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## Redefining Quality Education: A Missing Entrepreneurship Perspective!

### Abstract

*This paper establishes a theoretical lens through which funding bodies can see the effectiveness of an entrepreneurial education program, from the perspective of institutional accountability. In this regard, quality notions; exception, fitness for purpose, perfection, transformation, and value for money are put to the investigation during semi-structured interviews. The interviewed data were analyzed qualitatively by employing 'discourse analysis'. The findings of the research suggest that the notion of quality in the entrepreneurship program is a blend of 'value for money' and 'transformation'.*

**Key Words:** Entrepreneurship, Quality Education, Value for Money, Transformation, Fitness for Purpose

### Introduction

The notion of quality is generally considered an issue of utmost importance in higher education from the viewpoint of role conflicting theory. Role conflicting theory covers the essence of role conflict and role ambiguity both (Kahn, et al., 1964). The role conflict and role ambiguity are defined as “a situation where there is a lack of expectations associated with a role” and “a situation where there is a lack of clarity about the expectation of the role” respectively (Watty, 2003). If students' expectations from an entrepreneurial education program are different from an academic perspective, then this could result in students' de-motivation, lack of interest, low degree of involvement, in short underperformance of the whole education program. Therefore, it is tremendously important to improve the quality of education (Yousapronpaiboon, 2014). But what is quality and how it should be operationally defined in entrepreneurship education, is a phenomenon yet in the literature to be addressed. To define the quality notion of entrepreneurial education in advance is important so that its quality attributes could be used in the input process during program development to avoid cumbersome course content and activities during academic program development. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand the quality notion of entrepreneurship education; the research problem to address in this paper is:

### Redefining the Notion of Quality Education: A Missing Entrepreneurship Perspective!

The organization of the study is as follows; the next heading, 'literature review', aims to discuss the background literature in detail. Then, after reviewing the existing literature around quality a 'conceptual framework' is designed to investigate the research phenomenon. After describing the research 'methodology' then next heading 'findings' aims to illustrate the qualitative data along with its analysis. In the end, the 'discussion' and 'conclusion' sections both aims to comprehend the research to a conclusive point.

### Literature Review

In human capital theory, Schultz (1961) established 'human capital' is the key factor that adds towards

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economic development ([Kown, 2009](#)). The theory word of 'human capital' assumes the notion as an 'investment in knowledge, skills, and attitude' that makes an individual enhance his/her productivity ([Rosen, 2004](#)).

In literature, Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) is widely recognized as a major source for human capital development ([Rastogi, 2002](#)). The foundation of human capital theory emerges from classical economics, where it predicts that the prosperity and the functioning of an economy depend heavily on the development of its human capital ([Becker, 1975](#)). That is why most of the nations around the globe have adopted human capital theory for their economic development. In the premise of human capital theory, the HEI's around the globe broadly define a quality notion in education as 'Fitness for Purpose'; the 'purpose' to fit graduates/individuals for employability. [Hillage and Pollard \(1998\)](#) refer to employability as an individual's capability to gain "initial employment, maintain employment, and obtain new employment".

HEI's understood and operationally implemented this quality notion as an 'employment rate' (HEFCE, 2001). This process is accelerated by forming Career Development Centers (CDC's) at most of the HEIs' to find suitable jobs for their graduates. However, some genuine objections are using the employment rate as a quality standard, that is, it does not consider the type of jobs individuals get ([Knight & Yorke, 2003](#)). Due to the stated criticism, the HEIs quality criteria are in doubt and are subject to further improvisation.

A review within the existing literature in general (e.g. [Choi, et al., 2018](#); [Khan, et al., 2019](#); [Khan & Bae, 2017](#); [Khan, et al., 2019](#)), but particularly related to quality (e.g. [Watty, 2005](#); [Harvey & Green, 1993](#); [Fry, 1995](#); [Baird, 1988](#); [Adcock, 2005](#); [Reid & Sanders, 2005](#)), uncovers two schools-of-thought; one relates to stakeholders and the other to context. The first thought links quality to specific interpretations of stakeholders: considers quality using perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of the key stakeholders such as students, academics, and practitioners ([Watty, 2005](#); [Harvey & Green 1993](#)). The second way of thinking confers quality to a context, consequently quality becomes meaningful, for example, references to program evaluation criteria, student intake, learning approaches, etc. ([Fry, 1995](#); [Baird, 1988](#)). Before defining quality, it is important to understand what it means? Like any other concept, quality is a concept as well, which has been defined by numerous authors concerning linguistic disciplines in different socio-cultural and organizational contexts. Different theories have different ways of defining 'conceptualizing' but a significant approach towards it has been provided by Toole, O.R (2005/11/08)

