

**THE NEW SYSTEM OF VICE CHANCELLOR APPOINTMENT AND
SELECTION:
“A STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVE”**

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ABSTRACT

The principal objective of the paper is to understand how stakeholder perceives the new system of VC appointment and selection in Pakistan. VC is the life line of higher educational institute and these higher educational institutes will equip graduates to face global competition and economic crises. Thus VC selection is very crucial when it comes to universities. The system selection and appointment of VC was changed as a result of higher education reform initiative introduced in 2002. Stakeholder perception will give practitioners an indication of how these reforms have been implemented.

The paper used a qualitative approach of in depth interviews of 40 stakeholders. For this purpose semi structured interviews over a period of 8 months were conducted with VC, Ex VC, government officials and policy implementers. Basically the findings suggest that appointments at VC level are fraught with perceptual dichotomies and perceived bureaucratic attitudes. Further perceptual gaps among the various stakeholders on the merit and demerits of the new system were identified.

It is finally concluded that unless these perceptual gaps are bridged and proper steps taken to create an awareness of the merits, the implementation will be highly affective. Surprisingly a huge gap was identified among two different groups of stakeholders. This identified gap covers a main body of this paper. The main reason of this study is to inscribe the perception of stakeholders on this new system of VC appointment and selection. Their perception identifies an alarming situation which needs to be further researched.

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education Commission, since its inception in 2002 has led various reform initiatives to improve quality of higher education and university governance in Pakistan. The appointment of vice-chancellors of public sector universities through search committees was one of such initiatives taken in 2002. The main reason was to bring in professional leadership in universities and higher education institutions (HEIs), through open and transparent selection process. The use of search committee, for selecting individuals for top leadership positions in HEIs, public as well as private, is a well established practice in industrially advanced countries. Education sector is facing an increased pressure which should be taken care of.

Investing in education will definitely give long term rate of return to the overall economy; but it is of no use if we act in wrong direction. We have already stressed that Pakistan has its own problems that can be solved only with indigenous solutions. First step towards a desirable solution would be the one developed after thorough understanding of our own problems. This can only be done if we conduct a scenario based indigenous research. So first we should identify the depth of our problem and then suggest solutions, and such solutions should not be influenced by institutional context. This is the main purposes of conducting this study. Understanding of local problems and local scenarios will lead to a better understanding of the complex situations.

Vice chancellor is especially recognized in university settings. He is an educational entrepreneur. Entrepreneur is used as an alternate to leaders as the nature of universities is changing due to globalization. (Boyett, 1997) gives it a name of “entrepreneurial vice chancellor”. All of us can experience the emerging trend of economic processes. Vice chancellors are seen as a prime minister or a premier in a university community, “university as a community” because they have high level of interest within society (Aitkin 1998)

Vice chancellor is a very significant position, on whom academic leadership depends. This shows the importance of this study. Vice chancellor is at the core of organizational development, individual development and ultimately society’s development. His/her role is very challenging, even more challenging than a CEO in a private sector. As CEO’s decisions effect the company and in return the business as a whole. Similarly the vice chancellors decisions effect practitioners, faculty, parents, students and community at large. At larger perspective educational sector is totally different from industry setting. Organizational rewards are different; rewards in educational sector are not associated with sales or cash flows. Tasks are intrinsically satisfying

(Mello, 1999). Educational sector has its own characteristic that's serving the purpose of educational needs. Robert (1987) study identifies the reasons that make leadership difficult to operate in universities. The prominent reasons are the unclear goal, conflict between professional and administrative authority, dual control systems etc.

Pakistan's Higher education holds a different focus with its own complexities and analyzing it from leadership lens is altogether a challenge. Pakistan higher education system is itself in a limbo of Islamic ideology and British experience (Korson1974)(Ahmad, 2004). Political scenario in Pakistan makes it further difficult for higher education institution leaders to function. In our local setting leaders not only has to influence , motivate and polish the subordinates but it also has to adjust itself according to the political pressures and unrest which creates uncertainty and lessen expertise and effect competency. Government always dominates the higher education around the worlds(McDaniel, 1996). Keeping these difficulties in mind. The issue of selection of a vice chancellor in universities becomes very critical. Unfortunately this issue has never been taken up to that extend where we can make judgments of how this relevant and competent person is selected?

The paper is based on a study conducted on the implementation of new procedure for selection of vice-chancellor from the stakeholder's perspective. The study adopted case study approach well suited to our research questions. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews of major stakeholders including Department of Higher Education of Government of Punjab, Higher Education Commission, Vice-Chancellors and key administrators of public sector universities, Professors, and the members of Search Committee. The paper is organized into six sections: 1) the first section traces out the origin of current higher education reform; 2) the second section presents the outcomes of implementation of new selection procedure; 3) the third section reports the contrasting perceptions of major stakeholders; 4) and the last section concludes the paper with recommendations for improving the system of selecting the Vice-Chancellor.

DRIVERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN PAKISTAN

This is the second part of this paper and it explains the source of this reform initiative. This discussion is very important because, we will have a clear picture of how much this system is

driven by our local need. This new system of VC appointment and selection was introduced in 2002 as a result of major higher education reform measurement. These reforms were initiated by international financial donor agencies. This new system of VC appointment and selection is basically a result of study done by a task force funded by World Bank and UNESCO. They developed a road map for third world countries and Pakistan was one of them. These reforms followed the usual track like every other reform implementation. The idea might have been good but it lost its essence as soon as it fused into our system. Some shortfalls have been observed in this system. These new market driven, transparent and merit based selections are supposed to provide contentment to community, but instead are encountering ambiguity.

Usually international financial/donor agencies influence the reform initiative. To elaborate it further, a content of reform package was introduced in a form of higher education reform; these reforms were part of a report which was developed by World Bank task force and Boston consulting group. Task force was called together by World Bank and UNESCO; both of these are international donor agencies. The main agenda was to investigate the higher education future in developing countries. Then Boston Group also played a very important role in shaping higher education reform. These efforts by international think tanks were presented on an international platform and which was then presented to the government of Pakistan. These reforms were ultimately directed to ministry of education. These reform clearly identified changes to be made in education reforms including VC appointment and selection.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SELECTION PROCEDURE

This new system of appointments was replaced by the previous one. Higher education reform is a chronicle in itself. The results in terms of its implementation are very important. The third part of this paper tells about the results and outcomes of this new system.

This can only be seen if we look at the implementation of this system. The result usually depends on how the reform was implemented. The in depth results are not part of this study but immediate results can be explained. These are

? Education of VC is not consistent. All VC's are not PhD. Even this PhD requirement consistency was also not observed is ads.

- ? There are few cases pending in courts. And universities are run on acting VC
- ? Wrong perceptions about search committee
- ? Diverging views of stakeholders
- ? Delay in appointments

All these are the results of this new system implementation. The change in policy is not giving the expected and desired results. The structure of administrative organization influence political administrative decision making, it means that the national administrative culture impact the national policy outcome. (Howlett 2003)

The impact of institutional context on this new system is very important and it is very obvious as well. Institutional context is continuously affecting the reform process and this issue is not letting the achievement of desired results. The institutional context of Pakistan is highly influenced by the colonial bureaucracy, corruption, excessive reliance on foreign donors strongly held cultural values and mistrust over political parties. This dishonest system is a result of colonialism, British legacy, elitist public service and policy administration dichotomy (Islam 1989)

All these contextual factors also affect the new system of vice chancellor appointment and selection. The first proof of this affect is the contradictory statements of the stakeholders. It is because of these institutional factors that the search committee is perceived as an Appointment/ Selection committee, which is not the case. This system is also responding in the same direction. This search committee is perceived to be highly bureaucratic; this is obviously because of the institutional context of bureaucracy which is highly prevalent in our administrative structure. The policy was implemented with good intentions but it changed the picture when it went through the societal system.

The perception of stakeholders differs varyingly depending on the part they are playing in this process. This study covers all the stakeholders who are part of this new system. Stakeholders include policy makers to implementers, from executors to receivers. Every group of stakeholders holds a different view depending on their position within this new system. The stakeholders who implemented it are very confident about the successful implementation of this process and those who are the receivers again hold a mixed view. Some showed their trust, and some were not comfortable with the process and some were unhappy about the results. This is further discussed in detail in the discussion section.

PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders approach to understanding the firm in its environment is a very influential heuristic device for decades (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Stakeholder's perception is very important since it gives a direction towards achievement of goals. Those firms who "practice stakeholder management will perform better profitability, stability, growth, etc (Pesqueux & Damak-Ayadi, 2005). Effective communication is very important for the implementation procedure to be successful. Any information that is unclear or very directive might lead to serious consequences. Information that is ill-defined or overloaded may leave the interpreter with a confusion that will hinder the implementation process and it may raise conflicts (Makinde 2005). All the stakeholders' views are very crucial and should be taken into account, "the policy makers should enable a policy-related discussion so that the public's participation becomes one of the forces in shaping educational policies." (Cheng and Cheng 1995).

