

Combating Challenges: The Role of Vice Chancellor in the Management and Development of Pakistani Public Sector Universities

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Abstract



Education plays a pivotal role in individual, societal and global development and is a fundamental human right. According to Nelson Mandela "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." By investing in education, individuals and societies can unlock their full potential, leading to a more prosperous, equitable, and peaceful world. The role of higher education is much more crucial which plays a vital role in knowledge creation and dissemination to develop individuals, institutions, societies and nations and encompasses several key areas like human capital development, research and innovation, socio-economic impact, cultural and intellectual enrichment, policy and leadership, community development and global competitiveness. Promoting higher education greatly depends on the role and functions of an outstanding academic leadership. Being in charge of academic institutions and playing a central role in the advancement of individuals, organizations, and ultimately society makes the Vice Chancellor (VC) extremely important in the academic leadership. A VC position demands an outstanding person with amazing skills. The role of VC in Pakistani universities is pivotal in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by the higher education sector. This paper explores the critical functions of VCs in managing and developing universities amidst multifaceted challenges. Through a comprehensive analysis of administrative practices, strategic decision-making, and leadership dynamics, this research identifies key challenges including funding constraints, infrastructural deficiencies, and academic quality assurance. It examines how VCs navigate these issues by implementing innovative policies, fostering academic excellence, and enhancing institutional resilience. The study employs a qualitative analysis of institutional performance metrics. The findings reveal that effective leadership, strategic vision, and stakeholder engagement are essential for overcoming obstacles and driving institutional growth. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy reforms and leadership practices to bolster the efficacy of VCs in shaping the future of Pakistani universities.

Keywords: Vice Chancellor, Academic Leadership, Pakistani Universities, Higher Education, Higher Education Commission, Quality Education.

Introduction

Education plays an important role in individual, societal and global development and is a fundamental human right. Education is one of the most powerful weapons which can change the world. The knowledge has changed the world economy by replacing the physical capital with knowledge as a source of wealth creation. Higher education is the main source of knowledge creation and dissemination (Tauqir, Hussain & Azhar: 2014). By investing in education, individuals and societies can unlock their full potential and can lead to a more prosperous, equitable, and peaceful world. The role of higher education is much more important in this regard. Higher education plays a vital role in knowledge creation and dissemination to develop individuals, institutions, societies and nations and encompasses several key areas like human capital development, research and innovation, socio-economic impact, cultural and intellectual enrichment, policy and leadership, community development and global competitiveness. Higher education is closely related to one's career advancement and is impacted by new global trends since it is essential to the survival of society,

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socioeconomic advancement, political stability, and peace (WDHE, 1998). Higher education also contributes to the "development of enlightened leaders, expansion of choices, enabling social mobility and helping the people to fulfill their potential and address local problems with appropriate solution," all of which will result in a better standard of living and faster economic growth (Ali & Kassim: 2002). Higher education is vital for economic development, political stability and overall society's survival. Society can only flourish if it makes financial and administrative effort for higher education (Hooaen et al., 2009).

Promoting higher education greatly depends on the role and functions of an outstanding academic leadership. Administrative leadership needs three bases to be securely and adequately built-personal, political and institutional. As far personal base is concerned, a leader should be of good health, energy and physical stamina. He/she should have a sense of purpose and mission and self-confidence, a sense of friendliness and concern for other. He/she should have keen intelligence, profound knowledge of detail, quickness to comprehend the essential elements of necessary importance, integrity, a sense of moral duty and fairness, persuasiveness and the capacity to judge the strong and weak sides of a person and problem. Politically, a leader should have responsiveness to the officers and to the administrative machinery over which he/she presides. He/she should be responsive to external political direction and control and should reflect the political attitude and traditions of a country. Institutionally, a leader must fulfill the conditions necessary for the wellbeing of the institution (Shaikh, 1992: 333-5).

