

Flaws in Higher Education in Pakistan: An Appraisal

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Abstract

The education system in Pakistan, unfortunately, is facing several problems due to the existence of certain flaws in education, particularly in higher education. On the other hand, a country's progress in any sphere of life is mostly dependent on its educational structure and system because it is considered a roadmap on which the direction of national behavior is based upon. In the meantime, the government of Pakistan since the inception of the country is not properly investing in the field of education which has created numerous hurdles in the growth and development of the country. The present study aims to analyze the state of higher education by paying special attention to the flaws in higher education in Pakistan.

Keywords: Problems, Higher Education, HEC, Pakistan, Universities

Introduction

It is an irrefutable fact as stated by Rehman and Khan (2011) that no nation of the world can progress until it improves its education sector. History testifies that only those nations who have made their presence known in the world have realized the importance of education and have embraced their new generation with this ornament. It is the responsibility of any welfare state to provide the best educational facilities to its future builders in the shape of students in an organized and disciplinary manner but unfortunately in the recent era, Pakistan is lagging far behind other countries in the world in education. The education system in the country is the same educational organization established by the British in the pre-partition of Indo-Pak. Through which we can only produce clerks and inferior classes' through educational polarization in Pakistan. Today, we are far behind the world in the field of science and research because of this maladjustment of the educational structure. In Pakistan, there is still a class system of education. On the one hand, there are schools of O- level and Cambridge system that only rich children can enjoy. On the other hand, there are public schools that are accessible to the children belonging to the poorer classes, but everyone will be aware of the plight of these public schools (Malik, 2017).

The biggest flaw as mentioned by Ashraf & Hafiza (2016) in Pakistan's education system is only the education system, where there is urban, rural, metric, Cambridge, madrassas, and last but not the least, the Urdu-based education mainly operational in the villages in Pakistan. In the cities mostly comprised of the urban sides of the country, the expensive private educational institutions teach curriculum mainly based on English. When children come from villages to get further education in the city, they face many difficulties in the curriculum and language, on the other hand, in each province of Pakistan, students are taught a separate curriculum. The numerous private schools that are set up in the streets and neighborhoods also have their separate text boards and each province has a separate curriculum that reduces national solidarity and harmony.

Statement of the Problem

In modern times, due to the importance of education particularly science and technology which is considered the spirit of development, therefore the modern world is focusing merely on the education sector, on the same hand, the education sector in Pakistan is facing huge pitfalls in general and higher education in particular. The problem of the statement was to analyze the state of higher education in Pakistan and on the same hand to learn about the causes of the decline of higher education in Pakistan by throwing light on the respective role of HEC and government in the development of education in Pakistan.

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Objectives of the Study

Comparatively, Pakistan is lacking behind the world in the field of education particularly, the higher education, therefore it is hypnotized that the primary cause behind the less developed the country in almost every sphere of life is lacking behind in education, the primary objectives behind the present study was:

- a) To analyze the state of education in Pakistan
- b) To study the flaws in higher education
- c) To investigate Role of HEC in quality education
- d) To draw suggestions to develop the education system in Pakistan

Methodology

This study is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methods have been used. To address the present study, secondary sources like books, articles, and internet sources have been consulted.

Higher Education in Pakistan

During the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the situation of education particularly in higher education was not too polarized on the one hand, and on the other, the quality was superior on quantity in the country even though only one university was working in the field of higher education i.e. The University of Punjab along with 40 colleges. In the meantime, the government of Pakistan had established new institutions and by 1997, the strength of universities' in Pakistan increased to thirty-five in which three were admonished under the domain of the federal capital of the country and twenty-two universities under provincial administration with the total admission of 71819 students, in the same hand, 789 colleges with an enrollment of 830000 but these all institutions failed to meet the financial needs which came accompanied by Pakistan in inheritance. Meanwhile, Pakistan in its early stage faced an educated class of people as the Muslims in the undivided India focused on every field except education. By 1997, 10 universities in Pakistan started working in the private sector of education also steeped in to provide quality education on the one hand, and the other assist public sector of education in the country, but soon, it started emphasizing on earning capital in education which ultimately led the country into creating social classes based on ethnic grounds. (Ali, 1997).

