches, promoting trust and transparency through collaboration. This shift towards participatory QA mechanisms enhances cognitive and interpersonal skills, aligning institutional objectives with student outcomes. Similarly, David (2023) explores the role of internationalization in QA practices, particularly in research

universities. The study highlights how global frameworks and institutional best practices can drive quality enhancement, especially in rapidly expanding higher education systems like those in the UAE.

Student-centered learning practices, as highlighted in recent studies, play a critical role in fostering intrinsic motivation and critical thinking. For instance, Bernard et al. (2021) found that inquiry-based and collaborative learning approaches significantly outperform traditional teacher-centered methods in enhancing cognitive development and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, challenges such as the need for robust teacher training and adaptive assessment strategies are underscored, calling for careful planning to implement these practices effectively.

The alignment between QA processes and modern educational paradigms remains an area of critical focus. Wang and Tinapy (2022) suggest that QA metrics should evolve to capture diverse student outcomes beyond standardized testing, including critical thinking, autonomy, and creativity. These insights advocate for a paradigm shift in QA, ensuring that it not only monitors academic standards but also supports innovative, inclusive, and student-focused learning environments. By integrating insights from these recent studies, it is clear that a balanced approach combining traditional metrics with modern, collaborative, and student-centered strategies can significantly enhance the quality of education and its alignment with contemporary global demands.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the global emphasis on quality assurance in higher education, there is limited research exploring students' perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of QA practices in developing countries like Pakistan. Most existing studies focus on institutional and administrative viewpoints, overlooking the critical insights students can provide as primary stakeholders (Shah et al., 2020; Tam, 2001). In Pakistan, while the Higher Education Commission has made significant strides in establishing QA frameworks, the extent to which these initiatives align with students' expectations and experiences remains underexplored (HEC, 2022). Moreover, the available literature predominantly addresses QA from a policy-driven lens, with minimal emphasis on how these policies translate into practice at the institutional level, particularly in private sector universities such as Minhaj University Lahore. This gap highlights the need for research that delves into students' awareness, perceptions, and suggestions regarding QA practices. Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on Minhaj University Lahore, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of how students view and experience QA initiatives at their institution. The study also seeks to highlight areas of improvement and gather actionable suggestions from students to refine existing QA frameworks, ensuring alignment with international standards while addressing local needs.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant importance for both academic and practical domains, as it focuses on a crucial yet underexplored aspect of higher education—student's perspectives on quality assurance (QA) practices. In the context of Minhaj University Lahore, the study aims to empower students by recognizing their role as active contributors to institutional quality enhancement. The insights generated through this research may provide a better understanding of how students perceive the effectiveness of existing QA mechanisms and highlight areas requiring improvement.

For administrators and policymakers, this study offers actionable recommendations that can guide the development of more inclusive, student-centered QA frameworks. Additionally, the research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature on QA in higher education, particularly in Pakistan, where the implementation of QA policies often faces challenges such as limited resources, lack of stakeholder involvement, and inconsistent evaluation standards.

By emphasizing students' awareness and expectations, this study contributes to the broader goal of aligning institutional practices with international benchmarks while being responsive to local needs. Furthermore, the findings have the potential to foster a culture of continuous improvement within higher education institutions, ultimately enhancing academic standards, teaching quality, and student satisfaction. This study is not only relevant to Minhaj University Lahore but can also serve as a model for other universities striving to strengthen their QA systems and uphold educational excellence in a competitive global environment.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore students' awareness and understanding of quality assurance practices implemented at Minhaj University Lahore
2. To assess the effectiveness of existing quality assurance practices from the perspective of students
3. To identify students' suggestions and expectations for enhancing quality assurance practices at Minhaj University Lahore
4. To identify the areas of improvement in quality assurance practices in ensuring the educational quality and student satisfaction

### **Research Questions**

To meet the framed objectives, following research questions were formulated:

- Q:1. What is the level of awareness and understanding among students regarding the quality assurance practices at Minhaj University Lahore?
- Q:2. How do students perceive the effectiveness of the current quality assurance practices in ensuring educational quality and student satisfaction?
- Q:3. What are the key suggestions and expectations of students for improving the quality assurance practices at Minhaj University Lahore?
- Q:4. What are the areas of improvement in quality assurance practices in ensuring the educational quality and student satisfaction?