Being in charge of academic institutions and playing a central role in the advancement of individuals, organizations, and societies, the role of VC is extremely important in the academic leadership. The VC influences educators, administrators, and students in the first place, which can lead to the development of superior institutions, faultless infrastructure, and secure governance (Chaudhary, 2013). VC is a key man of academic leadership. He/she is the person who manages academic institutions and is at the core of organizational, individual and ultimately society's development. VCs in Pakistani universities are faced with multifaceted challenges at financial, administrative, academic and technological fronts. The political climate in Pakistan further complicates matters for leaders in higher education. In our local context, a leader must not only inspire, encourage, and groom his/her subordinates but also adapt to political pressure and turmoil that reduces expertise and competency and causes uncertainty. As the face of higher education changes as a result of globalization, VCs are acting as educational entrepreneurs, serving as a prime minister or premier in the university community. Boyett (1996) refers to this position as a "entrepreneurial vice chancellor." VC has to be more than an administrator and must maintain communication with the internal and external environments. "VCs are expected to combine academic credibility with all other competences expected of a leader of any large commercial businesses that have political significance" (Breakwell & Tytherleigh, 2008).

An effective VC is essential to the development and prosperity of a university. Ogunode & Ayeni (2023) and Heffernan, Eacott, & Bosetti (2021) are of the opinion that an effective and efficient VC is of immense importance to a university in the following areas.

- i. He/she can provide strategic direction, vision and leadership, setting priorities and goal aligning with the institution's values and mission.
- ii. He/she can drive academic excellence by providing quality education, fostering and advancing research, supporting faculty development, and setting high standards in teaching and learning.
- iii. He/she can effectively manage institution's resources, administration, budgeting, and facilities falling under his/her purview, ensuring efficient and sustainable operations.
- iv. Develops and maintains strong relationships with his/her faculty, students, alumni, and related institutions, enhancing collaboration and institution's reputation.
- v. He/she can navigate challenges and adapt to changes in the educational setting, taking innovative practices to keep the institution up to date and forward-thinking.
- vi. Supervises governance structures and policy development, ensuring adherence to regulations and ethical standards while promoting accountability and transparency.

Thus in essence, an efficient and strong VC can considerably impact the overall reputation, quality and effectiveness of a university. The position of VC requires an individual with exceptional management and administrative qualities. Thus the sensitivity of the VC position demands that great attention should be given to his/her selection criteria and procedure.

The role of the VC in Pakistani universities is crucial to the governance and advancement of higher education in the country. In Pakistani universities a VC faces a number of problems requiring prompt and in time decision and solution. This research paper explores the multifaceted responsibilities of VCs, including their leadership in academic affairs, administrative management, and strategic planning. It also explores the critical functions of VCs in managing and developing universities amidst multifaceted challenges. It examines how VCs influence the direction and quality of education, research, and community engagement within their institutions. Through a comprehensive analysis of administrative practices, strategic decision-making, and leadership dynamics, this research identifies key challenges including financial, administrative, academic, infrastructural, quality assurance, managerial, technological etc. It examines how VCs navigate these issues by adopting innovative policies, promoting academic excellence, and enhancing institutional resilience. It also discusses how difficult it can be to uphold institutional autonomy while navigating the demands of government regulations and social norms. The study emphasizes that in order to overcome these obstacles an efficient, effective, capable and forward looking VC is essential in influencing Pakistani higher education's future. VC should have strong leadership, efficient management techniques, and creative problem-solving skill. Furthermore, effective leadership, strategic vision, and stakeholder engagement are essential for overcoming obstacles and driving institutional growth. By analyzing these roles and challenges, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the governance landscape within Pakistani higher education institutions and offer strategies to enhance the effectiveness of VCs in promoting institutional excellence. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy reforms and leadership practices to bolster the efficacy of VCs in shaping the future of Pakistani universities.

Methodology

In order to examine the functions, responsibilities and challenges faced by VC in Pakistani universities, this study uses a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative nature. To answer the study questions, primary and secondary data were used. Semi-structured and in-depth interviewing technique has been employed. A pilot test was conducted after the interview schedule was constructed. In-depth interviews were carried out with a selected group of VCs, policymakers, and education experts. The interviews explored personal experiences, viewpoints, and strategies employed by VCs in overcoming challenges. The interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to over two hours, with a 45-minute average. In order to obtain results, a thematic analysis was conducted. The qualitative data offers a thorough grasp of the function and difficulties faced by VCs in Pakistani universities, allowing for the development of informed recommendations aimed at improving university governance and leadership in the country. In this way, each interview question was transcribed into digestible chunks and categorized using the terms used by the participants. The primary goal of the study is to identify challenges to the VCs of Pakistani universities and suggest possible ways out.