The interest of all stakeholders including government is very crucial, especially in the public sector. This helps in developing good governance and increased accountability within the systems (Edwards & Vice-Chancellor, 2000). That is why government side is also included. Stakeholders were divided on the basis of the role they were playing in this procedure. Two broad categories are policy implementers and the general academia. Policy implementers include Education secretary, search committee, ex Governor, higher education commission and chancellor. The general academia includes the deans, Current VC's and Ex VC's more specifically the interviewees.

Advertisement and Procedure

To start off with the discussion, few people were not comfortable with the structure of the advertisement given. In fact a divergent view was prevalent on the procedure. The academia was against the structure of advertisement. In case of advertisement a large pool of candidates comes into view, which is not considered a reasonable approach by Australian vice chancellors. (Meara B, Petzall S, 2005) The academia would be happy if the policy implementers also mention "nominations" in the advertisement. Higher education representative told me that advertisement should be one of the tools to invite people; some efforts should also be made by the search committee members themselves. They should identify some competent people in society and they should be invited for a discussion, maybe over dinner or tea. One obvious reason is that, people of high posts or high achievers do not feel comfortable to apply everywhere and go

through a waiting process. In that case they should be reached by the search committee. The higher education representative's judgment was very realistic; Almost 70 % of my respondents were very uncomfortable with this procedure. Firstly they suggested that nomination is a better option rather than inviting applications. Secondly they wanted to bond the prestige of this post. This process offended the academia in terms of the way it is being conducted. Many respondents were very offended when I asked them about the procedure of this new system.

CONSTITUTION OF SEARCH COMMITTEE

Now the next sensitive part is the constitution of search committee. As discussed earlier the governor suggested these names, and ensured that search committee is independent and uninfluenced by the government. These individual were selected so that the system can be kept non-partisan. These are individuals that have experience of society at large. These people have already dealt with university and selection processes.

One of the respondent said that the secretary who advertises this post is not linked to the education sector in true spirit. They just come here to complete their tenure and move on. Many of my respondents raised a question that the search committee is here to interview a P.hD Vice Chancellor but none of the search committee members is PhD. Responding to this question search committee members told me that the VC is not only for an academic post it is also responsible for the administrative aspect. The administrative duties that a VC has are more important than the academic duties. A VC should be one who understands the environment and has strong leadership capabilities. Higher education commission justified that the search committee is not supposed to teach or research, they are supposed to simply to select a vice-chancellor. Which is more of a human resource activity and for this the search committee should be sound enough to judge the people. He added that the search committee in those terms is very strong because all of them are dignified people and their performance is extraordinary in their fields. Almost all my respondents were not comfortable with the composition of the search committee or the function being performed by them. The academia respondent's want heavy representation of their community i.e.; highly qualified individuals related to the public sector. Many identified this current search committee as a bureaucratic committee, sitting at home making appointments. All the stakeholders other than search committee members had this view that the search committee should be more active in identifying an individual. They need to do quite a lot of home work before starting this process. They should keep a record of a perspective

individual and not just rely on documents. On this note education secretary told us that last time it was decided that the search committee will also search for people who are eligible for this post. If they find some competent person the Search committee members would ask him to apply. Higher education commission representative also verified this. Again there is a great divergence in the views of search committee and the academic world. Excluding search committee members and those who constituted them, only 4 respondents said that they are fine with the composition of the search committee. Many strongly suggested that members should be PhD and also from the public sector. This way they can relate themselves to the search committee.

Secondly another very important reservation made by the same Ex Vice chancellor was the accountability of the search committee. "Finding people who have the desired profile – and who would wish to become a VC –is not simple. It requires great professionalism in search and selection"(Breakwell and Tytherleigh 2008). In this particular case search committee members are neither accountable nor responsible for the appointed vice chancellor. The search committee themselves accepted that they are the consulting body, not the decision making body hence the VC's actual performance afterwards is not their concern. Again a divergence views was identified. Academia said that the search committee should be held responsible, some mandate should be given to them and they should become more serious and active whereas the party conducting the search said that they don't have the time and that they were asked by the government to do this job. And after selection they are not responsible for the VC deeds. The researcher observed one thing worth mentioning. It was observed that search committee members were not at all hesitant about this research. In fact they were very open and interested in my study. None of them avoid any question.

Criteria of Selection:

It is very important that the criteria and procedure of this system should also be discussed. Now when we talk about criteria, here we find a whole wide shift in our administrative structure. The search committee in their meeting decided the criteria and then gave marks accordingly. The eligibility criterion clearly holds that the candidate should have a P.hD degree. At one glance it seems like we are coming out of the bureaucratic and dictatorship culture to more open, docile and academically strong culture.