### **Methods & Materials**

This study employed an interpretivist research paradigm, which aligns exclusively with qualitative research, to explore students' perceptions regarding quality assurance (QA) practices at Minhaj University Lahore. Adopting a phenomenological approach, the study aimed to delve deeply into participants' lived experiences. The research targeted postgraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Minhaj University Lahore. Using a purposive sampling technique, 10 students (6 female and 4 male) were selected to ensure that participants

could provide rich, relevant insights aligned with the study's objectives. The purposive sampling approach was chosen specifically to identify participants capable of addressing the research questions effectively.

Data collection was facilitated through a self-developed, semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol was designed based on the study's overarching aims and objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 20–25 minutes. The validity of the instrument was ensured by soliciting feedback from subject matter experts. Modifications to the protocol were made in accordance with their recommendations. To further ensure the tool's trustworthiness, a mock interview was conducted with individuals from the sample pool, enabling refinements to address any gaps in capturing relevant information.

The interviews were conducted in person, with prior discussion of the questions to ensure participant clarity. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed into English for analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify meaningful patterns and codes within the transcripts. Internal validation of the codes was ensured by aligning them with the respondents' statements. To minimize researcher bias, a colleague with substantial research expertise reviewed the coding process. Repeated readings of the interview data helped identify key themes and phenomena. Categories and codes were systematically developed in line with the study's objectives.

Before initiating the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the purpose and scope of the study. Participants were informed that their interviews would be recorded solely for analysis. All data collected was treated with strict confidentiality and used exclusively for research purposes. Ethical protocols were communicated to respondents prior to data collection, ensuring transparency and compliance with ethical research standards.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The current study endeavors to explore students' perspectives regarding various aspects of quality assurance practices at Minhaj University Lahore. The study was guided by overarching research questions aimed at examining students' awareness and understanding of QA practices, assessing the effectiveness of existing practices, identifying students' suggestions and expectations for enhancing the QA, and determining areas for improvement to ensure educational quality and student satisfaction. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, where themes and sub-themes were extracted in alignment with the research questions. Themes and sub-themes are discussed below to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions and insights regarding quality assurance practices at MUL.

**Table 1**

*Themes and Sub-Themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Awareness of QA and QEC Functions	Definition and Importance of QA Awareness of QEC Functions
2. Feedback Mechanisms	Feedback Collection (e.g., CMS surveys, questions about teaching and facilities) Transparency and Communication (uncertainty about action on feedback)
3. Challenges in QA Practices	Identified Challenges (e.g., fear of reprisal, lack of process clarity) Suggested Solutions (e.g., confidentiality, feedback committees)
4. Student Engagement in QA	Increased Representation (e.g., inclusion in decision-making committees) Workshops and Training (e.g., QA and research skills development)
5. Enhancing Feedback Mechanisms	Improving CMS Surveys (e.g., adding open-ended questions, in-depth interviews) Closing the Feedback Loop (informing students about actions taken)
6. Transparency and Communication	Addressing Gaps in Feedback Communication (e.g., real-time updates, regular follow-ups) Building Trust Through Communication
7. Administrative Efficiency and Student Support	Administrative Barriers (e.g., delays in requests, lack of coordination) Improving Accessibility to Processes (e.g., clear website guidelines)
8. Representation in Decision-Making	Student Participation in Committees (e.g., governance and policy-making bodies) Alumni and Ex-Student Involvement (e.g., utilizing alumni expertise in QA)

**Theme 1: Awareness of QA and QEC Functions**

This theme explores students' understanding of quality assurance (QA) and their awareness of the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) at Minhaj University Lahore (MUL). Respondents described QA as a systematic approach to maintaining academic, research, and service standards, while their understanding of QEC functions varied from basic knowledge to more detailed insights.

**Sub-Theme 1.1: Definition and Importance of QA**

Students highlighted the critical role of QA in ensuring high academic standards, supporting institutional reputation, and meeting stakeholders' expectations. QA was viewed as a mechanism for continuous improvement and an essential tool for aligning institutional objectives with educational outcomes. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Quality assurance in a university ensures that the institution consistently maintains and enhances the standards of its education, research, and services." (AS - Male)*

*"It guarantees high-standard education, well-designed courses, qualified teachers, and the availability of facilities like labs and libraries." (UF - Female)*

*"Quality assurance is the backbone of any company or institution that recommends positive changes. It notes areas of improvement and then changes are made." (TH -Male)*

**Sub-Theme 1.2: Awareness of QEC Functions**

While most respondents had heard of the QEC, their understanding of its functions ranged from vague to specific. Some described its role in managing feedback and improving curriculum quality, while others emphasized its connection to HEC standards. Respondents were of the view that;

*"QEC is responsible for the review of academic affiliations, effective management of standards, and quality of programs." (AB - Female)*

*"I know the QEC ensures academic and institutional quality, including teaching quality, curriculum, and compliance with HEC standards." (TS - Female)*

*"In orientation, we had a session about quality enhancement and feedback, and I studied this thoroughly on CMS." (TH - Male)*

**Theme 2: Feedback Mechanisms**

This theme highlights students' experiences with the feedback mechanisms at MUL, including how feedback is collected, the transparency of the process, and communication of actions taken in response.

