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# Higher Education in Pakistan: Challenges, Opportunities, Suggestions

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## Abstract

Higher education provides opportunities to censoriously reveal the cultural, moral, socio-economic, and spiritual issues faced by the human race. Pakistan's higher education system has many institutional drawbacks includes a lack of quality management, institutional structure, and knowledge gaps between cross-culture educations systems to improve the efficiency of the current higher education system in Pakistan. To make Pakistan an educational center, Pakistan must strengthen the education system by developing modern technology and higher education. This study focuses on low enrolment and dropout gaps, quality and quantity of higher education standards, infrastructure, facilities, and low-quality teaching methods. This study summarizes these problems with suggestions to improve higher education standards and quality through cross-culture developments, performance standards, teaching methods, and examination reforms in Pakistan's higher education system.

**Keywords:** Pakistan Higher Education, Challenges, Suggestions

Higher education becomes an input to the growth and development of the industry. It is seen as an opportunity to participate in the individual's development process through a flexible education model (Barnett R., 1992). Higher education is an essential contrivance for constructing a modern, informed, and civilized society by providing in-depth knowledge about various areas of life from the world's broader perspective. The core task of higher education is to educate, train, research, and serve society. In the context of globalization, there are increasing opportunities and demands for higher education. To fulfill these requirements, we need to build world-class, high-quality standards for higher education institutions. Education is the fundamental right of every citizen (Ashraf, 2019) and one of the most critical factors for the development of lower-class families of any country. However, in Pakistan, consumers of education services – parents and students – have little choice or idea in seeking higher education. Since its independence, Pakistan's higher education has experienced an amazing expansion, bringing scientists, engineers, technicians, doctors, teachers, and managers in high demand

worldwide. Higher education provides different opportunities for society to reflect on humankind's social, cultural, moral, economic, and spiritual problems. Higher education offers professional knowledge and skilled personnel for national development. Suppose the government of Pakistan realized the potential of employment capacity. In that case, the young generation's growth will be a huge wealth for its economic growth, but at the same time, if Pakistan's government is unable to provide formal higher education and unable to produce more employment opportunities, it will be a disaster for its socio-economy growth. Education is an important tool to achieve sustainability and creates the core of human capital's economic development. It also adopts the source of autonomous development in the economic process of the externality of human capital.

## 1. Background Analysis

Even after seven decades of independence, Pakistan's higher education development indicators do not show good results due to the comparatively low access to higher education to neighboring countries. In Pakistan, the quality of education at the primary and secondary levels tends to decline. Especially science education has reached the lowest level, and people urgently need to improve science education. Since independence, there has been a severe lack of teachers, libraries, and laboratories (Ghulam Rasool, 2007). However, the current trend is to concentrate all postgraduate work in university departments to maximize the benefits of interaction between teachers and students but often limits the university teachers' access, which hinders them from carrying out higher-level research because of the lack of rigid standards. Universities play an important role in higher and professional education. However, the actual teaching system is carried out by universities. Still, most of the public and private degree colleges also belong to the provincial universities (Jan & Hussain, 2020). These universities administrate courses through research boards in various disciplines, conduct examinations, and confer bachelor's degrees. These universities have formulated the minimum qualification standards for teachers, their recruitment, and upgrading standards for physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and regularly dispatched inspection teams to the college. In most colleges and university exams, 35% of the students must pass. Only 60% of them can continue or get admission to a master's degree (Nasir Khan, 2018).

The education of professional and technical colleges produced many doctors and engineers, which is superior. These colleges and universities gave admission to only those excellent students. Those who usually take 85% to 95% marks in higher secondary school examinations (12th grade or HSSC). According to stateuniversity.com, most of the graduated students from these institutions migrate to the Western world's competitive environment to perform well to be compensated or reimbursed for their education expenses (State University.com). The successful transfer of professional graduates from Pakistan to better pastures overseas leads to the so-called brain drain, which leads to the accusation of countries like Pakistan. As for universities' concerns, critics say that local universities can't attract the best people to join their faculty. The services of Pakistan's government, plentiful employment opportunities of Pakistan's multi-national companies, or the lure of overseas work make the university's real talent pool much more diminutive. In addition to various disadvantages like lack of facilities and environment to conduct high-quality research, universities are often unable to fill their teaching positions.

