Higher Education and Quality Assurance in Iran: A Brief Survey

Reza Ameri
General Director of Supervision and Evaluation Of Higher education,
Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT)
Tehran, Iran

Abstract
In this lecture we present a brief profile of higher education system, quality assurance and its challenges in higher education in Iran.

Keywords: Higher education in Iran, Quality assurance, challenge of quality assurance

1. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT)
In 1980, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education merged with the Ministry Culture and Art to from the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. According to the amendments of the Act to Establish the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, passed in 1974, the major responsibilities of the new ministry were as follows:

1. To set goals and make policies for all levels of academic research.

2. To set general principles for higher education and research programs.

3. To set rules and procedures related to higher education and research institutions.
4. To harmonize organizational regulations for universities and research institutions and to unify university employment procedures according to specific institutional needs and requirements.

5. To harmonize financial regulations for universities and higher education and research institutions.

6. To draw a comprehensive plan for the development of higher education and research in order to provide the required human resources.

7. To make policies for sending students abroad, their guidance and during their studies, and their employment upon their return to the country.

8. To supervise and evaluate institutions of higher education and research.

9. To set rules for the establishment and development of all institutions of higher education and research.

10. To cooperate with the planning and Budgeting organization (PBO) in order to verify the current budget, as well as the construction budget, for institutions of higher education and research.

1.3 Various Types of Higher Education

Higher education in Iran primarily includes academic courses leading to associate, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Ph.D. degrees. The main active institutions of higher education in Iran are as follows:

A- Government sector
To supply specialized human resources required for the country is the major responsibility of the MSRT. However, other ministries and government organization also take part in achieving this goal.

By delegating medical education to MTHM, all responsibilities and tasks of the MSRT in medical education were transferred to the new ministry, MHTM.

At present, in addition to universities and institutions of higher education affiliated with the MSRT and MTHM, other institutions are also active in higher education, such as colleges of vocational training and teachers, education affiliated with the Ministry of Education, along with other institutions affiliated with other ministries and government organizations.

Presently, the MSRT is supervising over 2500 universities and institutions of higher education.

Moreover, the Comprehensive University of Applies Sciences, established in 1993, is also active in improving vocational training and supplying skilled manpower required for industry, agriculture, and the service sector. Courses are offered with the cooperation of government organizations, leading to the Associate and Bachelor s degrees.

**B. Non-Government Sector**

In order to increase public contribution to higher education, to relieve the government s financial burden, and to meet the increasing demand for higher
education, non-government (private) universities and institutions of higher education have also been established.

- **Islamic Azad University (open University),**

  In 1982, after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Azad University was established as the first non-government (private) university. During its early years, the university benefited from the help and support of local authorities and benevolent people providing buildings, equipment and the like. Currently, Azad University has over than 300 branches throughout the country with more than 14000000 students.

- **Non-Government Institutions of Higher Education**

  Given the experience of the Islamic Azad University, the increasing demand for higher education, as well as the tendency of the private sector for contributing to higher education, the SCCR approved bylaws for establishing non-government universities and institutions of higher education in 1985. The bylaws aimed at mobilizing all possibilities of the country for development of higher education. To days more than 260 non–governmental institutions is active with more than 240000 students in countryside.

- **Distance Education**
In 1988, PayamNour University was established with a particular structure differing from that of typical universities in order to provide distance education. It aimed at promoting the knowledge and culture of the country, expanding higher education in remote areas, providing educational opportunities for more people, as well as the efficient use of all potentials and facilities for higher education.

The programs of the university are based on the integration of education and information technology. PayamNour University has over 300 branches throughout the country with more than 800000 students.

**The current status of higher education at a glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>row</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of state universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of non-governmental universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of academic staff of state universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>59886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The number of academic staff of nongovernmental universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>61857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total number of students of the state universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>1750507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total number of the students of non-governmental universities and higher education institutions</td>
<td>1858550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Higher Education Strategies and Policies

- Creating balance between the higher education development plan and societal needs
- Promoting good practices in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education.
- Improving internal and external evaluation systems
- Expanding international scientific collaborations
- Taking the advantage of update approaches to have easy access to the world’s recent scientific information.
- Developing researchers towards industrial, agricultural and service needs.
- Authorizing the universities
- Developing a long-term, comprehensive plan to revive Islamic traditions and cooperation between universities and theological centers towards theoretical issues of the country.
- Outstanding progress in fields of stem cells, biotechnology, nanotechnology, aerospace and neo energy.
- Design and ranking the articles and journals which called Islamic World Science Citation Center (the
abbreviation is ISC), with the goal of evaluation and ranking of scientist, researcher, scientific publications and Islamic world countries and also determine a remarkable articles and specify full citation authors and full citation articles, in the end, research performance evaluation of Islamic countries of Islamic conference organization member.

