
The Quality Education Challenges of Higher Education in Pakistan for Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract

Higher education institutions are essential as they provide fuel of knowledge and technologically advanced society which is linked to the social and economic needs of any nation. Graduates from higher education programs are equipped with revolutionary abilities that assist in the transformation of society from a traditional to a modern economy through superior instruction, innovative learning, and thinking. However, the higher education system in Pakistan is fronting many challenges for quality of education. The aim of this study was to provide an overview of challenges of quality in higher education by analysing the basic concepts and frameworks as it is considered that the rise of unemployment in Pakistan is due to a lack of quality education. The design of the study was qualitative and 20 universities including the public and private universities were selected through purposive sampling technique. The thematic analysis used by Braun and Clark 6 phases approach was applied. The findings of the revealed that results that Government, and policymakers when policy developing and implement as needed collaboration essential for quality education which develops an individual's ability to be trained for comprehensive jobs and to learn job-related skills for socio economic development.

Keywords: Quality, Higher Education, Socio-economic development

Introduction

Education must be prioritized as a vital requirement today to realize notions like nation building and economic stability. For this reason, many wealthy countries and regions devote a substantial amount of their financial

resources to education. This includes programs like scholarship programs and the extension of already-existing educational infrastructure (Raza et al., 2023)

While educators and other responsible stakeholders are constantly striving to improve the capabilities of all students, especially university students, Pakistan's higher education system faces numerous challenges that impede its development and global competitiveness. However, by recognizing these obstacles and leveraging the opportunities they present, policymakers and other stakeholders can support a strong higher education system that will achieve great strides both at home and abroad. Pakistan can make great strides in the development of its higher education system while producing a generation of competent and knowledgeable human resources that can meet future challenges. This can be achieved by effectively addressing issues related to funding, internationalization, research, governance, quality, and accessibility (Zia, 2023).

Universities need to provide quality education, promote critical thinking, and prepare students for pressing issues (Keham 2020). Quality is a management process that uses human resources and a set of statistics to continuously improve the services provided by investing in the talent and intellectual capabilities of employees. Quality in higher education refers to its application in the higher education system. As the demand for higher education changes and evolves, it is essential to establish a robust system to maintain and improve the quality of education provided by universities. This study aims to provide an overview of the challenges of quality in higher education by analyzing the basic concepts and frameworks, as the increase in unemployment in Pakistan is due to the lack of quality education.

Review Of Literature

To provide quality education to its citizens, since the creation of Pakistan, great efforts have been made in establishing higher education institutions, which have had a positive impact on the development of the national economy. However, effective utilization of knowledge, abilities and skills is crucial for social and economic development, which can be achieved through quality higher education. Quality educational content must help students develop their language skills and other talents and enable them to express their creativity as elaborated by Abraham and Edmonds (2021).

Problems and Challenges to the Education System in Pakistan

Unfortunately, despite significant changes, Pakistan's higher education sector has faced many challenges over the decades due to economic instability. At the time of independence, Pakistan only had one university, the University of Punjab. However, over the years, numerous other public and private universities have been established in the country (Shakil, 2019). Although Pakistan has many prestigious universities, there is a lack of quality education, which severely limits the country's ability to significantly influence policy decisions at higher levels. Challenges include

a shortage of well-trained academics, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources, and although Pakistan's higher education system has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, it unfortunately still faces many challenges due to economic unpredictability (Ali & Jalal, 2018). These are the major challenges of higher education system.

Flaws in Curriculum

The key document that provides the framework for the delivery of education is the curriculum. This is a curriculum that is shaped by various social and cultural backgrounds. (Fagrel et al., 2020). Curriculum is a means to achieve educational goals. The education curriculum in Pakistan does not meet today's demands. To achieve educational goals, it is necessary to build the psychological, philosophical and social foundations of education. The current curriculum in Pakistan does not meet the standards of modern education and research (Alvi et al., 2021).

Traditional Teaching Methods

Since the founding of Pakistan, various educational strategies have been developed. Successive governments have lacked the political will to actively pursue their initiatives. The policy was ambitious but could not be fully implemented (Ain, 2021).

Lack of Funding

Ackah (2019) defined education as one of the most neglected sectors in poor countries. Various governments in developing countries such as Pakistan fail to recognize that the socio-economic growth and success of the country requires quality education for all children and youth. Pakistan faces huge challenges such as poor teaching and learning, unequal access to education, and low enrolment and attendance rates due to inadequate funding for education. Bukhari et al. (2021), funding for the education sector is at its lowest since the creation of Pakistan, weakening the foundations of excellence for educational institutions.

As a result, the education system has failed to improve the economic, political and social conditions of the country. Majoka (2017) argued that the ruling elite and the wealthy seem to be motivated by their exclusion from the public education system, which may explain their lack of commitment and commitment to reform. This is because the public education system suffers from a lack of vision and stakeholder participation. When it comes to resource allocation, cost is always one of the lowest priorities. Thus, underfunding the public education system became one of the main reasons for the failure of policy implementation in Pakistan.