Even though education is considered the backbone of the progress and development of any country, Pakistan is lacking in focusing on its education sector. In the world ranking, Pakistan grades among the most resourcefully progressive but academically backward countries. Until laboratory level research comes into the market, the knowledge economy cannot be promoted. There are four pillars of development in the Knowledge Economy, including high-quality education, science and technology, business environment, and discipline that merit prevail and provide fast and transparent justice in society. Pakistan must move from a natural resource-oriented perspective to socio-economic development and focus on strengthening the knowledge economy. Pakistan spends less than 2 percent of its GDP on education, compared to Malaysia with 30 percent, therefore it ranks 126 out of 132 in science and technology and higher education, it is an understood reality that the promotion of science and technology, innovation and human capital increase jobs and reduce poverty, Such policies require proper and consistent investment. (Shakil, 2018).

In developing countries, according to Hill and Tanveer, (1990), there are about 2500 to 3,000 scientists and engineers in the population of one million who serve as the backbone of the country's development. Pakistan has only 120 scientists and engineers per 1 million populations, which need 5 million high-quality scientists and engineers in the next ten years in certain selected fields. We need to establish world-class performance centers in selected fields to compete globally. These centers should be tasked with making high-quality scientists and engineers and establishing contacts with their industry, agriculture, and health sectors to enable them to solve national problems. Establish high-performance centers in technology development and commercialization.

The total number of universities in Pakistan till 2002 was 177, of the 11 in Islamabad, 3 are military and 5 private, seven are official and one is private in Baluchistan, 21 are official in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3 institutions of higher studies are working in the public sector and 11 are private, 32 are official and 27 are private in Punjab, while 6 are unrecognized. Sindh has 20 public, one military, and 29 privates, while 4 are unrecognized, which are not registered in the Higher Education Commission. Likewise, there are only 5 public and 2 private universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir; According to an analysis issued by the World Association of Higher Education Institutes of

the International Association, eight countries in South Asia comprising of universities of 6.16% of the world's total. Pakistan ranks second in terms of the number of higher educational institutions in South Asia. 13.2% of the region's universities are in Pakistan, while the country is ranked 20th in terms of the number of universities worldwide. In this regard, if we look at the data of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, the situation that comes up is quite good in terms of increasing higher educational institutions in the country, in the context of which, the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2017-18 indicates the number of universities in the country till 2001-02, only 74, but the establishment of the Higher Education Commission in 2002, the number has increased to 189 from July 1, 2018. That is, for 55 years from the time of independence to the establishment of higher education, the country succeeded in creating only 74 universities in the country. In almost 16 years since the establishment of HEC, we have established 115 new Universities and Institutes of Degree, currently, 59.3% of the country's top educational institutions are working in the public and 40.7% in the private sector. (Govt. of Pakistan, 2002).

Total number of Degree awarding institutions in Pakistan till 2018

Provinces	Government	Private	Total
Punjab	35	26	61
Sindh	23	32	55
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	25	10	35
Baluchistan	7	1	8

Source: <https://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/universitiesstatistics.aspx>

Despite all this availability of universities, one problem is so acute that most universities and their campuses are located in urban areas of the country, making them out of reach of millions of students in rural and regressive areas; on the other hand, 65 of Pakistan's 120 districts have no university or campus. Besides, till 2018, regarding the approved universities and institutes of eligibility for the approved universities and degrees on the website of the HEC, only three cities, half of the country's 50.8 percent of the universities is located in the three cities of the country, i.e. Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, which left the 70 percent of the total population living in rural areas out of education, same is the case of Universities located in most of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which makes the number 15 located in the urban areas, 11 in Sindh, 7 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 5 in Baluchistan and two in Gilgit-Baltistan. (Khattak, n.d).

