

ANALYSIS OF THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAM IN NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK OF PAKISTAN: REFLECTIONS OF GOVERNMENT COLLEGE TEACHERS OF SINDH, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study looks at how the Associate Degree Program is being implemented under Pakistan's National Qualification Framework (NQF). The study examined college teachers' reflections on the Associate Degree Program in Sindh province. The researcher has adopted descriptive strategy followed by quantitative approach to encompass the multifaceted nature of research problem. The population of research is diverse in nature and comprised of college faculty members from various disciplines like Science, Arts and Commerce. Quantitative data was collected from Teachers of the public sector colleges using simple random sampling technique through administering a close-ended questionnaire. The quantitative data was analyzed through SPSS.

The study sheds insight on the program's integration into higher education and its impact on stakeholders' perceptions in an effort to close the gap between policy directives and grassroots preparation. The study advances knowledge of the Associate Degree Program's place in Pakistan's changing higher education landscape by examining how it was received.

Keywords: Associate degree, National Qualification Framework (NQF), Reflections, College Teachers, Sindh

Statement of the problem

In recent years, Governments and Universities are increasingly becoming focused on the quality of education, whereas parents and students are more concerned about the maintenance or upgradation of education standards (Thomas, Chie, Abraham, Raj, & Beh, 2014). Transformation has become essential for the socio-economic growth of any country in the era of globalization. For a country, no choice left to become more flexible, productive and efficient in order to compete with global economy (Pang, 2013). The establishment of Higher Education Commission has produced a considerable impact on higher education in Pakistan (Parveen, Rashid, Iqbal, & Khan, 2011). The strategic mission of Higher Education Commission comprises of three core aims including access to quality higher education with equity, ICT blended academic programs and development of research culture. HEC vision 2025 plans to increase community involvement of Universities through a variety of support activities involving students, faculty and staff. Over 100 countries had developed National Qualification Framework according to the guidelines of Bologna declaration of 1999 by 2014 (National Qualification

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Framework, 2015). There is a series of actions under the Bologna declaration of 1999 for the broad objectives such as to eliminate hindrances for student mobility, increase interest in higher education and establish common structure of higher education which is based on two main cycles, graduate and undergraduate (Khan, Khan, & Iqbal, 2018).

The development and training of professionals is largely based on the higher education framework of a country (Nessipbayeva & Dalayeva, 2013). Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has put forward a revised version of National Qualification framework 2015 in the light of guiding principles of Bologna declaration 1999. According to Nessipbayeva (2013) *“The Bologna Process is an important instrument to enhance the internationalization of higher education, an essential driver for widening reforms, and also process of the legitimacy of current governance structures and mechanisms”*. This revised framework has incorporated a two-year Associate degree program, consisting of 4 semester and 68 credit hours. This phenomenon was initially launched by HEC in Pakistan vide reference letter No.9-1/AD/Curri/HEC/2011 dated October 25, 2011. The letter introduces the rationale and background of the concept of Associate Degree to the stakeholders to make up their minds for future planning. Chairman Higher Education Commission Pakistan has issued a notification on July 11, 2019 stating that *“The new nomenclature, Associate Degree, shall be adopted in all documents and announcements related to two-year post-higher secondary or equivalent programs and the previous nomenclature of B.A./B.Sc./B.Com. programs shall be discontinued.”* However in a consultative meeting with chairman HEC, the Vice Chancellors conveyed many concerns related to capacity building of college teachers, private students, distance education, curriculum, bridging courses and infrastructure while implementing this directive.

Present research is an attempt to address major concerns faced by the stakeholders regarding implementation of Associate Degree Program. The researcher aims to generate awareness regarding the new horizon of learning and conducting SWOT analysis of the said program in order to ensure smooth academic transition.