Results and Discussion

Public sector universities in Pakistan face a lot of problems. In the recent past, budgetary issues have retarded the efficiency in respect of providing quality education to the future leaders of the nation. Altbach, Berdahl & Gumport (2023) have discussed in detail the challenges of university leadership and have well said “there are different models for higher education throughout the world.” Majority of the public sector universities are unable to pay regular salaries to the academic and administrative staff. Higher education's budget is getting smaller every year, which is having a negative impact on both the growth of higher education and the efficiency of universities. Furthermore, inadequate material resources, financing, excessive enrolment are the main factors declining the quality of higher education.

The liberalization, internationalization, and globalization of higher education have brought forth new difficulties. Three primary issues pertain to university governance: the first is structural, the second is intellectual, and the third is organizational. At structural level, the universities show a trend of expansion in disciplines. Universities remain centralized with a distorted decision-making. Decision making should be decentralized (Usman, 2014). Prof. Dr. Jehanzeb Khan Khalil, Ex-Vice Chancellor, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, was of the opinion that “Over centralization stifles initiative, results in a great deal of wasted potential, skews the allocation of resources, and negatively affects the caliber of human resources at the top” (personal communication, June 6, 2024). At

academic level, striking a correct balance between teaching and research is crucial, as faculty development and instructional enhancement both depend on research. Regretfully, the majority of Pakistani universities solely prioritize teaching, which results in big class numbers and heavy teaching loads and no space for adequate research. At the organizational level, committees and ineffective teams are used in place of effective systems and controls due to the dominance of various management levels. The issue is that committees are a means by which organizational democracy is destroyed since typically, a single person holds all of the administrative authority. The large and ineffective nature of these committees causes the decision-making process to be delayed. Additionally, patronage is typically used rather than merit to appoint members to these groups, which eliminates any possibility for transparency (Usman, 2014). Numerous other needs, dimensions, and approaches to the governance of higher education have been brought about by these new developments (Saeed & Tahira, n.d.). According to Aleem (2004), there are major gaps in the quality of faculty, the governance, the academic programs, excellence of students, research facilities, proper libraries and labs. Unfortunately, the higher education system in the country is not at par with international standards leaving a dearth of qualified graduates who can help with rebuilding of the higher education institutions.

As a rule, the President or the Governor is the Chancellor of every public university. He selects the VC and a few members of the other university governing bodies in his capacity. He has the authority to oversee, investigate or visit the university's general operations, research, teaching, and organizational structure. In order to perform their administrative, academic and financial functions, universities should have autonomy and self-sufficiency from all irrelevant influences, mainly, in terms of recruitment, faculty development, assessment, training and educating students. University autonomy is being undermined by increased government meddling in internal matters. Because the public sector universities lack autonomy, choices are made more in line with political agendas than with the goal of addressing university governance concerns as a whole. Pakistan's higher education institutions struggle with poor decision-making due to a lack of effective leadership. The primary cause of the imprecise decision-making is the governance issue. Higher education requires institutional autonomy in order to thrive. Expanded governmental control over higher education and political meddling in internal decision-making processes can stifle creativity, promote rent-seeking, and politicize the educational landscape (Saint, 2009). More financing, less intervention, and honoring and respecting autonomy are all excellent approaches to move forward with resolving the challenges (see Usman, 2014). The university administration doesn't seem to have the needed expertise to handle these challenges. The following succinctly sums up the problem of management and governance in Pakistani universities:

“Universities are the foundation of the higher education system. To be able to govern and administer their academic, administrative, and financial duties, they need to be free from outside pressures. Universities must have the freedom to create their own curricula, develop their academic programs, hire, evaluate, and develop faculty members, and select, prepare, and instruct students. There are many flaws in the current organizational framework, which includes the Senates and Syndicates. The important one is that governance and management roles are not sufficiently separated. Every university needs a strong, independent policy-making body, known as the Governing Board (GB), appointed by the Chancellor from applicants suggested by the Board's nominating committee. It also needs an autonomous management structure that reports to the GB in order to guarantee accountability for institutional performance. The Chancellor should appoint VC of a university from a pool of candidates suggested by the GB after a rigorous, public search process to find the right individual. Reviewers have questioned the effectiveness of the current university governance arrangements in light of the dysfunctional governance, growing worldwide competition among universities, and lack of public support for higher education (Trakman, 2008).

