

Research Paper

Modelling and evaluation of factors influencing the establishment of a "quality culture" (QC) at Farhangiyen University

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Abstract

Based on previous research, quality culture is considered as a dominant and specific organizational culture of the university defined by shared values and university representatives' commitment to quality. The purpose of the current study was to model and evaluate the factors that influence the establishment of a quality culture at Farhangian University. The research method was mixed-exploratory and two-stage (qualitative-quantitative). In the qualitative part, 23 academic and professional experts from education and research centers in 2017 were interviewed specifically using the semi-structured interview method. For the quantitative part, 462 faculty and non-academic members were selected by multistage cluster sampling and answered the questionnaires. The formal and content validity of the quality culture questionnaire was confirmed by experts. Also, in terms of reliability, the internal consistency method using Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the internal consistency, which indicates the high reliability of the dimensions and components based on the number of factors. The values extracted from the factor analysis were confirmed. The results of the first and second confirmatory factor analysis showed that the quality culture consists of the following factors: "Structural / management elements", "Cultural / psychological elements", "Leadership", "communication", "Trust", "Commitment and accountability", "Partnership", "Empowerment", "infrastructure Correction", and "quality culture's consequences". The indigenous model for the establishment of Farhangian University has a well-founded structural validity. Therefore, it can be said that the structural model of the study is of good quality and the observed values are well recovered and the model has good predictive power.

Keywords:

Quality culture,
faculty members,
university staff,
Farhangian University

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Nearly two decades have passed since the first efforts were made to establish the quality assurance system and make it a dominant discourse in higher education in the country. Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted on the conceptualization of quality culture as a necessity for institutionalizing the quality assurance discourse in higher education in Iran (Salimi & Hosseini, 2016: 1143). Therefore, "quality culture" has always been among the important and significant issues in the higher education system in the country. Meanwhile, Farhangian (Teacher training) University, which is focused on the quality of teacher education, has faced many serious challenges related to quality assurance more than other universities, including quantity orientation in student admissions, academic resources, and facilities, etc.

Given the development of the higher education system in terms of student numbers, which indicates quantitative growth and insufficient attention to quality in universities (Ghoorchian & Shahrakipour, 2010: 2), there seems to be no consensus on the original meaning of quality in higher education, and the main source of disagreement is the difference in philosophical and structural foundations and customer orientation (Ghaffari, Jafari, & Amir Mohammadi, 2011). However, quality assessment in higher education and its culturalization according to the intellectual foundations can be considered as the main prerequisite for establishing a quality assurance system in higher education (Farasatkah, 2006). Meanwhile, the dissemination of quality culture through the application of internal quality assessment and cultural infrastructures in universities can lead to continuous improvement and consistent assurance of quality culture in the long term. This is because, according to Hayrinen Alestalo & Peltola (2006), the main difficulties in achieving high quality in higher education are due to cultural issues.

Nevertheless, with the emergence of the Total Quality Management movement, the evaluation of the quality of higher education and its necessity; the main problem, according to most experts, is still the cultural background (Yazdkhasti & Rajaipour, 2009). Considering the above movement in the context of culture, it should be said that the concept of quality, like any other concept, can grow and develop rapidly in the shadow of the development of culture. Nevertheless, in recent years, the topic of quality culture has attracted the attention of specialists in academic quality assessment, which should be acknowledged because higher education institutions in Europe (d'Egmont, 2006) introduced quality culture years ago in order to apply a comprehensive and sustainable approach to quality in higher education institutions.

Thus, the study of the literature confirms that the continuum of stages in the establishment of the quality assurance system includes six stages: Contemplating about Quality, Gaining Initial Experience, Modelling and Localizing the Assessment Process, Disseminating the Quality Culture and Creating a Bond, Structuring and Establishing the Quality Assurance System. Considering the efforts in higher education, it is clear that the fourth stage of the above stages is not yet formed in the program of some universities (Bazargan, 2003: 155), but in recent years, regardless of the dissemination of the quality culture, structuring has been carried out in some universities in the country, including Farhangian University of Iran, and it must be said that the dissemination of the quality culture is in the shadow of the establishment of the quality assurance system, which indicates that Farhangian University always suffers from a serious problem in this regard (establishment of the quality assurance system). According to the requirements that apply to the above research area, and in order to understand this missing link in Farhangian University, namely the design and evaluation of the factors that affect the

establishment of quality culture in the university, a combined research was conducted for the first time to provide a model for the country's Farhangian University system.