In a study carried out by Baum and Payea (2007), it is a matter of fact, that higher education is beneficial not only to individuals but also to society, because, it enables people with higher education more environmentally conscious, who adopt healthy conducts' participate more in the affairs of state. Besides, they pay more tax due to higher income on the one hand, and on the other their vision and thinking make them aware of rules and regulations, resultantly, making stronger nations.

In general, higher education institutions provide individuals with appropriate and relevant skills not only for employment but also to make them an active member of their community. As discussed earlier that most of the nations of the modern world emphasize on education and the same hand, higher educational institutions are considered the policymaking institutions but the case in Pakistan is different from the other countries. In Pakistan different universities and colleges are working on different phenomena, teaching different curriculum based on their vested interests, and focusing mainly on those subjects which are profitable in the capital, on the same hand, public sector education is focusing merely on those subjects which are connected to arts, producing only social scientists, therefore, in modern times, we are far away from discoveries and inventions in sciences, there is no check and balance in the country particularly in the educational sector, on the same hand, merit is a concept, unfamiliar to the educational institutions particularly in provincial primary and secondary institutions and their respective deploying commissions in Pakistan, also, universities' are known for its research but, the same is less found in Pakistan which ultimately makes different classes on the one hand, on the other radicalism in the country based on ethnic and political grounds (Baum, & Payea, 2007).

According to the recently released Quacquarelli Symonds Rankings, (QS World University Rankings), 2018, Pakistan includes 6 varsities' which stands in the Top 1000 list. However, according to the Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings, 2018, the number of *Pakistani* universities featured has deteriorated. While last year 2019, only 7 universities made it to the list of Top 1000 universities,

in 2020, the number fell to 4. With Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad being ranked in the 401-500 lists, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology and the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) made it to the 601-800 groups. Moreover, the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad ranked in the 801-1000 group.

However, the remaining 3 universities from last year's ranking failed to retain their spot in the Top 1000 list. These include Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, University of Karachi, and the University of Lahore. Out of these 3 universities, two are situated in the province of Punjab. This fall in the rankings is concerning and more so because neighboring countries are much ahead with 30 institutions of India and 60 institutions of China featuring in the Top 1000 list. This indicates that the competitiveness level amongst the universities is higher in these countries, which in turn ensures that the educational standards are maintained. Regrettably for Pakistan, this has not been conceivable which is apparent from the fact that only four universities made it to the top 1000 list. Given these rankings, it is now significant that factors be identified and analyzed. (Academiamag, 2020).

Higher Educational Institutes in Pakistan

Currently, as per the Higher Education Commission (HEC), around 186 universities/degree awarding institutions are operating in Pakistan. With the majority being public sector institutions, the rankings place a huge question mark on the quality of these educational institutes. Gigantic sprawling campuses relatively lower tuition fees, greater accessibility to the brightest students, and generous financial aid/grants from the governments are characteristics of mass public universities. If indeed these institutions are filled with talented students and adequate resources, why is it that these universities have still failed to compete with other international universities?

Over the years, the Higher Education Commission has constantly been offering international Ph.D. scholarships. Through this, it aims to provide the country with the necessary human capital that will in turn educate the youth. While the country does require the services of these intellectuals the foreign returned PhDs have so far been incapable to make any far-reaching changes in the education structure of the country. One of the possible reasons for this is that during their time abroad, the Ph.D. candidates get accustomed to the ways and research environment there. However, when they return and join a public (or private) university as an Assistant Professor, it becomes difficult for them to kick start the research activities primarily because these universities are unable to provide a similar environment. Moreover, with limited Ph.D. faculty, most of the teaching workload falls on these new hires, which shifts their focus from research. Along with other administrative duties, the primary task of the professor, nonetheless those who are supposedly active in the research arena are not exactly serving the educational institute either. While they may indeed be doing research, how innovative are their endeavors? Has there been a surge in patents (especially in the field of science and technology)? For instance, according to the US Trade Patent Trademark Office (USTPO), the number of international patents of Pakistani origin was 16 in the year 2015. Compared to India's 3,415 and China's 9,004 in the same year, Pakistan is way behind². Apart from this, it needs to be noted as to how many articles are being published in top international journals by the faculty? What are the citation statistics? How many research and travel grants have been won by the faculty of these universities? All these factors play a key role in the universities' rankings and with Pakistan falling short on most accounts, its' place in the current rankings should not come as a surprise.