*"A concept is not understood by its potential to exist or not, but rather by what it makes inevitable, what it determines. The choices are components in the concept, but the scope of those choices is already determined as the intension of the concept"*

Hence, all of the proposed theories should align in consideration to meet the desired objective. If one theory is different from others but achieves the desired objective and is compatible in one's context for understanding than it is valid and must be acceptable, for example, measuring distance either in miles (UK) or kilometers (USA), measuring weight either in pounds (UK) or Kilograms (USA), etc. We must also recognize the fact that the defined concepts (such as miles & kilometers) are rest upon prior implicit linguistic subjects in different cognitive and cultural contexts ([Adcock, 2005](#)). Thus, there is no such issue of right and wrong it is the question of achievability and wide acceptability of desired objectives in contextual dynamics.

Similarly, a review of the literature around quality notion reveals interesting definitions concerning various disciplinary contexts e.g. conformance to specification, support services, psychological criteria, exception, transformation, value for the price paid, six-sigma, fitness for use, and ISO-standards, etc ([Reid & Sanders, 2005](#)). But the effectiveness and totality of one quality notion and its attributes is its ability to satisfy stated and implied need ([Straker, 2016](#)). The number of researchers in this regard try to probe the quality notion and the way of defining it in higher education. In this regard, [Harvey and Green \(1993\)](#) categorized the key notions of quality along with their attributes in five categories, below see t.

**Table 1.** Representing Key Quality Notions Along with Their Attributes by Harvey and Green (1993)

Quality of Education?				
Exception	Perfection	Fitness for purpose	Value for money	Transformation
> Distinctive	> Flawless	> Provider specified	> Efficiency and	> Empowering/enh
> Excellence	consistency	mission	effectiveness	ancing
> High level of	> Zero defects	> Fit for	> Output against	> Democratisation
academic	> Right at the	employability	input	> Cognitive
standards	first time			transcendence

A brief review of the literature around these quality notions would help us to depict their true spirits and the way each is perceived:

**Exception**

Means distinctive, embodied in excellence; passing a minimum set of standards. This is one of the traditional concepts that equates the notion of quality to excellence ([Harvey & Knight, 1996](#)). For-example a ‘Rolls Royce’ car is commonly recognized as a ‘quality’ vehicle because of using a high standard of components, sophisticated engineering and outclass finishing. From the students’ perspective, this quality notion demands to achieve a high level of academic standards and distinctive achievements and awards during their study life at HEI’s.

**Perfection**

Means zero defects, getting things right for the first time. It is a concept similar to 6-Sigma approach that demands flawless consistency. [Lomas \(2002\)](#) surveyed senior managers in the United Kingdom HEI’s and not recommended perfection to be used as quality criteria in academics. He argues that a perfection is an approach that is used by most of the Japanese car manufacturers. Using this approach in the education setting is practically impossible to achieve even if one institute has the students of the same caliber. [Watty \(2005\)](#) acknowledged this fact and thus excluded the quality notion of ‘perfection’ from her research.

**Fitness for Purpose**

Relates quality to a purpose or provider specified mission. From the academic perspective, most of the universities around the globe are public-funded universities therefore following human capital theory governments require universities to fit graduates/individuals for employability purposes. HEI’s opted for this quality notion and implemented it as an ‘employment rate’ that is, graduates, being employed within six months after graduation.

**Value for Money**

In this concept the focus is on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs thus the notion of accountability is central to this approach ([Lomas, 2002](#)). It is one of the most extensive used quality concepts in governments, that is if the same outcome is achieved at a lower cost then it has a quality product/service ([Rowley, 1996](#)). Using this notion from the students’ perspective could be problematic. How an individual sees the after benefits of an academic program is a matter of one’s subjectivity and context. For-example a job of \$40,000 could be a good value for money of \$15,000 academic program but another, it’s just a peanut.