Theoretical foundations

To draw the culture of quality in academic systems, researchers such as Barbulescu (2015) and Adina-Petruța (2014) talk about the internal quality of education that has led to the association of the culture of quality outside the university, and the categories of the professorial role of faculty members and the role of students, as well as the environment that evokes the culture of quality in education in the form of university symbols, and researchers such as Vilcea (2014), Chong (2014), Veiga et al. (2014), Cardoso, Rosa & Santos (2013) also studied the categories that evoke a quality attitude towards the university in the shadow of the components; trust, collaborative environment, self-management of staff and professors, attention to continuous quality; not immediate and superficial, systematic planning of the quality process; new knowledge in academic quality assessment; graduality of quality as a criterion for action; responsiveness to students; transparency, comprehensive supportive care, self-leadership, cooperation and teamwork, open communication. It seems that each of them used the same framework for the theoretical development of quality culture.

However, despite the mentioned researches abroad according to the international studies on this topic, the topic and challenge of quality culture in our country is still mentioned as a theoretical assumption in the lectures and annual conferences on university quality assessment by the well-known experts.

The lack of access of researchers to relevant empirical research results is also an aspect of it; because this issue is doubly difficult in the field of research and previous researches (Doctoral dissertation Ameri Shahrabi & Kavooosi (2016) under the title designing a quality culture model in Islamic Azad University, study by Ebrahimi, Adli & Mehran (2015) under the title university culture review, Latifi & Zohurian Aboutorabi (2015) study of general culture indicators of universities, Khoshdaman and Ayati (2013) Comparison of teaching and learning culture in two generations of faculty members, Mohammadi et al, (2013) Prevalence of university culture with its evaluation of the elements and processes of knowledge management of faculty members, and finally Bazargan (2011) Culture quality and its role in achieving the desired performance of universities; Amiri, Zarei Matin & Zolfagharzadeh (2010) the complexities of culture and its typology in higher education) within the country have not still been able to provide a coherent response in this regard. And most importantly, the greatest intellectual concern of the administrators of the university system in this period also demanded indexing the culture of quality in the university system, and the researchers paid attention to the topic by a systematic mode designing and its evaluation in order to establish the quality culture in Farhangian University.

Methodology

The current research is applicable in terms of its purpose, and field type in terms of data collection method (sequential exploratory hybrid model (qualitative-quantitative)). This research collects and analyses data based on the research strategy of grounded theory or theory derived from data, which is based on the systematic design of Strauss and Corbin's data theory. With this in mind, exploratory and semi-structured interviews with key informants, note taking, and document review were used to gather information. In this method, experts were purposively selected based on the research objectives. Depending on the content of the exploratory interviews with the experts, additional informants had to be brought in using the snowballing method.

Sampling and interviewing continued until the process of analysis and discovery reached theoretical saturation. The validation and acceptance criteria of the categories and their relationships were performed and approved by experts in the field of quality assessment and three participants. In the quantitative part of the research, the initial structure of the questionnaire was randomized with multistage sampling of the clusters among the statistical sample, which included 462 people (173 289 were faculty members and 289 were non-academic members) distributed throughout the country, after the evaluation of five experts in monitoring and quality assessment at Farhangian University by removing similarities and overlaps with 120 items in the final questionnaire. The PLS3 Smart software was used to test the research hypotheses and the model extracted from the qualitative part.

Research Findings

In the study of the primary data, 784 concepts were identified. On this basis, the data set was reduced to a specific and limited number of general categories. At this stage, 120 concepts and 44 main categories were identified. After identifying the main categories of the investigation, axial coding was performed. Finally, in the last stage, to determine the theory by merging the categories, 10 core categories were obtained from the 44 main categories, which were formed around an axis to form a strong network of relationships. All main categories and cores were classified in the form of conditional, interactive/process, and consequent categories, which were drawn into the final model of establishing a quality culture at Farhangian University in the country in Figure 1.