**Sub-Theme 2.1: Feedback Collection**

Respondents consistently mentioned surveys on the CMS portal as the primary tool for collecting feedback. These surveys covered teaching quality, curriculum effectiveness, and facilities, though some participants expressed concerns about the lack of diversity in feedback methods. Respondents were of the view that;

*"We fill out surveys related to professors and teaching methods on the CMS portal." (UF - Female)*

*"The survey asks about the study pattern of the teachers, how they are teaching, quizzes, and assignments." (FS - Female)*

*"I participated in a survey with sections on teacher quality and other services, but there were no focused group discussions." (TH - Male)*

### **Sub-Theme 2.2: Transparency and Communication**

Several respondents noted a lack of follow-up or transparency regarding the actions taken based on their feedback, which led to skepticism about the effectiveness of the process. Respondents were of the view that;

*"We do not know if the surveys we fill out are acted upon or not. We only fill the surveys." (UF - Female)*

*"Students are unaware if their suggestions or identified problems are acted upon by the university." (UF - Female)*

*"I have seen some policies like attendance rules change, but often, there's no communication about other feedback." (FS - Female)*

### **Theme 3: Challenges in QA Practices**

This theme addresses the barriers students face in providing feedback, including fears of reprisal, inefficiencies in processes, and a lack of clarity about the feedback system.

#### **Sub-Theme 3.1: Identified Challenges**

Students reported challenges such as fear of retaliation, time delays in administrative responses, and lack of transparency in the feedback process. Respondents were of the view that;

*"When filling out a survey, we fear that the teacher we are giving feedback on might take action against us." (FS - Female)*

*"I spent two hours just finding a form because departments kept redirecting me to different branches." (SN - Male)*

*"Students face challenges because of the lack of transparency regarding the implementation of their feedback." (UF - Female)*

#### **Sub-Theme 3.2: Suggested Solutions**

Respondents provided suggestions to address these challenges, including ensuring confidentiality, streamlining processes, and enhancing communication about feedback outcomes. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Surveys should be conducted in class and kept confidential to encourage honest feedback." (FS - Female)*

*"A feedback committee should be formed to ensure confidentiality and inform students about actions taken." (UF - Female)*

*"In-depth interviews and focused group discussions should be added to CMS." (TH - Male)*

### **Theme 4: Student Engagement in QA**

This theme explores students' involvement in QA processes, emphasizing the need for direct representation in decision-making and training opportunities to enhance their contributions.

#### **Sub-Theme 4.1: Increased Representation**

Students advocated for greater involvement in QA-related committees and governance bodies to address gaps in academic and administrative processes. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Students should be part of committees and directly involved in policy-making processes."*  
(SN - Male)

*"Dedicated committees should be formed, and ex-students or senior students could also participate."* (WS - Male)

*"Policies should be co-created with input from students who understand institutional challenges."* (TS - Female)

#### **Sub-Theme 4.2: Workshops and Training**

Respondents emphasized the importance of workshops and training programs to enhance students' understanding of QA and improve their skills. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Workshops should be conducted to address student problems and improve their contribution to QA."* (UF - Female)

*"Training on quality assurance, research article writing, and thesis preparation should be arranged."* (SN - Male)

### **Theme 5: Enhancing Feedback Mechanisms**

Feedback mechanisms are critical to ensuring continuous improvement in quality assurance (QA). At Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), students emphasized the importance of improving existing systems, such as the CMS surveys, by incorporating more in-depth feedback options. Additionally, they highlighted the need to close the feedback loop by informing students about the actions taken in response to their suggestions, which would foster trust and active participation.

