

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Purpose; This article analyzes and assesses the current status of higher education in Pakistan to examine emerging trends.

Design/methodology/approach; The discussion concentrates on structure, access, quality, funding patterns, private enterprise, and future prospects of higher education. It is argued that if quality does not match quantity, and the higher education sector fails to bring out enlightened, highly skilled, trained, motivated and ethically committed individuals, the countries cannot meet any of its development objectives.

Findings; to attract the brightest students towards social sciences in different paradigms and research, funds have to be allocated for the higher education sector in the country. These emerging scenarios have given birth to some new issues.

Key words: HEC, GPA, HSC, Enterprise, Emerging issues, Committed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is bordered by Afghanistan in the northwest, Iran in the southwest, the former USSR and China in the north, India in the east, and the Arabian Sea in the south. It is a Muslim state formed after partition of India in 1947 into two separate parts—west Pakistan and East Pakistan. East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh, included the eastern half of erstwhile Bengal and Assam provinces of British India. The erstwhile West Pakistan is today's Pakistan, with a population of about 166 million. Over 97 percent of the people are followers of Islam. About 56 percent aged 15 and older are literate—63 percent male and 36 percent female (Government of Pakistan, 2002). Like India, Pakistan adopted the British pattern of education after independence. Here, also, students may proceed to a college or a university after 12 years of schooling and having passed a higher secondary examination. Higher education refers to all levels of education above grade 12, generally corresponding to those 17 to 23 years old. There are two types of bachelor degree courses in the university, pass courses and honors courses. A pass course (slowly being phased out) constitutes two years of study 3 comprising a combination of three subjects (such as economics, sociology, and English), course takes three or four years and a student normally specializes in a chosen field of study. Students may also, after higher secondary education, study for a bachelor degree in engineering, medicine, veterinary medicine, law, agriculture, architecture, or nursing, for example, which courses are of four to five years' duration.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At the time of its creation in 1947, Pakistan had only one university—the University of Punjab at Lahore. But now there are about 50 public and private universities and 18 other degree-awarding institutions. Most private universities and colleges offer professional courses in engineering and technology, medicine, law, and business management. The total enrollment in higher education is only about 4.6 percent of 17- to 23-year-olds in 2005. Public universities, which are state controlled and funded, enroll 85 percent of students in higher education. Colleges, of which 88 percent are publicly funded, enroll about 71 percent of all students in higher education. Colleges are affiliated to universities. All college students are included in the enrolment of affiliating university also. Thus, total enrollment of a university is affiliated colleges-enrollment plus enrollment in the university departments. This shows that 15% enrollment is in private universities and colleges affiliated to them and 29% of the total enrollment is in non-government colleges and university departments. Given the present rate of population growth, in 2010 Pakistan will have approximately 25 million students 17 to 23 years old, requiring a variety of institutions and courses to accommodate them. To develop the country's human resources, proposals have been made to enhance the access of higher education to at least 10 percent of this age group. For this purpose, massive expansion accompanied by diversification of courses needs to be undertaken, along with increasing the role of the private sector, as the state cannot provide sufficient funding. Realizing this, the government reconsidered its 1970 decision to nationalize educational institutions and allowed, in 1980, private institutions to operate.

General education courses, mostly run by public universities, are mainly funded by the government. Of the total funds available, about 75 percent goes toward salaries (Government of Pakistan 2002) of teachers and other employees. Most of the public higher education funding comes from federal grants made through the University Grants Commission (UGC), which was set up in the early 1950s to fund higher education. Most development money is spent on universities; about 700 undergraduate colleges receive little support. Even so, the state was unable to fully support higher education, and universities raised their self-generated funds to 49 percent of the total expenditure in 2000–2001. Public spending on education has been hovering around 2 percent of GNP for the past