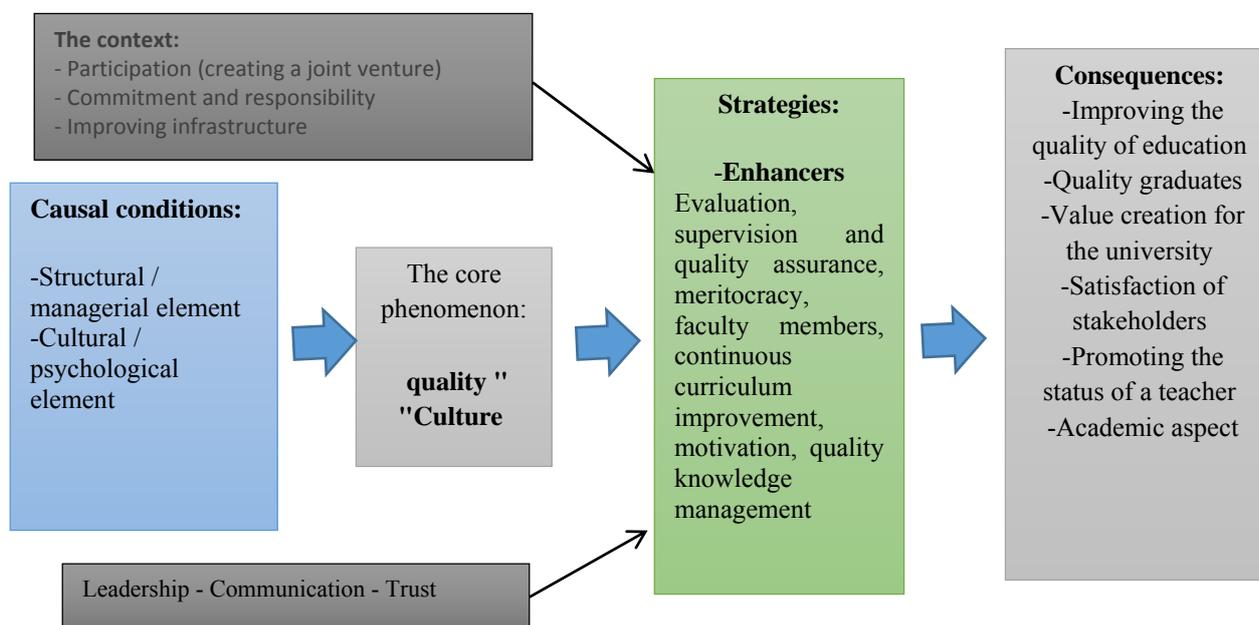


Figure 1). The final model for establishing a culture of quality at Farhangian University of the country.

In the quantitative part of the study, the basic criterion for evaluating the endogenous variables in the paths of the model is the coefficient of determination. This index shows that the endogenous variable is among few (one or two) exogenous variables, the average values of the coefficient of determination are also acceptable and all paths (endogenous variables to exogenous variables) are evaluated as average except for the path of strategies from

background factors and intervention factors, which is significant. To evaluate the extracted model (Figure 1), the Q2 Aston-Geisser rate for all endogenous variables was also evaluated. Therefore, it can be said that the studied structural model is of good quality and the observed values are well reconstructed, and that the studied model has good predictive ability and can predict the endogenous variable.

Conclusion and Discussion

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, quality culture as a main phenomenon is understandable in terms of a logical (systematic) model and considering its understanding with conditions (causal, mediating and contextual), interactions/actions and consequences and was confirmed in this research. That is, what factors influenced quality culture? And with what factors did they interact? And what variables were the consequences of these interactions?

In examining and explaining the details of the final (validated) model, it should be said that the final model of the research shows that among the causal factors (structural/management elements), university policies and procedures (0.885) play the greatest role, and organizational vitality (0.719) plays the least role as predictors of the establishment of quality culture at Farhangian University in the country.

Among causal factors (cultural/psychological elements), shared values and expectations (0.906) played the most important role and quality discourse played the least role (0.835). As for the influence of causal factors, among the strategies (mechanisms of quality culture), attention to meritocracy (0.991) had the greatest effect and curriculum reform (0.850) the least. For the implementation of establishing the quality culture in the university, which required basic strategies, among the contextual conditions for crystallizing the quality culture, commitment and responsibility (0.939) attracted the highest attention of the respondents and participation (0.902) played the least role.

In addition to the framework conditions, the intervention conditions were also found to be effective in the implementation of the strategies. Among the intervention factors, academic leadership played the greatest role (0.951) and communication the least (0.911). Finally, since quality culture leads to certain outcomes, based on the findings and the final model, among the extracted outcomes and consequences, university image (0.992) was ranked first and quality graduates (0.720) was ranked last by the respondents. Therefore, in accordance with the research results, the following suggestions are recommended: Academic leaders in the central organization and campus and affiliated academic centres should base their work on quality policies and procedures in the university (quality charter) with the existing strategic plan to create a quality culture in the university.

Furthermore, in line with the establishment, dissemination and consistency of the quality culture, university administrators can also establish the foundation and practical context of the quality culture by transforming the old structures of the university to pay attention to the inspiring elements in this research with collective agreement and belief in quality.