Second important part of criterion is that local PhDs weighted less than foreign PhDs. this is very misleading. If we do not trust our own degree then who else would. Giving fewer marks

to local PhD as compared to foreign PhD would discourage both the degree provider and the degree holder. The respondent added, if they want to keep a difference then they should not offer local PhD. The news papers also mentioned that when short listing was done for final interviews many local PhDs were left out, awarding lesser marks as compared to foreign PhD. Many people did not like this criterion. A candidate went in to lawsuit against the HEC over the advertisement stated “preferably foreign PhD” as basic criteria. This undermines the local PhD. The case is still pending in court.

GENERALIST VERSUS PROFESSIONALIST:

Apparently this can be said that it is a shift from a generalist approach to professional approach. Many respondents share that an army individual is there only to rule, they are not much aware of educational settings. They said that we should be come out of colonial system and VC should be a specialist. But on the other hand some people called army officer era a golden era, they added to the conversation that this is very unfortunate that an army individual is handling us well. The teaching community couldn't prove themselves strong enough to bring drastic and worthy initiatives. One professor said that it is very tragic, “why a non educationist suits us well?” Educationists did not prove themselves to be fair VCs.

Unfortunately professors are not well connected to the top. One professor said that because the professors are not well connected to the top, that is why they cannot make phone calls to ministers and so they cannot influence the decision making. For this government should also support VC, not just the army VC. Many saw it as a temporary shift which would be over soon.

Almost all the academic community was in favor of a professional VC, the professor community sees VC as their dream and ultimate post and they think that it's their right as well. The governor justified this shift in a very logical manner. He told us that all the systems is developed according to the need of society. When the government appointed an army official, the universities were facing many administrative issues. At that time only an army officer or bureaucrat could set the things right and address the stability issue. Now the systems are developed and universities are administratively strong, here there is a call for more academically strong individual with extra ordinary administrative capabilities.

Many respondents emphasizes on the personal qualities, commitment and honesty irrespective of PhD degree. One possible option was given by a respondent that universities need a true leader and community should accept it. The required qualities must be there, being highly

qualified is not enough on its own. Higher education representative gave a very comprehensive and realistic view. He said that it's not important that only professional can perform better and not the generalist. This advertisement mentioned "preferably PhD" to not to keep generalist away or to undermine their efforts. It is done because its the requirement of our education system right now. He added when we stress faculty development and research culture then it's important that the VC should be a PhD, as he knows the importance as well. If a PhD Vice chancellor is appointed, faculty can relate themselves to him and he can also be a source of inspiration for them. Obviously this can only happen if he is a good leader as well.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS

One more reservation made by an Ex- VC of a public sector was this that the public sector is entirely different from private sector. VC in public sector has to perform a lot more challenging task than a VC in the private sector, their aims are different, their stakeholders are different and their interest are different. So how can a private universities head committee appoint a VC in a public sector university?

Many respondents (more than 50 %) said that they are not aware how this process is being carried on, and since they are not aware how it is done they cannot be sure about the selection being done on merit.

On making comparisons an interviewee mentioned that in terms of theory this one is much better but in terms of practice there is no difference. All this disbelief is due to economic, political and administrative disorders (Haque 2001). All selections are not perfect. Some said that previously there was no system and this system is much better than the previous one as this system is more objective. But again respondents hold the view that this system does not serve the purpose for which it was made for. Previously appointments were made on the seniority bases but surprisingly the same patterns were observed in this new system as well. Now there might be two possibilities may be the senior people actually performed best or the search committee members had some inclination towards senior members. So many people think that this system needs to be improved a lot.

The search committee should consider the view of the departing VC, as he is the best source to evaluate the insides of the university. The search committee team didn't create much of a difference. On the other hand search committee member said that "this system is better as the

search committee has experience, as compared to the educational secretary who previously used to do this.” Majority of my respondents favored the system but they wanted some P.hD in the committee, some Ex VC of the same university for which candidate is being searched, and some public sector educationist. Lastly they wanted members to be responsible of their decision. They wanted bureaucracy to stay out of education. They want some change in the advertisement; they want procedures that ensure the dignity of the perspective vice chancellors. One respondent criticized that the university law has not been changed. The law still states that the chancellor will make final appointment. The authorities advocated that this is what still happens. It’s a change in procedure, not the final decision. This is an administrative measure and it takes 6 months to make changes in the law. One of the search committee member said there is no need for a change in the law as the search committee is only there to assist. The final decision is the same.

A Higher education representative identified one more issue in this system. He said that the vice chancellor selection process starts when the last vice chancellor has already left. He added that this process should start way before the tenure ends. The new vice-chancellor should sit with the current vice chancellor and the transition should be very smooth.