**Transformation**

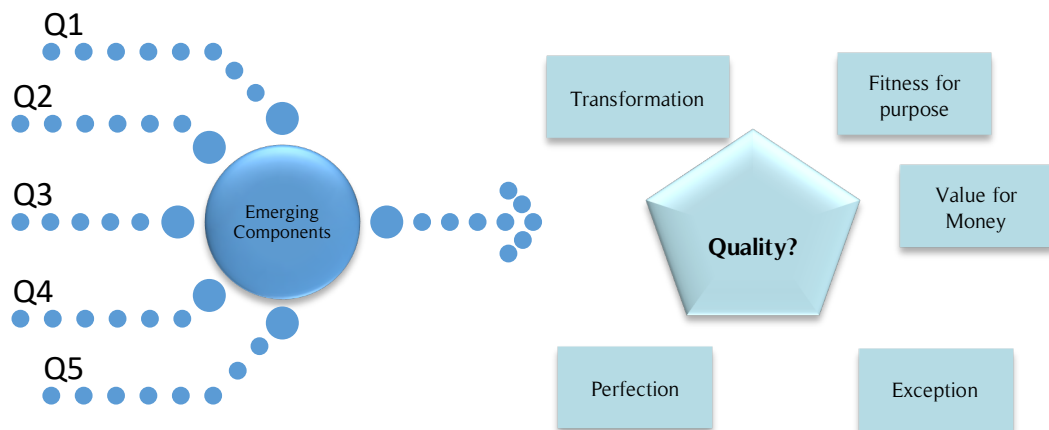
This means enhancing and empowering; democratization of the process, not just outcomes ([Watty, 2005](#)). Transformation involves a change in status-quo from one form to another ([Harvey & Knight,](#)

1996). The transformation involves cognitive transcendence from a marketing perspective, which means doing something to the customer rather than something for the customer' (Harvey & Green, 1993). From the academic perspective, it means a qualitative change, that is, education is about doing something to the learner as opposed to something for the learner. From the academic perspective, this concept demands that students should be transformed into an empowered individual who can understand, create and critic rather than taking things for granted.

### Conceptual Framework

A critical review of the above-mentioned literature reveals that different stakeholders have defined quality differently considering their areas of interest. For-example employers defined institutional quality as 'fitness for purpose' that is fitting graduates for 'employability'. This is because employers have zero or low interests in institutional issues such as university budget, academic profiling and processes. In contrast administrators from the educational institutes defined quality as 'value for money' assuring the aspect of 'accountability' (see Lomas, 2002). Similarly, academics defined education quality as 'transformation' assuring the quality of the 'delivery process'. Similarly, car manufacturers assured 'quality standards by defining it as 'perfection'.

This differentiation in quality perspective is because different parties' have different aspects to assure. Thus, while defining the notion of quality in educational institutes key stakeholders must be needed to have a voice to fit the notion of educational quality covering their areas of interests and context. Based upon the above mentioned five key quality notions along with their attributes (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) are set to provide the conceptual background as the focal theory to investigate the notion of quality from the viewpoint of entrepreneurship education. In this regard **Error! Reference source not found.** represents the conceptual framework representing questions that are specifically designed in a way to explore the quality notions of Harvey and Green's (1993) framework.



**Figure 1.** Representing the Conceptual Framework for Evaluation Purpose

The purpose here is to understand the quality notion of entrepreneurship education: -

### RO: Redefining the notion of quality education: a missing entrepreneurship perspective!

To evaluate the above-mentioned research objective, the following five research questions are asked from the interviewed participants: -

- Q1: What objective/s an academic institute should have to achieve through offering an entrepreneurship program?
- Q2: What changes you would like to see in your students after the completion of an entrepreneurship program?
- Q3: At institutional level what criteria should be used to measure the effectiveness of an entrepreneurship program?
- Q4: What are the responsibilities of an institute towards its students in terms of entrepreneurship program offerings?
- Q5: What activities or facilities an institute should offer in its entrepreneurship program?