two decades, which is well behind the 4 percent of GNP recommended by UNESCO (Government of Pakistan (2001)) and the 3.4 percent of GNP averaged in 1995 by the South Asia region (World Bank–UNESCO, 2000). The share of higher education is only about 0.40 percent of GNP. It is not surprising that students in publicly funded institutions get an education of mediocre quality, one that does not prepare them to participate effectively in the economic, political, and social life of the country or face the challenges of a competitive global economy. Private universities generally pay much higher salaries to staff and offer quality libraries and research facilities in response to public demand for modern and practical training in business and technology. In 1983 Agha Khan University became the first private-sector university to be established in Pakistan, followed two years later by Lahore University of Management Sciences. The Education Sector Reforms Action Plan (2001–2004) of the government envisaged an enhancement of the proportional enrollment in private-sector universities from 15 percent to 40 percent by 2004 by encouraging the establishment of new institutions of higher education in the private sector. Thus the process of privatization picked up speed, and by 2003–2004, 53 degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan enrolled about 4.6 percent of the relevant age group. The National Education Policy (1998–2010) increased public funding from 2.2 percent to 4 percent of GNP, expanded facilities to enroll at least 5 percent of the relevant age group, and introduced a three-year bachelor (honors) degree, with honors students given preference in admissions and government recruitment. The universities were asked to generate their own funds and quotas were to be abolished. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established to facilitate the development of the universities into world-class centers of education and research. The mandate of the HEC encompasses all degree-granting universities and institutions, public and private, including degree-granting colleges. It supports the attainment of quality education in these institutions by facilitating and coordinating self-assessment of academic programs with an external review by national and international experts. The HEC also supervises the planning, development, and accreditation of public- and private-sector institutions of higher education.

3. EXAMINATION /ASSESSMENT/GRADING

In each semester, students may be required to appear in quizzes, mid terms, final examination, give presentation, participate in group discussion, and submit projects/assignments/lab reports. These to be determined by the teacher concerned will have different weight age contributing towards the overall assessment in percent marks. This weight age can be determined, based on the following guidelines:

Nature of Examination	Course with Lab	Course without Lab
Quizzes	5 – 10%	5 – 15 %
Mid Semester Examinations	20 – 30%	30 – 40%
Assignments	5 – 10%	5 – 10%
Practical/Project (if applicable)	10 – 20%	
Final Examination		40 – 50%

4. GRADING POLICY

The following are the major/prevalent grading systems:

1. Absolute Grading System
2. Relative Grading System
3. Rubric Method

Computation of Semester Grade Point Average (GPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Average (C.GPA)

Semester Grade Point Average (GPA) and Cumulative Grade Point Averages (C. GPAs) will be calculated using the following relationships

$$\text{GPA} = \frac{\text{Sum over Courses in Semester (Course Credit Hours X Grade Point Earned)}}{\text{Total Semester Credit Hours}}$$

$$\text{C.GPA} = \frac{\text{Sum over all taken Courses in all Semesters (Course Credit Hours X Grade Point Earned)}}{\text{Total Credit Hours}}$$

5. RESEARCH REPOSITORY

Pakistan Research Repository is an ongoing project of the Higher Education Commission to promote the international visibility of research originating out of institutes of higher education in Pakistan. The aim of this service is to maintain a digital archive of all PhD and M.Phil theses produced indigenously to promote the intellectual output of Pakistani institutions. It provides a free, single-entry access point to view the manuscript of research executed, and distribute this information as widely as possible. The repository which is currently being populated with content has already made the full-text of over 1800 PhD theses available in high-quality digitized format, whilst a further 100 have been digitized and are in the process of upload. An additional 300 PhD theses are being digitized. Higher Education Commission has introduced a systematic mechanism for the collection and digitization of all the theses produced so far in Pakistan. The repository is estimated to hold approximately 3000 PhD theses by the end of 2008.

6. GOVERNMENT STRATEGY AND ONGOING POLICY REFORMS

The higher education sector in Pakistan has, in recent years, undergone a rebirth. The situation began to reverse itself in the early 2000s, with the government showing a clear commitment to improving higher education, as evidenced by significant increases spending on higher education.

The creation of the HEC in 2002 and the establishment of an ongoing major policy reform program outlined in the Medium-Term Development Framework (MTDF) 2005- 2010 prepared by the HEC. Recent developments in the areas of quality, access, and governance and management include;

7. QUALITY

Establishment of Quality Assurance Agency at the HEC and Quality Enhancement Cell at HEIs. A program launched to equip both new and existing faculty with the advanced qualifications. Introduction of a new compensation system TTS (Tenure Track System) .Provision for laboratories, equipment and scientific material. Alignment of academic degrees with international norms and curriculum revision.

8. ACCESS

Measures have been taken both to expand supply and to boost demand, expansion of existing infrastructure, exploitation of the potential of distance learning and Provision of undergraduate and post-graduate scholarships to students in both the public and private sectors.