The main challenges faced by the present day Vice Chancellor are discussed below:

1. Administrative Challenges:

VCs in Pakistani universities deal with a variety of intricate and multidimensional administrative challenges that frequently mirror larger problems with the country's higher education system. Prof. Dr. Jehanzeb Khan Khalil highlighted that VCs are under the immense political pressure mainly in respect of appointment. They frequently experience political pressure throughout the appointment process, which has the potential to erode their independence. Political changes may have

an impact on their term, which could result in leadership instability. Political sway can also affect university governance, including choices about student admissions, faculty recruitment, and policy execution. There are also bureaucratic hurdles. Despite having the highest authority inside a university, VCs frequently experience a lack of autonomy as a result of bureaucratic red tape from provincial governments and higher bodies like the Higher Education Commission (HEC) (personal communication, June 6, 2024). Securing and managing fund can be difficult because of convoluted processes, lengthy bureaucracy, and occasionally systemic corruption.

The VC may also have a challenge of maintaining control over university activities while preserving academic freedom which requires a careful balancing. Teachers and personnel who oppose changes or reforms could pose a threat to VC. Faculty management is a tedious challenge. Resolving disputes that cause disruptions to academic operations might arise from interacting with faculty unions and making sure that promotions and appointments are made on the basis of merit. Due to opportunities abroad and the competitive salaries offered by private sector universities, VCs have immense challenge to recruit and retain skilled academic members. Similarly, while upholding and raising academic standards is important, VCs frequently face resource constraints and opposition to change when putting quality assurance procedures into place. The lack of infrastructure, financing, and support for research activities makes it difficult to foster a research culture in universities. Keeping employees motivated in the face of scarce resources, political meddling, and bureaucratic obstacles is a recurring problem.

Prof. Dr. Aurang Zeb, Ex-VC, Lakki Marwat University, pointed the challenge of resource allocation. When funds are scarce, it can be extremely difficult to manage financial resources effectively, particularly making it sure to allocate it fairly among various departments. Similarly, VCs are expected to attract external funding via grants, partnerships, and endowments requiring strong personal relations, networking and negotiation skills. It can be difficult to establish deep collaborations with industries for funding, research, and student placements, especially in areas with little industrial presence. In the same way, obstacles pertaining to logistics, finances, and policies might make it challenging to establish international cooperation, student exchange programs, and uphold global standards (personal communication, May 18, 2024).

Dr. Manzoor Ahmad, Chairman, Department of Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, pointed to another administrative challenge of the VC. It pertains to staff and student unions. In Pakistan, student politics are generally strong and have the potential to cause disturbance, making management of student unions and political groups especially difficult. Students put some unjustified demands on the university administration which a VC may not be in a position to fulfill. Similarly, faculty unions may put some unjustified demands which VCs may not fulfill, thus causing disruption. VCs may also face legal difficulties pertaining to faculty conflicts, student discipline, and administrative decisions which may drain a significant time and resource of a university. It can be challenging to strike a balance between upholding university discipline and protecting students' rights, particularly in politically charged situations. Furthermore, it is imperative that the safety and security of faculty, staff, and students be guaranteed, especially in an environment when educational institutions could be at risk from outside threats. VCs must make sure that the university's physical infrastructure is established and maintained, which can be challenging given financial limitations and administrative hurdles (personal communication, May 10, 2024).

Response to crisis and its effective management requires skills. The pandemics like the COVID-19 have brought to light the difficulties in implementing online learning and handling public health issues in educational institutions. Crisis management may be a testing ground for the administrative skills of VCs.