## **Methodology**

To get a deep understanding this research has collected the data from one of the major stakeholder groups, that is, academics having professional experience involved in managing business incubation centers across Pakistan, India, and the USA, using semi-structured ethnographic interviews. Ethnographic interviewing is a qualitative research approach that combines immersive observation with directed one-on-one interviews. The interviews in this research are called ethnographic because the first author has spent sufficient time with the participants to collect interviews in experiential situations. All the interviews were conducted on an educational trip sponsored by the US Department of States (International Visitors Leadership Program-Managing business incubation for potential growth). In total, 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each interview session lasts for 30 min to 1 hour. During each interview probing technique' is used that allowed the participants to elaborate their responses in more detail. The selection of participants was based on a non-probability sampling technique; chosen experts and experienced participants by the US Department of State to provide deep insight. Most of the participants were between the age of 25-40 years and have the experience of managing business incubation centers and venture capitalists' funds.

For data analysis, employed 'discourse analysis' to make sense of the investigated phenomenon. From the interviewed responses key components were identified and most liked interpretation of quality notion is defined in the context of entrepreneurship education.

## **Findings**

This section aims to identify findings related to participants' remarks.

When it is asked from the interviewed participants to describe the possible objectives of initiating an entrepreneurship education program then most of the participants emphasized business start-ups, the creation of employability or having Intellectual property rights. In this regard, some of the comments made by the participants were explicitly noticeable, that is: -

*"Well, a new start-up creates jobs and more jobs mean more wealth distribution among more people. [3]" [Participant-2]*

*"One can look at the number of start-ups that are initiated after the completion of the entrepreneurship degree program [14]. ... Business ideas that are in incubation can also be considered [16]... and the conversion rate of business ideas from incubation to start-up can be considered to measure the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship program [18]... institutes must have seminars, conferences, symposiums, and exhibitions to support such activities. [21]" [Participant-1]*

The interviewed Participant-2 stated the objective of having an entrepreneurship education program to employability as job creation and emphasized it from the theoretical perspective of wealth distribution in human capital theory. A similar view is also proclaimed by Participant-1, who emphasized for creation of more business start-ups, having more graduation programs, and similar activities such as seminars, conferences and business exhibitions, etc. However, the interviewed participant-3 extended the objective of having an entrepreneurship education program beyond the creation of employability, as he stated: -

*“At the institutional level, the one who helped in establishing more start-ups registered more patents, copyrights, industrial designs, created more jobs through their business incubation facilities and such kind of things [11] ...means to the creation of jobs could be the criteria. For example, someone registered a patent or copyright, is not creating a job but creating a means for others to create a job. [16]” [Participant-3]*

He stated the objective should be to have technological innovation or breakthrough invention awarding intellectual property rights which could facilitate others in the creation of businesses or products, as he explained: -

*Institutions need to help them register their innovations in intellectual property offices. This is the job of a good institution to facilitate their students in the process[24]”. [Participant-3]*

Therefore, considering the above-mentioned debate, the first quality component derived from the views of participants' responses is captioned as 'creating means to employability'. Operationally this component is characterized as: -

### **Creating means to Employability**

Characterized as awarded intellectual property rights, jobs created by university-led start-ups, and several graduated start-ups This derived component holds an aspect of utmost importance from the institutional accountability perspective, discussed later in the discussion section.

When it is inquired from the interviewed participants to describe the institutional responsibilities and changes which they like to see in their entrepreneurship students then the participants had responses indicating a list of knowledge skills and attitudes. In that regard, the following comments are noticeable: -*“I believe, along with the theoretical knowledge, applied skills are the key for students to become entrepreneurs [43]. The student should have the ability to analyze market trends. A student shall have a basic understanding of business operations. A good entrepreneur should have good communication skills, should be confident, patience and persistent [44]”. [Participant-1]*

*“Students should have the ability to analyze market trends. A student shall have a basic understanding of the business before jumping into real action... have an understanding that a hobby or a science project is not always a business opportunity unless it has some market acceptability. [36]” [Participant-3]*

*“I am talking about complete feasibility along with operational, production, financial, HR and marketing plan. Know partnering techniques and fail-fast strategy [45]. [Participant-4]*

*“Creativity, out of the box thinking is the key essence of entrepreneurship that must be encouraged and motivation” [36]. [Participant-5]*

*“The objective shall be to seed entrepreneurial germs in the students so that they can establish or at least try to establish a business [12]”. [Participant-6]*

Most of the participants have emphasized having several market-driven competencies that include creativity, patience, confidence, fail-fast strategy, interpersonal skills, applied skills, negotiation, partnering techniques, marketing, finance, operations, production, and persistence. By stating entrepreneurial germs, Participant-6 means motivation along with a set of market-driven competencies that are essential to establish businesses. When it was probed to inquire about who will decide which competence is required by the graduate then Participant 2 explained: -