Higher Education Commission Pakistan has announced vide reference letter No. 9-2(16)/BA/BSc/Curri/HEC/2016/982 dated March 15, 2017 about phasing out graduation degree of BA, BSc B.Com after 2018 and after 2020 Two-year M.A, M.Sc., M.Com will also be phase out. Nevertheless, it has been observed that Universities and affiliated colleges are still not well aware of the new Qualification Framework 2015 and hence not prepared to face the upcoming challenges embedded with it. The guidelines are available in the Associate degree program booklet and National qualification framework 2015. These two documents have been broadly shared with all stakeholders in printed form as well as on the HEC website. It has been felt that not much preparation is done till now for launching the new program across the board, however, it needs to investigate whether there is a lack of willingness or some missing links between higher authorities and the people at the grassroots level delaying the implementation process. Several issues have been raised in the aforementioned meeting of Vice Chancellors with the chairman HEC regarding the integration of new nomenclature in the National qualification framework 2015 but no serious effort has been made so far from any platform to bring all stakeholders on one page with a consensus. To name some, the private students who prepare themselves for examination, acceptability of Associate degree in job market and distance learning are the matters needs consistent deliberations to design an effective mechanism to facilitate higher learning.

The rationale for conducting the present research is based on the growing concerns regarding the implementation of the Associate degree program. According to the directives from Higher Education Commission, there is a dire need to carry out surveys to identify the potential disciplines for launching Associate degree programs but no published research has been found exclusively on the integration of Associate Degree in national qualification framework. However, the research indicates few investigations focusing Associate degree in Education (ADE) which has been launched recently with collaboration of USAID.

Khan, Khan, & Iqbal (2018) explored that the stakeholders acknowledged that an inadequate teachers' preparation program in Pakistan has resulted the existing gaps regarding the

quality of education, particularly in the public educational system. Sadruddin (2015) has suggested for revision in the curriculum of ADE in order to develop the global competence and skills among the students.

In Public sector, Punjab University has launched Associate degree program in the fields of Fine Arts, Commerce, Information Technology and Mass Communication and all scheme of studies are available on website. Very few private universities have integrated Associate Degrees into their academic framework. This research aims to fill the gap in knowledge regarding scholarly research on Associate Degree programs in the National Qualifications Framework 2015.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of present study is to explore the reflections of college teachers of Sindh province about Associate Degree Program with respect to infrastructure requirements, teacher training, curriculum development, assessment policy, financial constraints and the stakeholder opinions.

Research questions

- i. What are the salient features of Associate degree programs in developed countries?
- ii. What is the awareness level of all stakeholders about Associate degree programs?

Hypothesis

- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about importance of Program.
- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about infra-structure needs.
- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Teacher Training.
- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about curriculum development.

- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Assessment policy and implementation.
- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about stake holders.
- There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Financial Constraints.

Literature Review

In recent years, pursuing high-quality education and raising educational standards have been governments', institutions', parents', and students' top priorities. (Harnisch and Lebioda, 2016). It is indisputable that in the modern era of globalization, countries must achieve flexibility, productivity, and efficiency in order to compete successfully in the global market. (Nikolova, Rodionov, and Afanasyeva, 2017). Neoliberal policies that have altered the function of higher education institutions, as well as influenced policy-making, are influencing reforms in higher education in Pakistan (Naz, 2016). It is important to note that in this globally interconnected world, policymaking has become a challenging process. As a result, developing nations are under pressure from wealthy nations and international organizations to serve the demands of globalization rather than their own domestic needs (Ali, 2005). The impact of globalization on the educational policies of developing countries has been substantial enough to compel them to integrate many of the international trends in educational policies, programs offered in the universities, and their alignment and equivalency with what has been offered globally. As a result of the worldwide trends and issues in higher education, Pakistan is one of the nations that has created a National Qualification Framework (NQF) (Raza and Ibrahim, 2017). The NQF strives to meet the requirements and expectations of many stakeholders, including students, employers, academics, and policymakers, as well as to align Pakistan's higher education system with worldwide standards and best practices (HEC, 2015). The development of a research culture, ICT-integrated academic programs, and equal access to high-quality higher education are all part of the HEC's strategic objective.

According to Riaz, Jabeen, Salman, Ansari, and Moazzam (2017), that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has been a key player in directing changes to the higher education system in the nation. Researchers, decision-makers, and educators all acknowledge and have examined its importance in bringing about important changes in higher education patterns.