## 2. Challenges and Opportunities

Pakistan's higher education is not ranked anywhere among the world's best higher education systems in terms of quality. Higher education quality depends on many factors, such as appropriate education and learning environment, infrastructure, teachers, courses, information feedback, research skills, and observation systems (Ahsan Nasir, 2019). Since independence, the Pakistan education system had faced many challenges. The central governments of Pakistan's political parties were working hard to formulate new and effective education policies. These policies were not enough to meet the standards of education a country needs. However, people are still facing many problems in Pakistan's higher education system. Pakistan's higher education commission recognizes the new global situation, which poses unprecedented challenges to the higher education system. The most common issues faced by Pakistan higher education are lack of academic space and teachers, deteriorating research standards, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, low rate of student enrolment, out-dated teaching methods, lack of enthusiasm for students, poverty, and gender discrimination (Salik & Zhiyong, 2014). In

addition to these problems related to deteriorating standards and lack of facilities, many private education providers have reportedly exploited students in rural areas.

### *2.1 Low Enrolment rate and Drop-out Gap*

In the last two decades, student enrolment in primary school is very low as well as the dropout rate in secondary school is also very high. In case of majority numbers of students do not complete their secondary education, future economic opportunities will be reduced for them, and government investment in public universities will be wasted (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010). In rural areas of the country, most families live in poverty or think that education is not vital for their children (Zulfiqar, Shabbir, & Ishfaq, 2019). Pakistan's government significantly increased the funds for primary education in its education plan to control these issues and involve non-government organizations (NGOs) to manage primary and secondary schools known as private schools. But most of the private schools are located in urban areas and attracting the children of the elite-class and usually affiliated with the world's renowned universities and maintain excellent facilities, including laboratories, computer labs, and qualified, trained teachers. These private schools' tuition fees are very high, where low-income families cannot avail of these school facilities. Due to the low enrolment rate at the primary level and a vast quantity of dropout students at secondary or higher secondary school education (Anwar, Tahir, Saeed, & Ghori, 2012). Pakistan's higher education system is affected most. According to the World Bank, tertiary education enrolment was reported at 9 % in 2018 in Pakistan compared to 26% in India and 48% in China (World Bank, 2018). By 2020, Pakistan's government aims to achieve a 15% gross enrolment in Pakistan higher education, which means Pakistan failed to achieve its higher education sector goals even in 2020. Due to Pakistan's low total enrolment ratio, unable to compete with other developing countries in the higher education sector indicates insufficient socio-economic development progress.

### *2.2 Deteriorating Research and Quality Standards*

Teachers' ability level, study plan, and student admittance standards are the main factors leading to the decline of higher education quality (Ullah, Ajmal, & Rahman, 2011). Ensuring higher education quality is one of the significant challenges faced by Pakistan's higher education system. However, while the government has always focused on quality education, many universities and degree colleges are still failing to meet the minimum requirements set by the HEC. These universities cannot stand out in front of the top universities' research and quality standards globally. Pakistan has a very low enrolment in Masters and Ph.D. degrees, which means Pakistan does not have enough high-quality researchers. There is a lack of early research experience, lack of creativity and innovation, and low industry participation. Universities and higher education institutions are more focused and dependent on theoretical knowledge than fieldwork or experimental research.

### *2.3 Inadequate Facilities and Infrastructure*

According to Younis Ahmad Sheikh's research analysis, poor infrastructure is the main reason behind the flawed higher education system of Sub-continental (Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh), particularly the institutes run by the public sector's inadequate physical facilities and infrastructure. Many colleges in India function on the second or third floor of the building on the ground or the first floor; therapists, readymade hosiery, or photocopy shops (Younis Ahmad Sheikh, 2017). The same problems occurred in the Pakistan education system; most of the school infrastructure is there. Still, there is no student or faculty staff in these colleges or schools are under the control of politicians; they use it for their benefit. In Pakistan, many of the universities don't have proper facilities and adequate infrastructure to teach students. Even in the modern era of education technology, most of the degree colleges and universities in Pakistan are running without computer labs, digital libraries, and internet or in-campus internet facilities to assist their students. Poor infrastructure is one of the harsh truths in Pakistan's higher education system, particularly in those institutes run by the government sector suffering more than private colleges and universities. Many degree colleges are functioning in the same old-traditional teaching methods without the immersion of technical facilities.