- Rise of 11 steps in Iran scientific production according to ISI statistics in 2008 equal to 2006 and acquisition of 24 place in the world in 2008.
- Organization of common industrial poles among university and industry (designing and making satellite and its throw up), designing and making aircraft and other activities in the field of electronic, mental and marine systems.
- Expansion and dissemination of Islamic culture throughout the country, strengthening the Cultural Revolution and the enhancement of the common culture.
- Development of universities, schools, cultural and art centers on the basis of pure Islamic culture, as well as enhancing them with the assistance of devout, active and skillful staff – lecturers, educators and teachers devout, active and skillful staff – lecturers, educators and teachers faithful to Islam and the independence of the country.
- The preservation, revival, and introduction of Islamic and national heritage.
A. Quality Assurance in Iran

The rapid growth and expansion of higher education in Iran during two decades led to the creation of the office of supervision and quality assurance (OSQA) in 1995 at the Ministry of Science Research and Technology in Iran (SQAI).

Also in all universities the center of supervision and QA, as well as the council of QA were established for self-assessment.

Fields / Disciplines
Higher education

Objectives OSQA

- The purpose of the office is to promote integrated systems of research, training, information and documentation in the field of higher education.
- Providing the facility for the collaboration between
high-level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the University and other institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- The study of the evaluation and development of policy-making, planning and management in higher education, conducting institutional research, institutionalizing higher education quality assurance and promoting the level of higher education within regional and international interactions.

- Provide public accountability
- Help institutions to improve
- Require academic freedom and integrity
- Ensure that higher education institutions have primary responsibility for quality
- Promote Quality assurance in higher education.
- The study of the evaluation and development of policy-making, conducting institutional research, institutionalizing higher education quality assurance and promoting the level of higher education within regional and international interactions.

Progress of Internal Evaluation in Universities
A. External Quality Assessment (EQA)

After successful in internal-evaluation the external evaluation was started in universities in 2005.

During 4 years ago external evaluation has been done in many universities with the collaboration of faculty members and scientific Societies in higher educations.
Also in each provinces to do external evaluation of all universities and institute in that province and send their reports to OSQA to final decisions.

Now Iran Quality Assurance Network is started to establish.

- More than 800 university and institute in HE has been evaluated
- External evaluation will be continued with collaboration of faculty member in all universities and institutions
- Iran University Quality Assurance Network is under establishment,

3. Challenge of QA in Iran HE

For several decades, Iranian universities have not been able to monitor themselves and develop efficient, internal structures of quality assurance. Recent changes in Iran have given rise to new concepts, including the principle of universities' self-evaluation, based on academic autonomy and scientific freedom. But the dominant tendency in is still toward external, bureaucratic control. The conflict between more or less advanced texts and typically solid structures, pursuing its transitional stage.

Most Challenges
1. The shadow of government over evaluation and the unfinished project of establishing intermediate institutions.

2. Scientific and specialized approach towards evaluation and its structural obstacles.

3. Continuously lurking tendency in the governmental system to return to external and bureaucratic control.

5. Neglect of output indicators of higher education quality due tendency towards controlling the processes and influenced by petroleum-driven political economy.

6. Students’ evaluation of classes and ambiguity in the procedures, methods, and instruments.

7. Lack of a higher education information system. The lack of an efficient information

8. Internal evaluation as a completed project. Efficient mechanisms for internal evaluation in the country’s universities have not yet institutionalized.

9. Lack of external evaluation by scientific peers.

10. Undeveloped professional, non-governmental institutions and their lack of participation.
11. Lack of a professional system of standardized examination.

12. Lack of valid and agreed indices, indicators, and standards.

The formulation of indices, indicators, and standards for higher education evaluation has not yet been desirably organized in a consistent and consensual manner.