The HEC has made substantial contributions in a number of important areas, with quality assurance and accreditation being one of them. According to academics like Ashraf and Huma (2013), the HEC created a thorough quality assurance structure that resulted in the certification of educational institutions and programs. This effort attempted to promote a culture of continual improvement by ensuring that educational institutions adhered to established standards.

In raising the research culture in higher education institutions, the HEC has been instrumental. Chatha and Omar (2015), claim that the HEC's implementation of funding opportunities, assistance programs, and research-oriented policies considerably enhanced the production of research. As a result, Pakistani universities are now more respected in the world arena of research.

With its innovative reforms for high-quality education at the tertiary level, associate degree programs were established by Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) as a part of its initiatives to improve and modernize the country's higher education system (Rasheed, Humayon, Awan, and Ahmed, 2016). These programs were created to give students the hands-on experience and specialized education required to meet the demands of the labor market and industry. Usually lasting two years, associate degree programs are meant to give students a strong foundation in a particular field of study. These programs frequently place a strong emphasis on practical skill development, hands-on learning, and curriculum alignment with business needs. They provide students with the chance to pick up specific skills that increase their employability, bridging the gap between regular academic programs and vocational training. An associate degree is frequently equivalent to the first two years of a four-year college or university degree in the United States and some parts of Canada. It is the most basic of the

post-secondary academic degrees available in these countries. Despite the fact that an associate degree is less financially lucrative in the long run than a bachelor's degree, new study suggests that community college graduates make more money directly out of school than graduates of four-year universities. Despite persistently high unemployment, there is a great demand for workers with "middle-skills" such as lab technicians, early childhood educators, computer engineers, draughtsman, radiation therapists, paralegals, and machinists, which frequently require only an associate's degree. (Associate degree, 2022)

Associate degree in other countries of world

Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework was updated in 2004 to include the term "associate degree." This designation was given to courses that were more academically focused than advanced diploma courses and were intended to connect to bachelor's degree courses. Graduates with this level of education will have a broad range of knowledge and abilities that will prepare them for paraprofessional/highly skilled work and/or further education (Main features of the Associate Degree, 2004).

Brazil

Undergraduate degrees are referred to as *graduação* ('graduate') in Brazil, while graduate degrees are referred to as *pós-graduação* ('postgraduate'). Free public schools are accessible from kindergarten through postgraduate degrees in Brazil, both as a right established in Article 6, caput of the Brazilian Constitution and as a duty of the state established in Article 208, Items I, IV, and V of the Brazilian Constitution.

In 2001, *tecnólogo* ('technologist') was added to the list of undergraduate degrees (*graduação*) in Brazil. A technologist's degree might take anywhere from two to three years of full-time study to finish. This degree requires less time to complete than a bachelor's or teaching degree (which can take anywhere from four to six years to complete), and it attempts to deliver highly specialised expertise (e.g., agribusiness technical degree, tourism management degree,

web development technical degree, etc.) (Marco legal e normativo / Catálogo Nacional de Cursos Superiores de Tecnología, 2020).

France

For decades, a diploma equivalent to an associate degree was regarded a sufficient degree for persons seeking employment as competent technicians. However, as the general public spends more time studying, they are becoming less appealing to students who want to stand out. The Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (DUT) was restructured in 2021 as an intermediate degree that is now part of a three-year programme known as BUT. Prior to the 2006 reform, universities granted a two-year credential called DEUG, which was designed to assist students in pursuing studies in fields other than those originally intended. The degree was considered as a 'stepping stone' toward earning a bachelor's degree. Apart from the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS), which is still relevant in many fields where long academic studies are not required and young professionals are in demand, associate degrees are gradually being phased out, despite the fact that their legitimacy remains in theory (but not always in practice) for those who have received one in the past (Calmand, 2014).