### *2.4 Low-Quality Teaching Methods*

The main reasons for the poor academic integrity of Pakistani students are classroom behavior, teacher evaluation, and the popularity of recitation among students (Haq, Mahmood, Shabbir, & Batool, 2020). The main reasons behind the low-quality teaching methods are the interference of political parties in job quotas. These political parties try to hire their political workers; thus, most people do not have any professional experience. Most teachers lack basic instruction of training. According to global academic-industry demands, they are still using old teaching methods when most Western teachers help modern educational techniques. Some private universities and colleges recruit young graduates as professors or lecturers on low salaries who do not have any experience or teaching knowledge. Because of non-professionals hiring, many institutions and universities have inferior quality teaching methods, which torture the quality of standards education. In the modern era, traditional teaching methods are now out-dated, and lack of quality assurance, lack of accountability, research separation, rigid pedagogy and curricula, and low-quality teachings are raising objections to Pakistan's higher education system. Most of the professors and management authorities don't want to involve in educational activities and wish to stick to their own financial and political growth.

### *2.5 Uneven Growth of Opportunities*

Pakistan has experienced increasing student mobility, which is a significant aspect of the higher education scenario. Due to the uneven growth of opportunities in South Asian countries, especially those in the subcontinent, international students' mobility has dramatically changed the environment of general higher education. The number of Pakistanis students going abroad for higher education or job opportunities is growing incessantly with every passing year, especially in the field of medical and engineering studies (Javed, Zainab, Zakai, & Malik, 2019). Also, most of the young generation is engaged in taking an excellent job with high salary packages as they are not interested in serving their country. Half of the young people do not want to stay in Pakistan after graduating from universities; according to a survey of the local media network, 48% of young people of Karachi (the largest populated city of Pakistan) don't want to stay in Pakistan because of reduced opportunities and financial problems. Most graduated students from medical and technical institutions with excellent grades want to find opportunities in the Western world's competitive environment, which allows them to compensate or reimburse their education costs. In this case, the Pakistani government's mismanagement of the education system and corruption related to the higher educational institutions considered to be the most valuable (Aly & Taj, 2008), transfer of Pakistani professional graduates to better pasture abroad has resulted in up to 70% to 80% of the so-called brain drain, leading to accusations against Pakistan and other developing countries. The majority of Pakistani medical graduates wish to leave the country for postgraduate qualification abroad, mainly due to low salaries, poor job structure, insecurity (Nazli, N Shah, T Shah, & Sidra, 2016). After graduating from higher education, most students cannot find a job in the country, and the government cannot afford them ample opportunities. Due to the lack of uneven growth of opportunities, most engineers, technical professionals, and doctors have no choice but to settle in a developed country.

## **3. Suggestions for the Improvement of Higher Education**

Pakistan cannot move forward until the quality of its higher education system is sufficiently high. Because poor-quality reduces job opportunities, reduces professional productivity, and lacks innovative ideas. These are the critical elements of continued success and progress. In summary, Pakistan needs to be more sensitive to the changing world and expand the adaptability and quality of higher education systems to meet national and global economies' diverse needs.

### *3.1 Balanced Teaching Methods*

The time has come to switch from teaching centered on the teacher's actions to a dynamic learning method centered on pupils' actions (Sylvain Denat, 2017). Higher education institutes need to approach teaching methods according to learners' needs to learn, learn to do, and become. With student-centered education and balanced teaching methods, instructors need to intend new skills and attitudes. Through lectures, teaching

methods should follow self-study, personal counseling between teachers and students, and methods that highlight lively seminars and symposia. There is a shared approach to learning in balanced teaching. Students and teachers are equally responsible for students' performance, including behavior, attendance, and academic growth (M Kammer, 2019). A gradual transition of annual exams and semester exams reform needs to be implemented to assess student academic performance regularly. Internationalization and Exchange student programs between Pakistan and world-renowned universities have to be a significant channel for promoting higher education and disseminating knowledge. Every university must invite world-renowned professors and experts to teach professional and modern pedagogy methods to their teaching staff.