#### **Sub-Theme 5.1: Improving CMS Surveys**

Respondents suggested that the feedback surveys available on the CMS platform should include open-ended questions and enable students to provide qualitative input. They also recommended incorporating other formats, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, to capture diverse perspectives. Respondents were of the view that;

*"CMS should include open-ended sections where students can express their opinions in detail, not just select from predefined options."* (FS - Female)

*"I recommend adding in-depth interviews and focus groups to the feedback process. This would give students a platform to discuss issues freely."* (TH - Male)

*"Face-to-face interviews or discussions about quality and environmental issues should be added to the CMS to make feedback more effective."* (AU - Female)

#### **Sub-Theme 5.2: Closing the Feedback Loop**

Many respondents expressed concerns about the lack of communication regarding actions taken based on their feedback. They emphasized that the university should provide regular updates to ensure students feel their input is valued and impactful. Respondents were of the view that;

*"We do not know if the surveys we fill out are acted upon or not. This lack of transparency makes students skeptical about the process."* (UF - Female)

*"The university should inform students about actions taken on their feedback. Updates through CMS or student councils would help close the loop."* (FS - Female)

*"Students need to be told how their feedback has been used to improve things. Without this, the process feels incomplete."* (FN - Female)

### **Theme 6: Transparency and Communication**

Transparency and effective communication are essential for building trust in QA processes. Students highlighted the need for regular follow-ups and real-time updates to bridge

communication gaps between the university and its stakeholders. Enhanced communication would foster a sense of involvement and accountability among students.

### **Sub-Theme 6.1: Addressing Gaps in Feedback Communication**

Respondents stressed that the university needs to address existing communication gaps, particularly by providing real-time updates and regular follow-ups on student feedback. Respondents were of the view that;

*"There's no communication about whether our feedback leads to improvements, which discourages honest participation." (FN - Female)*

*"Regular updates about changes made based on student feedback would help build trust in the process." (WS - Male)*

*"The university should provide real-time updates through the CMS to show how feedback is being implemented." (FS - Female)*

### **Sub-Theme 6.2: Building Trust through Communication**

Several respondents emphasized that effective communication about the outcomes of QA processes is crucial for building trust between students and the university. Without this, students feel disconnected from decision-making. Respondents were of the view that;

*"When students see that their suggestions are valued and implemented, it creates a sense of trust and encourages more participation." (TH - Male)*

*"Building trust requires clear and consistent communication about how feedback is used to make changes." (FS - Female)*

*"Transparency in the QA process helps students feel like active stakeholders rather than passive participants." (WS - Male)*

## **Theme 7: Administrative Efficiency and Student Support**

Administrative processes are a critical aspect of QA as they directly affect students' academic and non-academic experiences. Respondents identified several barriers in administrative operations and suggested improvements to make these processes more efficient and accessible.

### **Sub-Theme 7.1: Administrative Barriers**

Students reported challenges such as delays in fulfilling requests, lack of coordination between departments, and unclear administrative processes, which hinder their overall experience. Respondents were of the view that;

*"I spent two hours just finding a form because departments kept redirecting me to different branches." (SN - Male)*

*"When I applied for a transcript, it took three months because of errors in the photo format. These unnecessary delays make the system frustrating." (TS - Female)*

*"Students face difficulties in accessing administrative support for even basic tasks, which adds to their stress." (FS - Female)*

### **Sub-Theme 7.2: Improving Accessibility to Processes**

Respondents emphasized the importance of clear guidelines and efficient systems to streamline administrative operations. They suggested enhancing the university website and providing detailed information to help students navigate processes. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Clear and detailed guidelines about office processes should be provided on the university website to avoid confusion." (SN - Male)*

*"Administrative processes should be simplified, and students should be facilitated better to reduce unnecessary delays." (FN - Female)*

*"The CMS should include detailed instructions for tasks like transcript requests and degree applications to make the process easier." (UF – Female)*

### **Theme 8: Representation in Decision-Making**

Students emphasized the importance of being directly involved in governance and decision-making processes related to QA. They advocated for representation in committees and policy-making bodies to ensure their voices are heard and their concerns addressed effectively.

#### ***Sub-Theme 8.1: Student Participation in Committees***

Respondents suggested that students should be included in governance and policy-making bodies to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered in institutional decisions. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Students should be part of QA committees to highlight issues directly affecting them." (SN - Male)*

*"Policy decisions should include student input to make them more relevant and effective." (WS - Male)*

*"Committees that involve students in governance will foster collaboration and improve institutional transparency." (AU - Female)*

#### ***Sub-Theme 8.2: Alumni and Ex-student Involvement***

Involving alumni and ex-students in QA processes was recommended as a way to leverage their expertise and experience in improving institutional practices. Respondents were of the view that;

*"Ex-students and senior students working in relevant fields should be included in QA discussions to share their insights." (WS - Male)*