Factors responsible for Deterioration in Academic Standards

- Most universities have been unable to offer a learning and research-based atmosphere to the students/scholars and the Ph.D. faculty
- Foreign returned PhDs have a hard time adjusting to the academic setting of local universities
- HEC's policies with regards to research, promotion, and incentives have been ineffective
- Academia is more focused on quantity than quality due to these policies
- Publishing of paper has indeed increased but a heart beating job in different research journals
- However, the quality and relevance of the published material is doubtful
- Lack of innovative research being conducted
- No significant increase in patents, nor any breakthrough in the field of sciences.

Academic and Administrative Issues in Universities

- Out-dated curriculum
- Rote based learning and examination system

- Teaching methods have not evolved
- Most classes are lecture-based instead of interactive and participatory
- Too much interference in the running of universities- especially those in the public sector (Ahmed, (2017).

Quality of Learning and Examination Standards

The main purpose of educational institutions is to impart knowledge. The rankings imply that the standards of teaching are also not at par with the higher education institutes globally. That is, the curriculum and way of teaching is not equipping the students with the skills necessary to compete both academically and professionally. As per HEC, more than 3, 000 PhDs (that availed HEC's overseas scholarship) are currently serving the country in different capacities. And it aims to furnish around 40,000 more by the year 2025 (in line with HEC vision 2025). On the surface, this news is heartening and promises to cater to the needs of higher education. However, the rankings state otherwise. If there is indeed more expert teaching staff (those having completed MS/M. Phil or Ph.D.) available now than, say a decade ago, then why are the number of Pakistani universities featured in the rankings so few? One explanation for this is linked to the above-mentioned HEC policies. Since the number of research papers is the criteria for career growth, teachers are not putting in many efforts to offer interesting classes to their students. That is, as there is no additional incentive to be a good teacher, the faculty would rather spend their time doing research. This is especially true for those private and public sector universities where there is no concept of teacher/course evaluation at the end of the academic session. With students giving feedback on the course effectiveness and the instructor (teacher) itself, the university will be able to correctly assess the quality of education being offered.

Additionally, the syllabus and examination system in most universities has been the same over the years, with little or no change. Lecture-based classes; rote learning and straightforward exams are still part of the education system. With increasing advances in various subjects, modern teaching methods need to be adopted. That is, focus on interactive classroom sessions, use digital platforms to disseminate knowledge, and make education accessible (Hasnain, (2017).

Administration Distresses in Pakistan's Universities

Apart from these factors, there are administrative problems that are not allowing the universities to function efficiently. For instance, as of September 2017, several public sector universities in Punjab are still without permanent vice-chancellors (VCs). Temporary administration (such as acting VC/additional charge) means that enduring policies with regards to academic direction and streamlining of the administrative processes cannot be formulated. With issues in implementation, it can then be understood that universities, will never be able to function properly unless and until there is someone to lead it. This issue can be partly attributed to the 18th constitutional Amendment, 2010, and the subsequent devolution process. With provinces having the authority to make its policies, the Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) was established in 2015. Albeit relatively new, the PHEC has taken initiatives that include offering international travel grants, scholarships etc. However, there is a slight discord between PHEC and the HEC which has created confusion concerning the distribution of the functional roles and authority amongst the two institutions. Dispelling this confusion is imperative to improving the overall standards of the universities (Khan, 2017).

Academic Trauma, Peer Pressure, and Freedom of Speech

More specifically, extreme stress, lack of counseling, the huge distance between teachers and students, restricted academic freedom is all contributing to the standards of these universities. It then comes as no surprise that given there is little or no room for debate on various socio-economic issues, the environment of the universities is stifling. Is this the case for most of the universities in Pakistan, and Punjab? There have been instances whereby students have resorted to substance use due to academic and peer pressure.