### *3.2 Quantity and Quality*

Higher education quality depends on many factors, including appropriate learning environments, infrastructure, teachers teaching standards, practical courses with annual feedback, research skills, and unbiased institutions observation systems (Nasir Khan, 2018b). In 2019, 1,200 higher education public colleges and 188 universities were accredited by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. Due to the high population rate, Pakistan needs to build more universities as the population number is huge compared to current universities' quantity. Since the Government of Pakistan could not reach the total enrolment rate of 15% in the higher education sector by 2020, the government should recommend establishing new universities to achieve 20% in 2030. Various models have been developed based on the Total Quality Management System and have been used or implemented successfully in many countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, and China (Soomro, & Ahmad, 2012). Pakistan needs to learn from these countries' higher education models and introduce or develop quality management standards in its higher education system. The government also needs to establish an independent administrative authority on Higher Education Commission and all public-private institutes to oversee Pakistan's higher education institutions' quality. Ensure the quality of educational activities. All colleges and universities need to be reviewed academically and administratively by external experts before applying the new five-year academic plan. Self-funded colleges and universities must move forward, pass the certification, and meet certification requirements. According to global education standards, universities should recognize the need for quality education and propose action plans to improve higher education quality.

### *3.3 Development of Cross-Culture Awareness*

Research shows that international and domestic students have many advantages in facilitating interaction in an educational environment with teachers' support. With faculty and staff support, students can frequently interact to enhance their intellectual, effective communication, and intercultural effects. Higher education studies should arrange cross-culture social activities with social or non-government organizations' cooperation to help students understand the culture, art, literature, religion, and technological development. The analysis of social and academic exchanges between local and international students is not extensive enough to learn each other's cultures and traditions. Cross-cultural development requires designing interventions carefully, feedback, and mentoring/coaching. Regardless of whether the institution is fully prepared and supported, sending people abroad or inviting international students cannot guarantee the development of multicultural attitudes or the cognitive framework of students (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016). Students with abilities and talents can use it to develop the world for peace, prosperity, and progress. Many universities in Western countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and China allow international students in their home countries to study higher education through distance learning or by inviting international students to local universities. Similarly, Pakistan's top universities can use the globalization process to offer courses to international students. To achieve this goal, educational institutions must adopt a unified international syllabus.

### *3.4 Libraries Standards*

The Government of Pakistan does not prioritize the development of standard libraries in its higher education system and should pursue according to the requirement of international standards of education. The library must prove its value and record its contribution to the organization's effectiveness for higher education development (Patricia A. Iannuzzi et al., 2011). Library standards in higher education should be designed to encourage and



support public and private libraries. These libraries should play a collective role in student learning, fulfill corporate missions, and position themselves as library leaders in higher education development quality assessment. The Pakistan government, administrators, and educational policymakers or decision-makers should build more libraries in higher education institutions, universities, and colleges to benefit from quality research-data (Khan, A., & Ahmed, S. 2013). The implementation of multiple libraries will help improve the students and researchers' knowledge and research skills from the experience of library resources. This experience can assist with future engagements and training and make the most of these resources to help students and researchers conduct research and analyze research. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan should provide funds or facilitate its institutions to help students develop standards libraries. We need to make more and more E-learning or E-library soft wares. These soft wares should accommodate print and electronic resources and provide a single interface for the students to search for multiple resources (Siddique, N., & Mahmood, K. 2016). Pakistan's government needs to build institutional and public libraries according to the world-class standards and be facilitated with high-tech standards with a wide range of educational and experimental research facilities. Pakistanis universities should focus more on providing quality education comparable to international standards.

#### 4. Conclusion

To improve quality higher education in Pakistan, parents and students expect the government to implement transformational and innovative approaches to higher education according to the globally relevant and competitive requirements. Universities and higher educational institutes of Pakistan need to improve their quality standards and reputation, and infrastructure to attract students. The government must reform higher education policy and promote internationalization by collaborating with the world's renowned universities and building more institutional laboratories and research centers for quality and concerted research. Universities need to arrange such courses, in which students can gain quality knowledge and experience. Invite more multinational companies for higher studies students to reduce recruitment problems to get jobs in their own country instead of migrating to western countries. To improve enrolment and economic growth, Pakistan needs to build more institutions with quality standards to meet future requirements. There is an urgent need to rethink financial resources, education policies, access, equity, quality standards, relevance, and responsiveness. Human resource development will continue, especially by promoting appropriate academic development programs, including learning methods and education. Internal self-assessment and external reviews must be conducted regularly and publicly by independent professionals and international higher education professionals. The government should restrict political involvement, favoritism of faculty recruitment, money-makers institutions, and explore awareness about women's education or gender discrimination in universities and higher educational institutes.

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