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Tahir, Pro-VC, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan mentioned that modern technology integration is crucial for administration and academia, but it's sometimes impeded by a lack of resources, a lack of knowledge, and an aversion to change which may pose administrative hurdles for a VC. Due to financial and personnel limitations, integrating contemporary technology and digital tools into administrative procedures and educational settings may be difficult yet necessary. Similarly, maintaining adherence to federal, state, and university rules necessitates ongoing attention to detail and can be challenging. VCs are required to develop leadership within their universities, but it can be challenging to find and develop future leaders, particularly in an environment where seniority may be valued more highly than ability. Similarly, in a conservative society, promoting

gender equity and diversity and inclusion inside the university might be difficult. Again, it can be challenging to striking a balance between the university's academic obligations and its involvement in local community development, especially in areas with severe socioeconomic problems may be challenging (personal communication, July 3, 2024).

These administrative challenges require VCs to be not only academic leaders but also adept administrators, diplomats, and negotiators who can handle a challenging and frequently chaotic environment.

2. Financial Challenges:

VCs of Pakistani universities deal with a variety of financial issues that affect the growth and operation of their institutions. There are much budgetary constraints with which the VCs have to cope with. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan's public universities heavily depend on government financial support and grants. However, the funding for higher education is decreasing day by day and is mostly insufficient, which puts a burden on the university finances. Universities may have further financial challenges during economic downturns due to a lack of government support as well as a decline in private funding sources. Their capacity to fund research, infrastructure, and high-quality education is thus constrained. Even if funds are allotted, they are frequently withheld and lately disbursed, which disrupts university operations and raises issues for things like salaries and research funding. One respondent, who desired anonymity, said that even if the fund is released, it is not prioritized and honestly utilized. The VCs are at beck and call of the university treasurer and registrar who often misguide VCs. The top management of universities is usually involved in corruption, nepotism, favoritism that mostly violates merit-based appointment (personal communication, May 20, 2024). Due to limited government funding, universities mostly rely on tuition fees, examination fees etc. This puts pressure on fees to go up, which may spark student demonstrations and make education less accessible to those with lesser incomes. This creates a paradoxical situation. When fees go up, students enrollment may go down, thus impact the financial position of university. Furthermore, main source of fundraising for universities is the BS program. Universities have opened many BS programs but at the same time the affiliated colleges also offer the same BS program with much less tuition fee and with the same, if not better, quality. Colleges have attracted a greater number of students making the students enrollment in universities limited (Dr. Manzoor Ahmad, personal communication, May 10, 2024).

Qamar Yousafzai, an Islamabad based journalist, pointed to another financial challenge of the VCs. It is about the aging infrastructure and the need for expansion. A large number of universities in Pakistan have outdated infrastructure that needs a lot of maintenance and modernization. VCs, however, find it difficult to set aside funds for these demands due to their tight budgets. In the same way, growing student populations necessitate the expansion of facilities including classrooms, labs, and hostels. However, it is challenging to carry out these projects due to financial limitations (personal communication, April 16, 2024).

Likewise, universities' ability to conduct both high-quality and high-volume research is hampered by a lack of funding for innovation and research. VCs frequently encounter difficulties in obtaining adequate funding to assist academic and student research projects. Research financing from private sector collaborations is scarce due to the weak connection between academia and industry. There is also a salary and pension liability. VCs are responsible for managing the cost of pensions and staff and academic wages. A. Z. Hilali, a retired Chairman, department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, said that universities have opened many disciplines which are not market oriented. Staff has been appointed for these disciplines but they are having low students enrollment. They have become liabilities for the universities. Most of the universities are financially struggling with surplus staff. Budgetary restrictions frequently cause under-compensation or delayed salaries, which lowers morale and decreases productivity. When universities are unable to provide competitive salary or research funds, it becomes difficult to recruit and retain skilled professors, which can result in brain drain (personal communication, July 6, 2024).