Lack of Tolerance and Respect for Differing Viewpoints

In other cases, student groups have been embroiled in clashes over religious, ethnic, and political beliefs for example, recently a public university in Punjab came under the spotlight when activists disrupted an on-going activity on the university premises, injuring handful students in the process. The universities are failing to curb such misdemeanors. An alternative consequence of this is the extremely negative effect such environments are having on the current as well as the graduating students. A recent example of this is the attack on a political leader in Sindh, by an ex-student of a

renowned public university of the province. The fact that an educated individual would resort to such an extremist activity is concerning (Nelson, 2011).

Economic Constraints in Higher Education

The Higher Education in Pakistan is confronting with numerous constraints just as modern question and wariness, recruitment, disappointment of faculty and students, inappropriate behavior grievances, rising turmoil among workforce/staff individuals for a made sure about vocation, utilization of medications among colleges understudies, affirmations and sports embarrassments. These are a portion of the noteworthy patterns imperiling the financial eventual fate of this nation reliably. What is more, the ongoing starkness drive of the Government of Pakistan and the IMF program, the budgetary slices will get further in monetary creation of the nation's higher education section. The legislature regardless of its cases of advancing the reason for higher education in the nation has arranged a general cut of forty percent in the financing of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2019-2020. Contrasted with what HEC of Pakistan might want to request, the portions may be to the tune of 10 percent to 15 percent in repetitive uses and up to 50 percent being developed expenditure which has its ramifications. 10pc to 15pc cut in recurrent uses for the HEC implies huge cuts in progressing college programs across Pakistan fundamentally in open division colleges. What's more, a 50 percent cut being developed expenditure implies that plans for practically all new projects, colleges, research focuses including the foundation of the National University of Technology Islamabad, expansion of, Pak-China National Research Center, Bolan University of Health Sciences Quetta on Earth Sciences at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, limit working for applied examination and innovation move at the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Lahore, elevating of scholastic and framework offices at Hazara University, Mansehra and foundation of sub-grounds of colleges at the local level, should be deferred or dropped. It unmistakably shows that that will be no opportunities for new activities and scholastic plans (Khan, Siraj & Sultana, 2010).

Intrinsic Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Students' Actions

Apart from the shortcomings of the universities (concerning the quality of education, environment, preparing for a Successful career, etc.), other factors influence the students' actions. These include the nature of their household, up-bringing, financial condition, the kind of company that they keep themselves in etc. All of these play a huge role in shaping up the personality of the student, and most importantly in developing the mindset (Nelson, 2011).

With set ideas on religion, morality, justice, these individuals become less tolerant towards differing opinions and hence are propelled into taking extreme positions and measures in such sensitive matters. But does this mean that universities must not be blamed? Universities need to create such an environment on their campuses wherein tolerance is promoted.

As students come from various socio-economic backgrounds, the university should be a place where everyone is treated equally and on merit. However, this is not always the case. How many times has one heard that a certain student was able to get admission into a university using his family influence even though he was not eligible? Hence possibly taking away an opportunity from another deserving student. These instances are still prevalent in the society and have long-lasting implications, with the students' feeling deprived and demoralized (Akhtar, 2012).

Economic Opportunities in Higher Education

For most, the aim of acquiring higher education is to attain a respectable livelihood and improve their living standards. Given the turbulent economy, and the law and order situation of Pakistan, employment opportunities have been drastically reduced.

With an unfavorable job market, the new graduates are unable to find appropriate jobs. Having invested both time and money in attaining a degree, lack of opportunities is forcing the youth to direct their disappointment and anger towards the authorities and policymakers. Perhaps one can then safely state that the current economic affairs of the country are also playing a significant role in radicalizing the youth. (Unspoken Taboos of Higher Education, 2017).

Faculty and on-campus Mentors: Do they influence the environment?