*"Alumni involvement can help bridge gaps in policy-making and provide valuable feedback from a different perspective." (TS - Female)*

*"Ex-students working in management or administrative roles could guide current students and improve QA practices." (TH - Male)*

### **Gender -Wise Comparison of Responses**

In analyzing the responses from male and female students regarding quality assurance (QA) and the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) at Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), distinct patterns emerge across various themes. Male respondents tend to articulate QA in terms of its systematic nature and its crucial role in promoting positive institutional changes, emphasizing the significance of QA for improving quality and aligning it with institutional objectives. In contrast, female students highlight the necessity of QA for maintaining high academic standards and ensuring qualified teaching. Their responses reflect a strong focus on the practical aspects of QA, such as the availability of facilities and educational resources.

When discussing feedback mechanisms, male respondents express concern about the limited diversity in feedback methods, indicating a desire for more engagement through focused group discussions. Female students, however, vocalize their frustrations with transparency issues, often citing a lack of knowledge regarding whether their feedback leads to any meaningful changes. This difference underscores a more pronounced desire among females for clearer communication about the feedback process.

In addressing the challenges within QA practices, both groups identify common barriers, such as fear of retaliation for providing honest feedback. However, male respondents specifically highlight operational challenges, like difficulties in locating administrative forms. Female

respondents echo concerns about fear but place greater emphasis on the overall inefficiencies and delays in administrative responses, showcasing their frustrations with the existing system.

Both male and female students advocate for increased representation in QA-related committees, underscoring the importance of being part of the decision-making process. Males express a strong need for policy-making inclusion, while females focus on the necessity of workshops and training programs to empower students in QA processes. This divergence indicates that while both groups value representation, the approach to achieving that involvement differs. The necessity for enhancing feedback mechanisms is echoed by both genders, with males emphasizing the need for qualitative feedback through open-ended questions and focused discussions. Female students express concern about the lack of communication regarding the outcomes of their feedback, reflecting a desire for a more engaged feedback loop.

Transparency and effective communication are critical for both groups, with males articulating that the absence of communication creates a sense of disconnection from the university. Female students highlight similar feelings of skepticism regarding the impact of their suggestions due to insufficient updates.

In discussing administrative efficiency and student support, males point out inefficiencies and express a need for improvement in services, while females highlight frustration with delays and the necessity for streamlined processes and better access to support. This difference reveals that females may prioritize accessibility while males focus on systemic improvements.

Lastly, both male and female students emphasize the importance of representation in decision-making processes. Males insist on being included in governance structures to ensure their voices are heard, and females advocate for the involvement of alumni to provide broader perspectives. This collective emphasis on representation indicates a shared interest in enhancing the quality and efficiency of academic experiences, even as they express their insights and concerns in unique ways. Overall, this comparative analysis reveals overlapping themes, with nuanced differences that reflect varying priorities and perspectives among male and female students at the university.

The thematic analysis revealed several critical insights into students' perspectives on quality assurance (QA) practices at Minhaj University Lahore (MUL). Students generally understood QA as a means of maintaining academic and administrative standards, enhancing institutional credibility, and ensuring student satisfaction. While many were aware of the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) and its role in managing feedback and maintaining academic quality, they highlighted significant gaps in feedback mechanisms. The reliance on CMS surveys for feedback collection was appreciated, but students called for more inclusive methods, such as focus groups and open-ended feedback options. Transparency emerged as a key concern, with students frequently unaware of whether their feedback had led to actionable changes, which diminished trust and engagement in the QA process.

Other notable themes included administrative inefficiencies and limited student representation in decision-making. Delays in fulfilling administrative requests and unclear processes were reported as barriers, with students recommending streamlined systems and better communication through digital platforms. Additionally, students expressed a strong desire to participate in governance and QA committees, suggesting that their inclusion could address gaps in policy-making and institutional practices. The analysis also highlighted the potential value of alumni contributions to QA, emphasizing that experienced ex-students could provide unique insights into institutional effectiveness. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of

enhancing feedback mechanisms, improving administrative support, and fostering a collaborative, transparent QA culture at MUL.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study shed light on students' perspectives regarding quality assurance (QA) practices at Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), highlighting gaps in feedback mechanisms, administrative efficiency, and student representation. Respondents demonstrated a general understanding of QA as a tool to maintain academic and administrative standards, aligning with previous research emphasizing QA's role in improving institutional effectiveness and student satisfaction (Mishra, 2016). However, concerns about transparency in feedback processes and limited student involvement in decision-making were recurrent themes, echoing findings from Shah and Nair (2013), who noted that student engagement in QA is often superficial, with inadequate feedback loops discouraging active participation.