Hong Kong

Associate degrees were initially offered in Hong Kong in 2000, with the goal of expanding the number of students having post-secondary credentials. The certificate took two or three years when it was first offered, however it was reduced to a two-year course in 2012. In comparison to the more vocational Diploma/Higher/Advanced Diploma (Qualifications Frameworks Level 4), the associate degree is designed as a general academic education qualification that allows articulation onto the third year of a four-year (US-style) bachelor's degree or the second year of a three-year (British-style) bachelor's degree. According to a 2016 survey, most students believe associate degrees will help them get into bachelor's degree programs, but not (by themselves) in gaining a career; however, only 30% of associate degree graduates were accepted into bachelor's degree programs, prompting accusations that the degree is "a waste of time and money" and calls for the government to address this by increasing the

number of bachelor's degree spots available. A better source is required. Others have questioned this, claiming that education offers benefits beyond income, which is a temporary metric.

Netherlands

Between 2005 and 2011, four pilots in the Netherlands were conducted to examine the value of an associate degree. The associate degree was introduced into the Dutch higher education system in 2007 as part of the Higher Professional Education (HBO) stream, which is offered in Universities of applied sciences. HBO bachelor's degree courses include associate degree courses, and advising requirements for the two-year associate degree and the associated four-year bachelor's degree are the same. The associate degree allows students to progress to an HBO bachelor's degree in two years, although it does not align with bachelor's degrees in the research-oriented (WO) stream (Associate degree, 2012).

West Indies

Associate degrees with a two-year programme are available in the West Indies. Regional organizations like the Caribbean Examinations Council and the University of the West Indies, as well as higher education institutions in Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Kitts & Nevis, among others, offer them (CXC Associate Degrees, n.d.).

Methodology

The present study is of great value to policy makers and the expected beneficiaries of Associate degree program. The scope of the study is limited to Karachi, Pakistan, since it is a metropolitan city and caters to the need of education for a large population of country. The research questions demand descriptive strategy followed by quantitative approach to encompass the multifaceted nature of research problem.

The population of research is diverse in nature and comprises of college faculty. Quantitative data will be collected using simple random sampling technique through administering a close ended questionnaire. The research has conducted a survey to produce

quantitative data to reflect on the awareness level of stakeholder including students, faculty members and human resource consultants from business sector. A questionnaire was designed to collect the data consisting demographic features and close ended questions about associate degree program.

Significance/Expected Outcomes

There is no doubt that since its establishment Higher education Commission is striving hard to improve the quality of higher education and has set up the examples like Offices of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORICs) as well as Business Incubation Centres (BICs) in universities to promote and commercialize relevant research. Initiating Associate Degree program is also a continuation of the same with the intention to bring Pakistani system of education at par with global standards but it has been observed that due to some reason the deadlines for the inclusion of new titles in National qualification framework are not being followed in real spirit. The expected outcomes of proposed research are as follows;

- The policy maker will find the root cause for the delay in implementation of Associate degree programs so as to remove the concerns of stakeholders
- The University leadership and faculty members will find an opportunity to make deliberations for adopting new qualification framework
- The human resource departments will redefine their job titles and job descriptions.
- Student will be able to direct themselves to take better career decision.

Ethical considerations

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.865	.872	30

Findings

The findings generated from demographic information of the respondent is given below.

Table-1 Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	29	34.1	34.1	34.1
Valid Female	56	65.9	65.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table -2 College

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Science	35	41.2	41.2	41.2
Arts	15	17.6	17.6	58.8
Valid Commerce	16	18.8	18.8	77.6
Others	19	22.4	22.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table-3 Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than 10 years	17	20.0	20.0	20.0
10 years	23	27.1	27.1	47.1
More than 10 years	45	52.9	52.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table-4 Grade BPS

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 16	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
17	39	45.9	45.9	51.8
18	27	31.8	31.8	83.5
19	9	10.6	10.6	94.1
20	5	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table-5 Qualification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Masters	49	57.6	57.6
	M .Phil	28	32.9	90.6
	Ph. D	8	9.4	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0

Table-6 In which division of Sindh province, your college is located?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Karachi	63	74.1	74.1
	Other than Karachi	22	25.9	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about importance of Program.