Likewise, it might be difficult to obtain foreign grants and donations because of competition and perhaps a lack of knowledge or ability to apply for such financing. Some universities rely on gifts and donations but gifts from donors or alumni support is not a steady or sustainable source of funding for many of them. Many universities are neither equipped nor have sufficient expertise to efficiently mobilize resources through corporate collaborations, alumni networks, and fundraising. VCs' limited

financial autonomy limits their ability to make decisions that could enhance the effectiveness and management of their finances.

Vice Chancellors must strategically plan and manage their institutions in order to ensure their sustainability and further growth in the face of these financial problems. Overcoming these challenges requires creative methods for resource management, financial independence, and fundraising.

3. Academic Challenges:

The worth and quality of higher education in Pakistan are impacted by the academic obstacles that VCs of Pakistani universities must overcome. A major problem is to make sure that academic programs adhere to national and international standards. This entails maintaining accrediting standards, developing faculty, and updating curricula on a regular basis. It might take a lot of time and energy to manage the accreditation process from organizations like the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and foreign authorities, especially when making it sure that the institution satisfies all requirements. Research funding and research output is another academic challenge the VCs face. Similarly, securing fund for research is a continuous problem because private sector collaborations are few and government funds are normally insufficient. It is imperative but difficult to increase the number and caliber of research papers, patents, and innovations because of limited resources and a dearth of a research oriented culture. It is challenging to promote international collaboration because of administrative hurdles and restricted faculty and student mobility.

Dr. Aurang Zeb was of the opinion that it has become very difficult to draw in and keep qualified faculty members, especially in specialized sectors where there is a scarcity of experts. Financial and practical limitations frequently make it difficult to give faculty members opportunities for ongoing professional development that improves their research, teaching, and leadership abilities. Similarly, curricula of many programs have not been updated to take into account the demands of the industry, developments in technology, or changes in global patterns. Collaboration with industry partners and continual curriculum evaluation are necessary to guarantee that graduates possess the skills demanded by market. Again, as already said, it can be very challenging to strike a balance between the requirement to maintain academic standards and the desire to grow enrollment, particularly in a competitive climate. Concerns about poor graduation rates must be addressed with improved academic advising, counseling, and student support programs. It should be ensured that academic decisions are made by competent academic bodies rather than external influences (personal communication, May 18, 2024).

VCs also find it difficult to integrate technology into administration and academic activities and at the same time expanding online quality education programs has become increasingly important, but it is often delayed or mired by inadequate infrastructure and resistance to change. Universities also have to struggle to enhance their ranking which requires significant efforts in enhancing research output, academic standards and international collaborations. Similarly, promoting international students and faculty exchange programs face financial, logistical and sometimes political barriers. To address these challenges and secure the long-term growth of higher education in Pakistan, there is a greater need for strategic vision, strong leadership, and cooperation with all stakeholders.

4. Technological Challenges:

VCs in Pakistan are confronted with a variety of technological obstacles that affect their capacity to lead and grow higher education institutions. Unreliable or poor internet connections is a problem for many educational institutions, particularly those in rural areas, which makes it difficult to conduct online research, classes, and administrative tasks. Many institutions still use outdated IT infrastructure, which causes inefficiencies in data management, communication, and administrative procedures. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Tahir, Pro-VC, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, mentioned that a robust e-learning platform implementation and maintenance are difficult because of the high expenses and ongoing requirement for technical support, maintenance and updates. Another major technological difficulty, he mentioned, is making sure that faculty members are adept at using digital technologies for instruction and evaluation. There are insufficient training initiatives. VCs have to deal with the challenge of engaging students in a virtual setting, which is challenging because students have different access to technology and levels of digital competence. Universities manage vast volumes of sensitive data, such as research data and student records. One of the biggest challenges is making sure that this data is secure against cyber-attacks. Universities are more exposed to ransomware, phishing, and other cyber-attacks due to their increased reliance on digital platforms.

Similarly, the quality and extent of research undertaken at universities are negatively impacted by the lack of access to sophisticated research tools and software. There is issue of promoting collaboration among researchers via digital platforms, both domestically and globally because of the technological barriers and an absence of standardized protocols (personal communication, July 3, 2024). Most often, budgetary restrictions make it difficult for universities to allocate enough funds for technological upgrades. They also make it difficult to decide which technological investments will yield the biggest long-term returns, given the speed at which technology is developing. In urban and rural areas, there is a notable digital divide between students and faculty. VCs need to figure out how to close this disparity so that everyone has access to the same learning materials. It is crucial to give staff and students who are less tech-savvy or who have restricted access to digital resources enough assistance.