This is just not limited to the students; faculty members are also victims of the unjust university policies. As explained earlier, when quantity (and not quality) is rewarded, a feeling of resentment is bound to set in. Hard-working teachers are being overlooked in matters of promotion, research grants, etc., possibly due to internal politics or plain favoritism. Such blatant misuse of authority is likely to

give a negative signal and create divisions within the institution. Teachers pitted against one another, students are almost always affected, thus, influencing the overall environment of the campus. Apart from this, it has been observed that some of the faculty members are usually more politically and/or religiously inclined. Since they are in direct contact with the young impressionable minds, they intentionally or unintentionally influence the youth. Additionally, there is another staff working on-campus in different capacities. For example, many universities have counselors available that help students in balancing work and life. These mentors play a huge role in influencing the minds of these young individuals, thus making it crucial that counselors do not have any political or religious affiliation or hard stance on sensitive issues (Aslam, 2011).

Contribution of Higher Education Commission

According to Zaman (2017), the role of the Higher Education Commission is crucial in establishing new universities and improving the quality of education. Higher Education, established in 2002, can undoubtedly take credit for the fact that since its inception, there have been several universities in the public and private sectors. Sin has increased. The Commission is also right to take credit for the fact that it also releases huge grants to chartered universities across the country to establish higher education sectors. Although these grants have been drastically reduced and universities have faced several financial difficulties and problems, scholarships for Ph.D.-nominated scholars and the cost of their education at foreign universities for a certain period must be borne. Can be counted among the notable works of the Higher Education Commission, but as far as the quality of education of the country's universities is concerned, it can be judged from the painful fact that any university in Pakistan is one of the top universities in the world today. However, it may be somewhat correct to say that there are a few universities in the country which can be considered as having some high standard, but there are some other issues and problems concerning them. Concerns and concerns are not only expressed in different national circles, but also about the overall environment of these universities, the relationship between teachers and students, teacher-friendly female students, groupings among students and regional and linguistic divisions, etc.

Higher education in Pakistan is mired in a maelstrom of problems. Institutions of higher learning have failed to achieve the goals of higher education, that is, to produce people who have high moral and intellectual excellence and scientific ability and who can play an effective role in the industrial, economic, technological, and social development of the country. According to a World Bank report, Pakistan is facing serious problems in higher education. These include poor organizational structure, incompetence, teaching problems, inadequacy, waste, lack of resources, and lack of research. Education is a very important source of socio-economic and cultural development of the country and it is a common feeling in the world today that with the help of quality higher education an underdeveloped nation can join the ranks of developed nations in a single generation. (Zaman, 2017).

Revisiting Universities' Role in Youth Development

It is important to note that radicalization here does not necessarily mean religious extremism. Instead, this word implies as to how the campus environment and university policies (activities) can deliberately or unknowingly influence the behavior (action) of the students. Which in turn may result in extreme actions, be it due to social, economic, religious, or political factors? As various issues, regarding the on-campus environment have been discussed above. Hence, it is becoming increasingly

Important for universities to take notice and review their academic and administrative policies so that at least these esteemed institutions do not become breeding grounds for extremism.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the secret of the development of nations lies in education and the current fast-paced era, the coin of those nations is running which has emphasized on education based on research, technical education, modern sciences. It is an indisputable fact that private universities have worked side by side with public universities at the national level for the higher education system. Pakistan could also be included in the ranks of other developed countries in the region, though the country had produced numerous highly qualified people but unfortunately, the quality of education particularly in higher-level has decreased due to the flaw full education in the country, on the same side, higher education commission is busy in providing education in colleges and universities but the negligence is

paying by the government by not paying its due attention to the education sector in the country which brings disastrous in every sphere of life.

Suggestions

- ❖ Expenditure and resources for education should be increased so that the education budget can be brought to the level recommended by UNICCO.
- ❖ Universities are considered the frontline institutions in nation-building, so the government should focus upon providing budget to HEC to provoke hardships in higher education.
- ❖ Uniform curriculum should be adopted across the board in the country i.e. in private as well as public sector educational institutions.
- ❖ Proper training for professors in higher level should be ensured to provide quality education.
- ❖ The expenditure of the education budget at the provincial level should be monitored by the competent authority and should be ensured that the entire budget is spent.
- ❖ The role of the federal government in assisting and advising the provincial governments in providing education should be strengthened so that inequalities between the provinces can be eliminated.

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