Table-7 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.473 ^a	4	.346
Likelihood Ratio	4.899	4	.298
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.645	1	.200
N of Valid Cases	85		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .53.

Conclusion: The above table-7 shows that for N=85 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.346 which is greater than 0.05 alpha value, hence failed to reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is insignificant as there is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about importance of Program.

Hypothesis No. 2: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about infra-structure needs.

Table-8 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.225 ^a	4	.084
Likelihood Ratio	8.853	4	.065
Linear-by-Linear Association	.059	1	.809
N of Valid Cases	340		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .71.

Conclusion: The above table-8 shows that for N=340 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.084 which is greater than 0.05 alpha value, hence failed to reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is insignificant as there is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about infra-structure needs.

Hypothesis No. 3: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Teacher Training.

Table-9 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.177 ^a	4	.186
Likelihood Ratio	7.080	4	.132
Linear-by-Linear Association	.256	1	.613
N of Valid Cases	340		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.48.

Conclusion: The above table-9 shows that for N=340 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.186 which is greater than 0.05 alpha value, hence failed to reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is insignificant as there is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about teacher training.

Hypothesis No. 4: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about curriculum development.

Table-10 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.400 ^a	4	.022
Likelihood Ratio	9.458	4	.051
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.140	1	.286
N of Valid Cases	425		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.68.

Conclusion: The above table-10 shows that for N=425 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.022 which is less than 0.05 alpha value, hence reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is significant as there is a significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about curriculum development.

Hypothesis No. 5: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Assessment policy and implementation.

Table-11 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.057 ^a	4	.901
Likelihood Ratio	1.060	4	.901
Linear-by-Linear Association	.855	1	.355
N of Valid Cases	170		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.55.

Conclusion: The above table-11 shows that for N=170 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.901 which is greater than 0.05 alpha value, hence failed to reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is insignificant as there is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about assessment policy and implementation.

Hypothesis No. 6: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about stake holders.

Table-12 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.657 ^a	4	.013
Likelihood Ratio	10.639	4	.031
Linear-by-Linear Association	.364	1	.546
N of Valid Cases	680		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.16.

Conclusion: The above table-12 shows that for N=680 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.013 which is less than 0.05 alpha value, hence reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded that the test is significant as there is a significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about stake holders.

Hypothesis No. 7: There is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Financial Constraints.

Table-13 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.341 ^a	4	.673
Likelihood Ratio	2.298	4	.681
Linear-by-Linear Association	.547	1	.459
N of Valid Cases	340		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.51.

Conclusion: The above table-13 shows that for N=340 with df = 4 the p-value is 0.673 which is greater than 0.05 alpha value, hence failed to reject null hypothesis. So it is concluded the test is insignificant as that there is no significant relationship among level of awareness regarding Associate Degree Program and opinion about Financial Constraints.

Discussion

Higher education in developing countries are still grappling with the developmental phase, Pakistan is one of them (Bano and Tylor, 2015). The need of the populace to take into consideration higher studies so as to be part of the global economy is what is required to be supported by the country's Higher Education Commission (Albach, Reisberg, and Rumbley, 2019). Sensing the trends of the current trends in higher education, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) also endeavors to align its policies with it. The analysis of the current study examines the Associate Degree Program from the perspective of Pakistan's

National Qualification Framework. Examining the opinions and ideas of government college professors in the Pakistani province of Sindh, it provides a distinctive viewpoint. The study offers a deeper understanding of how the Associate Degree Program is viewed and experienced on the ground by drawing on the experiences and ideas of these educators.

The study's multifarious findings shed light on various aspects of the Associate Degree Program. These factors include not just the program's design and execution but also its overall influence on the Sindh region's educational system. By revealing how the program's existence affects educational possibilities and routes within the local context, the study goes beyond a simple surface evaluation. It is important to signify that associate degree programs improve a wider spectrum of students' access to higher education (Lee, 2017). For those who might not be immediately prepared or able to commit to a full bachelor's degree program, they offer a starting point. This is especially important for people who originate from underprivileged families or who have other obligations, such family or employment commitments.