*“How come a business graduate on its own develop UBER or let's say Microsoft...universities are required to offer more electives in their programs so that potential entrepreneurs should have more choice to get knowledge related to their start-ups” [51]... I believe they [students] are too naïve to see the real world out there. We have to groom them and impart basic knowledge. This is our responsibility for providing them with fundamental knowledge of business and tools[52]”. [Participant-2]*

Here, operationally competences seem to be characterized as a mix of academic and students' desired knowledge, skills and attitude. The mix of academic and students' desired competencies is for a reason that may be at the initial stages of an entrepreneurial career, students are too naïve to decide which type of knowledge they need. In that sense, students should be guided initially by academics to

establish their understanding regarding business knowledge and tools. Further, participants emphasized offering several electives in numerous disciplines to students. This is for a student to have the knowledge and skills of their own choice which they consider is more relevant to their start-up needs.

Therefore, considering the above-mentioned debate, the second quality component derived from the views of participants' responses is captioned as 'required competences'. Operationally this component is characterized as: -

### **Required Competences**

Characterized as a mix of academics' and students' desired knowledge, skills and attitude. Such as creativity, patience, confidence, persistence, fail-fast, interpersonal skills, applied skills, negotiation, partnering, marketing, finance, operations, and production.

When it is inquired from the interviewed participants to describe what responsibilities or facilities an institute should provide to their students then the participants had a mix of responses. In this regard the following two responses are explicitly noticeable: -

*"Contributing to the eco-system, a center [entrepreneurship-center] need to have incubation and accelerator program where they [graduates] must have to pitch their business ideas to venture capitalists for funding purpose. [92]" [Participant-3]*

When it is asked from the participant to differentiate between an incubation and accelerator program a participant commented: -

*"The incubation program is a co-working space where alike minded people can work on idea generation, refinement and development before they launch their start-up. But in an accelerator program already launched, start-ups are enrolled to give these business exposures to venture capitalists. Then they can raise seed funding for the first time or the second and third round of it [98]" [Participant-3]*

*"Efforts shall be made to bridge the gap as much as possible through different strategies, such as field trips, market placements, etc [20]. The entrepreneurship liaison office in the industry can help in minimizing the gap and make curriculum market-driven [61]. This effort of networking is essential to bringing mentors and venture capitalists to entrepreneurship centers. Without it, commercialization will always be an issue [62]. [Participant-4]*

*"Experimentation is key for entrepreneurs. How could one expect to develop an error-free, product for the very first time? Students need to have a makers' space[99]" [Participant-5]*

Participant 3 and Participant 4 emphasized having an entrepreneurial environment with opportunities that drive entrepreneurs continuously toward achieving business sustainability and commercialization. In that regard, they mentioned a list of activities and facilities that an institute should conduct or provide to their students, which include, working space, work placement opportunities for experience purpose, networking, mentorship, and access to venture capitalists for seed funding. Further Participant 5 emphasized having a 'maker's space' for students to do experiments to create market sustainable products. This aspect of achieving sustainability is considered extremely important to protect the entrepreneurial eco-system from academic snobbery rather than practicality. In this regard one of the participants stated: -

*"In my opinion, the objective should be to create real start-ups that could be seen even after 5 years of their graduation [33]... what I've observed so far, entrepreneurial education institutes and their incubation centers are a kind hatchery for producing graduate start-ups. No-one cares what happened to them afterward. [37]" [Participant 4]*

Implicitly, Participant 4 above, exclaimed and related institutional necessary support/activities(such as makers' space, field trips, working space, seed funding rounds) to create a sustainable business venture. Thus, considering the above-mentioned debate, the third quality component derived from the views of participants' responses is captioned as 'establishing sustainable ventures'.

## **Establishing Sustainable Business Ventures**

Operationally means providing necessary support to entrepreneurs to make their product/service and commercialize them successfully. Such support includes working space, work placement opportunities, networking, mentorship, and access to venture capitalists for seed funding.

## **Discussion**

In response to our interviewed questions, participants identified three major components (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) that are considered important from the entrepreneurial education point of view, that are; 'creating means to employability', 'required competences' and 'establishing sustainable business ventures'.