Qamar Yousafzai, an Islamabad based journalist, mentioned that it can be difficult to adjust to local, national, and international rules pertaining to intellectual property, online education, and data privacy, especially as these laws change. The degree of governmental support for technological endeavors differs, and maneuvering through the bureaucratic procedures to obtain funds or authorization for projects can pose challenges. Similarly, the curriculum and administrative procedures must be integrated with cutting-edge technology like automation and artificial intelligence, which calls for major financial commitment and careful preparation. Pakistani universities face difficulties in keeping up with the rapid speed of change and resource limits when trying to stay competitive in the face of global technology breakthroughs (personal communication, April 16, 2024).

The implementation of technology projects may be slowed down by the frequent pushback from administrative and faculty staff to the adoption of new technologies. VCs have to show strong leadership and a clear vision for how technology might improve research and education in a setting where there may be skepticism or a lack of awareness of the advantages.

Thus a comprehensive approach involving infrastructure investment, training and capacity building, industry and government partnership, and a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion is needed to address these issues.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Education is one of the most powerful weapons which can change the world. By investing in education, individuals and societies can unlock their full potential and can lead to a more prosperous, equitable, and peaceful world. The role of higher education is much more important in this regard. Higher education plays a vital role in knowledge creation and dissemination to develop individuals, institutions, societies and nations and encompasses several key areas like human capital development, research and innovation, socio-economic impact, cultural and intellectual enrichment, policy and leadership, community development and global competitiveness. Higher education also contributes to the "development of enlightened leaders, expansion of choices, enabling social mobility and helping the people to fulfill their potential and address local problems with appropriate solution," all of which will result in a better standard of living and faster economic growth.

Promoting higher education greatly depends on the role and functions of an outstanding academic leadership. Being in charge of academic institutions and playing a central role in the advancement of individuals, organizations, and societies, the role of VC is extremely important in the academic leadership. The VC influences educators, administrators, and students in the first place, which can lead to the development of superior institutions, faultless infrastructure, and secure governance. He/she is the person who manages academic institutions and is at the core of organizational, individual and ultimately society's development.

VCs in Pakistani universities are faced with multifaceted challenges at financial, administrative, academic and technological fronts. The political climate in Pakistan further complicates matters for leaders in higher education. VC has to be more than an administrator and must maintain communication with the internal and external environments.

University autonomy is being undermined by increased government meddling in internal matters and decreasing government funding. Because the public sector universities lack autonomy, choices are made more in line with political agendas than with the goal of addressing university governance concerns. In order to perform their administrative, academic and financial functions, universities should have autonomy and self-sufficiency from all irrelevant influences, mainly, in terms of recruitment, faculty development, assessment, training and educating students. Expanded governmental control over higher education and political meddling in internal decision-making

processes can stifle creativity, promote rent-seeking, and politicize the educational landscape. More financing, less intervention, and honoring and respecting autonomy are all excellent approaches to move forward with resolving the challenges

The study has also emphasized that in order to overcome these obstacles an efficient, effective, capable and forward looking leadership is essential in influencing Pakistani higher education's future. Similarly, strategic vision, and stakeholder engagement are essential for overcoming obstacles and driving institutional growth. VC should have efficient management techniques, and creative problem-solving skill. These challenges require VCs to be not only academic leaders but also adept administrators, diplomats, and negotiators who can handle a challenging and frequently chaotic environment. VCs must strategically plan and manage their institutions in order to ensure their sustainability and further growth in the face of these challenges. Overcoming these challenges requires creative methods for resource management, financial independence, and fundraising. VCs have to show strong leadership and a clear vision for how technology might improve research and education in a setting where there may be skepticism or a lack of awareness of the advantages. Thus a comprehensive approach involving infrastructure investment, training and capacity building, industry and government partnership, and a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion is needed to address these issues.

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