This system was actually meant to deliver transparency and a merit based selection. According to many respondents this system does make merit based appointments, but on transparency matter there is a big question mark. This system doesn’t ensure transparency at all. When the criteria set is not applied to all, when some appointments are made out of blue, then yes people do question the transparency of the system. Everyone who favored the system had reservations on a few appointees that were not competent enough to become a Vice chancellor, but such cases are only 5%. The remaining 95% appointees are competent people. But even to take a 5% chance hurts the transparency of this system. One of the VC commented that the system should be vigilant in terms of its policies. Many people had the hunch of politics being embedded in the administrative culture. One of the respondents said, although the people are eligible for the appointment but the appointment are made only on political basis or some relationship with the chancellor or some relationship with the political parties or some other influential people. This idea clearly identifies that they are not comfortable with the system. Here the analysis truly identifies a challenge for the Search committee and the education secretary as well. Islam (2004) gave a very comprehensive study on the administrative culture of Pakistan.

The culture that we are living in is get its traces from colonial antecedent, administrative reforms were discussed in this study due to these reason. He used Hofstede's four dimensional model of national culture as an analytical framework. Pakistan scored very high on collectivism, this mean that people give great importance to personal relation, which in turn results in a greater safarish culture. The public at large believes that Nepotism is prevalent in our society. Same is evident in our study: people who are not the policy makers think that this new system of vice chancellor appointment and selection does have some political influence and that is because everything is not transparent after all. But on the other hand the policy makers assured that there is no political influence and the new system was introduced to assure a merit based and transparent appointment. The problem arises because the government tried to reform without consulting the stake holders. In organizations whenever changes are made they are fruitful if only done with mutual consent. But one thing is of great importance and maximum of respondents agreed to it. It is a new system and it should be given some chance to flourish and it should be made better to avoid criticism. One of a respondent gave a justification, as the education is gaining importance, now more people endure higher education, this means more universities. More universities mean more competition. So now it is a dire need that some such system should be intact. This system should be further improved. This system is better because at least it gives some room for discussion and improvement. Otherwise the previous system wasn't even questioned. We as a nation should try to trust our processes if they are truly made transparent. Same is the case with this new system of vice chancellor appointment and selection. It should be made transparent. It's not just a shift from generalist to professionalism. There are many facets which have already been discussed in this study. This study gives many suggestions to policy makers which can help them develop a system which respects the sensitivity of this post.

CONCLUSION

Higher education has been moving away from the traditional structure, towards a more transparent and business like system. The very reason of this shift is globalization and competition. The knowledge based economy made the bond between higher education institutions and economic growth in the country. This bond can be taken in by policy goals. These policies are introduced from time to time in least developed countries. These policies are usually prescribed by international donor agencies. The least developed countries are then bound

to adopt these prescriptions because the promised funds are dependent upon acceptance. The colonial and post colonial structure of governance in these countries is an emulation of foreign model rather than a native context. The context of reform is more important than the content of reform. This is apparent from the investigation of stakeholders view.

Higher education includes university academic functions and administrative issues are taken up by the vice chancellor. VC selection is a very crucial process. A wrong decision can give a lot of harm in the shape of a rebellious society. A competent VC can develop a stable and a healthy nation for all.

In the end I would like to conclude by suggesting that search committee should hunt for competent people themselves, rather than just relying on the CV. Secondly this system need to be more transparent so that the non policy makers can also trust this system. Thirdly consistent criteria for VC post should be developed. Fourthly politics should be kept away from the selections. Law should be amended, this would give an impression of justification and this would also lessen the bureaucratic milieu. Lastly all senior respectable professors should be taken into confidence and their opinion should be given weight so that their dignity is not hurt. The VC post demands the same. This is a very sensitive issue and main problem is of attitude. We have seen a lot of divergence in stakeholder's point of view, this call for a serious discussion and consultation among all the stakeholders. The main idea is to develop trust and to ensure dignity. By ensuing this, the VC can perform in full capacity and the post can be filled by deserving and ideal educationist leader. Government should get serious with this issue and higher education commission now should play a leading role in developing guidelines. Search committees need to be very responsible, active and less bureaucratic while processing this system. The professors and VCs should be more focused, honest and vigilant in their offices. They should serve the community and bring change so that the nation's future can be secured.

We can see the application of this system of VC appointment and selection in other provinces of Pakistan. This could be taken further as a research area. Another area of research could be to analyze the performance of a VC on quantitative terms. Then a comparable study could be generated which would reveal the effectiveness of this new system of VC appointment and selection as compared to the previous system.

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