9. GOVERNANCE:

(I) Implementation of measures to introduce a culture of accountability in Universities/DAI, to clarify administrative procedures and to institute transparent quality assurance mechanisms.

(II) Strengthening capacity of HEC through streamlining of financial management and procurement procedures, and stakeholder consultations. As a result of the reforms introduced since 2002, the higher education sector has made some progress toward addressing the significant issues and challenges that faced the sector at the turnoff the 21st Century. The impact of these initial measures has been substantial, and the results can be seen at both the University/DAI and HEC levels. For example, total enrollments grew at an average annual rate of 21% between 2002/03 and 2004/05, recruitment procedures for HEI leadership and academic staff is now explicitly based on merit, and HEC is able to process a huge volume of transactions with reasonable turnaround time. Despite considerable progress in addressing the issues and challenges facing the Pakistan higher education sector, much remains to be accomplished.

10. PROBLEMS/WEAKNESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the very day of independence, the higher education could not achieve its proper place in education scenario of Pakistan resulting in Lower Product Standard and enhanced number of unemployed graduates.

The present system of college education provides to the student a little choice of disciplines, however, they have to study many subjects which are neither relevant to their present curriculum nor for future studies or employment. A very small number of college students become doctor, engineer or scientists and the majority try their luck in general education. Some of them are definitely successful in getting good jobs through competitive examination by the rest cause increase in the number of unemployed population of the country. To sum up, we may list the major weaknesses of college education in the following manners: Irrational policy making: haphazard changes. Sticking with the Pre-Independence Colonial legacies. Higher education without determining future goals. In-adequacy in educational environment: Political polarization among college Students. Not developing indigenous model of higher education.

11. POSSIBLE REMEDIES

Nevertheless, we may need an overall change in the system of college education in the light of the guidelines given by the founder of the country. A System situated to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and cultural and having regard to the modern conditions and vast development that take place all over the world. (Quaid-e-, 1947)

12. ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Ijtehad: To welcome modern views/circumstances in the light of Ijtehad Perspective. Character-oriented Education: Balanced Personality in Islamic perspective.

13. NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Strong political will: Long term ongoing policies. Specification of National targets/Goals. Allocation of proper resources. Due regard, respect and status for teachers.

14. CONCLUSION/FINDINGS

Many things like in geographic boundaries and climatic conditions, a dense and growing population, low per capita income, low literacy rates, low participation of women in any developmental process, and underdevelopment. Mutual cooperation is a key factor in dealing with these problems, especially in higher education. Both countries aim to accelerate economic and social development. This requires optimal utilization of human resources. It has, therefore, emphasized the importance of promoting education. Higher education is of utmost significance for modern countries, therefore, must assess the progress of higher education, both in quantity and quality, and take corrective measures.

The foregoing review reveals that enrollment in higher education as a proportion of the eligible age group is low. The first and foremost task is to increase opportunities for access to higher education to meet the educational needs of various sections of groups, including women. Thus, large-scale expansion of higher education facilities has to be undertaken in these countries. Improvement in the quality of education is another aspect requiring urgent attention. Establishing world-class schools of higher education will prevent youth being lured away by foreign institutions. Unconditional cooperation in curriculum development, preparation of instructional material, implementation of innovative practices, use of new technologies, exchange of experts, and promotion of collaborative research are the needs of the hour. Government has also welcomed private for-profit investment in the higher education sector. It has been observed that the impact of private higher education in the region has been positive, because private universities generally pay higher salaries to teachers, offer a good curriculum, and provide high-quality libraries and research facilities.

Privatization of higher education is a relatively new phenomenon and is due to both a social need and a financial compulsion. But most private universities and colleges are providing professional education and are functioning on commercial lines. Opening private universities and colleges is a lucrative business in India these days. Privatization and commercialization of higher education are two faces of the same coin, and hence, commercialization must be accepted. All governments must monitor institutions so that privatization combined with commercialization does not lower the quality of education.

Private universities and colleges have to be kept under strict vigilance to guard against excessive profiteering and be subjected to stringent administrative and financial regulations. A thoughtful debate toward a collaborative regional strategy needs to be planned in this regard. To attract the brightest students to social subjects and research, increased funds have to be allocated for the higher education sector. This emerging scenario has given birth to some new issues. The brightest students are attracted by medical, engineering, and similar professional programs.

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