In order to meet particular workforce demands, associate degree programs are frequently created in association with specialists from the sector (Clarke, 2018). This implies that graduates of these programs have the necessary information and skills to meet the needs of the labor market today, improving their employability. The Associate Degree Program's acknowledgment as a crucial step towards bringing Pakistan's educational system in line with international norms is one of the study's most notable conclusions. This acknowledgment from government college professors is significant because it shows that they are aware of the program's potential to improve educational standards. The Associate Degree Program is viewed as a means of bringing Pakistani education more closely in line with international standards by bridging the gap between higher secondary education and conventional four-year degree programs.

The study's results also show that the Associate Degree Program is viewed favorably by participants as a constructive influence that can increase Sindh-based students' access to higher education and their possibilities. Given that this program is acknowledged as a link between secondary education and higher education, it is possible that it will be a crucial stepping stone for

students who may not be interested in pursuing standard four-year degrees right away. This is crucial in areas where access to higher education may be constrained.

Despite the upbeat prognosis, the study isn't afraid to discuss some worries and challenges related to the successful implementation of the Associate Degree Program. The inadequate nature of the curriculum is a noteworthy complaint raised by the teachers at government colleges. These educators place a strong emphasis on the requirement that the curriculum be not just pertinent but also current and directly related to business requirements. This worry draws attention to a possible inconsistency between the program's stated goals and the actual curriculum being provided to pupils.

Through the analysis and interpretation of the observed data importance of Associate Degree Program seems to be insignificantly related to the awareness level of educators. Similar trend was observed while considering the factor of infra-structural needs regarding Associate Degree Program. Training of teachers for conducting the proposed program also found to be irrelevantly associated with their level of awareness. Irrelevant relationship was detected among the awareness with policy assessment and implementation of Associate Degree Program. While on the other hand focusing the development of curriculum appears to be accompanied with the cognizance of educationalist. Alike, the curriculum development the aspect of financial constraint towards the Associate Degree Program also recognize to be in relation with the awareness of the considered perspectives of educators.

Conclusion

The study's findings offer important information that can be used to improve and streamline the Associate Degree Program in Sindh, Pakistan. The program can successfully support the region's educational and economic growth by addressing the issues and putting the recommended solutions into practice.

Recommendations

Some recommendations can be made in light of the study's findings in order to deal with the difficulties and improve the efficiency of the Associate Degree Program.

Curriculum Alignment: To make sure that the curriculum is in accordance with the demands of the job market, authorities in charge of its design should consult with professionals in the field. To stay current with shifting industry trends, frequent updates and revisions are necessary.

Capacity Building: Continual professional development should be funded for teachers working on the Associate Degree Program. This includes instruction in cutting-edge teaching strategies, assessment methods, and curriculum integration of practical skills.

Quality Assurance: Implement a strong quality assurance system to keep an eye on how the program is being delivered. Student exams, feedback loops, and routine reviews can all aid in upholding the program's standards.

Industry Partnerships: Encourage collaborations between businesses and educational institutions to give students access to internships, real-world experience, and hands-on learning opportunities. This partnership can increase students' employability and guarantee the program's relevance.

Student Counseling: Establish comprehensive counseling services for students pursuing an Associate's degree so they can choose their academic and career paths with knowledge and clarity. They may be able to maximize the program's advantages as a result.

Practical Implications

The following changes might be made to enhance the Associate Degree Program in Pakistan's National Qualification Framework based on the study's findings and the advice given:

- To make sure that the Associate Degree Program stays current and in line with industry requirements, the government and educational institutions should prioritize regular curriculum changes.
- Authorities should create a well-organized framework for teacher preparation that includes both subject knowledge and contemporary pedagogical techniques.
- Promoting cooperation between academic institutions and businesses would help students get internships and practical experience.
- To track and evaluate the program's execution and results, a dedicated quality assurance body should be established.
- To improve students' overall success and experience, the program's framework should incorporate student support services including counseling and career coaching.

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