A significant issue raised by students was the lack of transparency and follow-up on feedback. This aligns with the study by Harvey (2011), which emphasized that closing the feedback loop is crucial for building trust and fostering a sense of ownership among students. While MUL utilizes CMS for collecting feedback, respondents indicated a need for more diverse methods, such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Similar recommendations were made by Brennan and Shah (2021) who argued that effective QA practices should involve participatory feedback systems that enable students to articulate their concerns in a meaningful way. Another area of concern was the inefficiency in administrative processes, including delays in requests for transcripts and degree documentation. This is consistent with findings from a study by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002), which emphasized the importance of integrating QA with administrative practices to enhance student satisfaction. The study also highlighted that institutional websites and digital platforms should provide clear and accessible guidelines to minimize confusion and delays, as supported by Telford and Masson (2005), who found that streamlined administrative processes significantly improve student experiences in higher education.

The respondents acknowledged the importance of QA in institutional credibility and continuous improvement, their awareness of QEC's functions was often limited to curriculum review and compliance with HEC standards. This highlighted a need for more robust orientation programs and student training workshops to enhance understanding and engagement with QA processes.

The study highlights a multidimensional understanding of QA among students, emphasizing the need for greater awareness QA practices and their significance. While students acknowledged QA as vital for maintaining academic standards and enhancing institutional credibility, they underscored the limited outreach and engagement of QEC. Many respondents were vaguely aware of QEC functions, indicating the need for comprehensive orientation and workshops to educate students on how these platforms work and have impact on their academic and administrative experiences. Similar recommendations were made by Harvey (2011) that students' awareness, perceptions, and expectations are not only indicators of the institution's performance but also serve as a basis for continuous enhancement of QA systems.

Lastly, respondents strongly advocated for increased student representation in QA-related committees and governance. Research by Kuh and Ewell (2010) underscores that engaging students as active stakeholders in institutional decision-making fosters a collaborative culture and improves the relevance of policies and practices. Involving alumni and ex-students, as suggested

by respondents, aligns with findings from Newton (2007), who highlighted the value of alumni contributions in providing longitudinal insights into institutional effectiveness.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored students' perspectives on quality assurance (QA) practices at Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), focusing on their awareness, the effectiveness of existing systems, and areas for improvement. The findings reveal that while students recognize QA as essential for maintaining academic standards and institutional credibility, significant gaps exist in the transparency, inclusivity, and effectiveness of QA processes. The reliance on CMS surveys for feedback collection, though functional, lacks diversity and depth, limiting students' ability to share comprehensive insights. Additionally, the absence of follow-up on feedback outcomes has led to diminished trust and skepticism about the university's responsiveness to student input.

The students expressed the need for enhanced awareness of QEC functions. Workshops and training programs tailor to students could play a pivotal role in bridging this gap and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to QA initiatives.

Feedback mechanisms emerged as a critical area requiring improvement. While CMS surveys are a functional tool for collecting feedback, their lack of diversity and limited transparency hinder their overall effectiveness. Students emphasized the need for more inclusive feedback methods, such as open-ended sections, focus groups, and real-time communication about actions taken. Closing the feedback loop is essential for building trust, encouraging participation, and ensuring that students view their input as valued and impactful. By addressing these issues, MUL could enhance the effectiveness of QE practices.

Administrative inefficiencies and limited student representation in QA-related committees further exacerbate the challenges. Delays in fulfilling requests and unclear processes hinder student satisfaction, while the lack of involvement in governance restricts their ability to influence meaningful changes. Students strongly advocate for improved communication, streamlined administrative operations, and enhanced feedback mechanisms, including focused discussions and real-time updates on actions taken. The study underscores the importance of fostering a student-centered QA culture through active representation, transparency, and collaboration. By addressing these areas, MUL can enhance its QA practices, ensuring continuous improvement, greater student satisfaction, and alignment with institutional goals.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The university may expand feedback mechanisms to include focus group discussions and in-depth interviews for comprehensive student input.
2. It is recommended to provide regular updates on actions taken in response to feedback to enhance transparency and trust.
3. The university may include student representatives in governance and policy-making committees to ensure their active involvement.
4. The university may also organize workshops and training sessions to educate students about QA and improve their feedback skills.
5. It is recommended to ensure confidentiality in feedback mechanisms to encourage honest and fearless participation.
6. The university may promote collaboration between students, faculty, and administration to foster a culture of continuous improvement.

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