The operational meanings of each identified component are summarised as follows: -

### **Creating Means to Employability**

Characterized as awarded intellectual property rights, jobs created by university-led start-ups, and several graduated start-ups.

### **Required Competences**

Characterized as a mix of academics' and students' desired knowledge, skills and attitude. Such as creativity, patience, confidence, persistence, fail-fast strategy, interpersonal skills, applied skills, negotiation, partnering, marketing, finance, operations, and production.

## **Establishing Sustainable Business Ventures**

Operationally means providing necessary support to entrepreneurs to make their product/service and commercialize them successfully. Such support includes working space, work placement opportunities, networking, mentorship, and access to venture capitalists for seed funding.

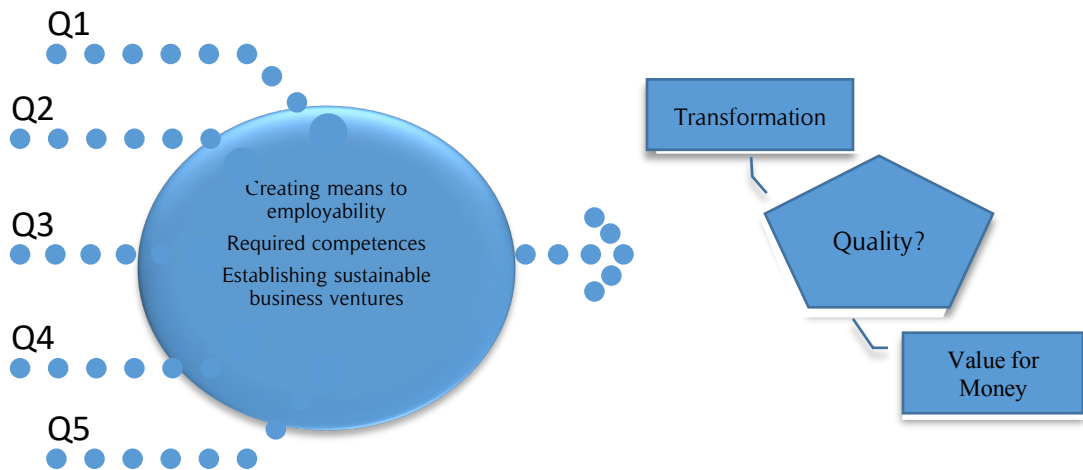
In consideration to emerging three components in the previous section, here the objective of entrepreneurship education is summarised in one statement i.e. The objective is to create means to employability through empowering graduates with required competencies to establish sustainable business ventures

## **Conclusion**

To date, in university education the quality notion of fitness for purpose prevails, where the quality of a university education program is seen from the quality lens of employability only. All the HEI's understood this quality notion as an 'employment rate', that is, graduates being employed after education. In order, to implement and accelerate this process Career Development Centres (CDC's) are formed at every university to find suitable jobs for their graduates. However, in entrepreneurship achieving just the employability is certainly not the obvious case. With reference to Harvey and Green (1993) quality framework (see Table 1), the started entrepreneurship objective above (that emerged from participants remarks) holds the quality characteristics of 'value for money' and 'transformation' rather than the previously dominated quality notion of fitness for purpose in university education, which was just employability. The emerging definition initially dominates the quality notion of 'value for money' from the institutional accountability point of view, which establishes, how one should see the effectiveness of an entrepreneurial education program, that is through intellectual property rights, several jobs created by university-led sustainable start-ups, and seed funding raised. But simultaneously the quality notion of 'transformation' also prevails, that is, how an institute empowers its graduates to acquire the required skills, attitude, and knowledge of their own choice which is considered critical for their success. In that regard, competencies such as creativity, patience, confidence, persistence, interpersonal skills, applied skills, negotiation, partnering, marketing, finance, operations, and production are considered important. Thus, in contrast to previously researched UK universities, where



quality is found as fitness for the purpose only (HEFCE, 2001), here, the notion of quality is not mutually exclusive, it's a blend of value for money and transformation.



**Figure 2.** Representing results Derived out of Conceptual Framework

From the policy implication point of view, for bodies, especially at the government level (such as quality assurance agencies; HEC), this research establishes an atheoretical lens through which they can evaluate the quality of an entrepreneurial institute. This aspect is of utmost importance for funding purpose especially for those universities who claim to have their mission statement following the entrepreneurial spirit.

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