Lack of Investment

Provision of updated infrastructure (physical, technical, and informative) Aftab and Malhi (2021) discussed that Pakistan's education industry faces several issues, the most serious of which is a lack of investment. The mere fact that most people in Pakistan are unaware of all

the long-term advantages of getting a good education is one of the reasons why education is not a high priority in terms of funding. Pakistani individuals are deprived of knowledge and comprehension due to a lack of high-quality education. This has exacerbated the country's predicament since illiterate parents fail to recognize how education leads to huge psychological benefits, societal expansion, and economic empowerment.

Undirected Education

A solid education system is essential for every country in the world. All nations develop their generation based on positive education and training for social, political, economic, and ideological reasons. Pakistan's education system, due to its lack of direction and has failed to develop and guide its people on a solid political and social basis and does not bring a skilled work force to the market. As a result, unemployment increased. The system lacks cohesion, tends to be a generalist, and does not bring a skilled work force to the market. As a result, unemployment is increasing. This situation can foster a sense of deprivation in the masses. Because of this, there is cultural and political unrest in society. There is also a lack of educational opportunities in the natural sciences and technology. In this way, the development of thinking, reasoning, and creativity in students is not honed (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Need of Development of Cross-Culture Consciousness Research

International and domestic students benefit a lot from promoting interaction in educational institutions through teacher support. Teacher support allows students to interact frequently, promoting intelligent and effective communication and intercultural influence. Higher education programs should collaborate with social and non-governmental organizations to organize intercultural social activities to help students understand culture, art, literature, religion, and technological development. Analyzing social and academic interactions between local and foreign students is not as comprehensive as learning about each other's cultures and traditions. Intercultural development requires carefully designed interventions, feedback, and mentoring/coaching. Whether you are sending people abroad or inviting international students, ensure the development of multicultural attitudes and cognitive frameworks among students, regardless of the appropriate preparation and support from the educational institution (Kuchinke et al., 2014).

Shortage of Qualified and Competent Teachers

Public universities frequently experience a lack of adequate funding, leading to a dearth of essential amenities, including libraries, laboratories, and lecture halls. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient funding mechanism has also resulted in a dearth of faculty members who possess the necessary qualifications. Numerous academic institutions in Pakistan are currently grappling with a dearth of faculty members, resulting in a discernible detriment to the caliber of education being imparted to students (Khokhar,

2018) The issue of higher education quality in Pakistan is a subject of significant apprehension. Despite the proliferation of tertiary education establishments within the nation, the standard of educational provision continues to exhibit suboptimal levels. One of the contributing factors to the substandard quality of education in Pakistan is the insufficiency of competent faculty members, coupled with insufficient resources and outdated curricula (Walkinshaw, Fenton-Smith, & Humphreys, 2017). Shortage of educated and competent instructors, in addition to financial constraints, is one of the most significant obstacles to providing quality education to all in Pakistan. Teachers are either elected or employed through nepotism in Pakistani government schools (Brookings, 2021).

Aftab and Malhi (2021) discussed that Pakistan's education industry faces several issues, the most serious of which is a lack of investment. The mere fact that most people in Pakistan are unaware of all the long-term advantages of getting a good education is one of the reasons why education is not a high priority in terms of funding. Pakistani individuals are deprived of knowledge and comprehension due to a lack of high-quality education. This has exacerbated the country's predicament since illiterate parents fail to recognize how education leads to huge psychological benefits, societal expansion, and economic empowerment. Shortage of educated and competent instructors, in addition to financial constraints, is one of the most significant obstacles to providing quality education to all in Pakistan. Teachers are either elected or employed through nepotism in Pakistani government schools (Brookings, 2021).

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan aims to improve and enhance quality education through strong coordination and cooperation between universities and accreditation where in 1800 programs are established and ensured by the Quality Education Cell (QEC) clearing 209 out of 224 universities have observed the standards set for (i) curricula, (ii) faculty, (iii) examination system, (iv) management and (v) digital resources. This effort has streamlined the educational development towards Human Resource Development in the country as well as abroad.

Research Methodology

All the public and private universities in Punjab and Islamabad comprised the target population. Thus, the population of the study consisted of all the university's heads of departments (HODs). From all the universities in the public and private sectors, the study was limited sample to the social science departments of each. This study's sample size has been further reduced to 20 universities with randomly chosen social science departments. The pre-testing findings at the chosen universities informed changes to the sampling procedure. The technique of stratified sampling has been employed. Every university functioned as a stratum. Individuals were chosen at random from each university, which acted as one stratum. Interviews were

conducted with heads of several universities. The approach of purposive sampling was employed in conducting the expert interviews. The data analysis section contains a description of the specifics of the data collection process. Expert interviews that were semi-structured were one type of qualitative instrument. To gather information and support, a variety of documents, journals, and reports were reviewed for literature. The utilization of expert interviews in social sciences research has become widespread.

According to Meuser & Nagel (1991), an expert is a person who is active in a community or derived process and who bears a variety of responsibilities for the development, implementation, or examination of a challenging issue. When respondents depended on Urdu, the interviews were done in English and simultaneously translated into English. Every interview was digitally captured and MP4 was used for transcription. The interviews took place in a laid-back and informal setting, with an unusual halt when the interview was directed because every expert was in their offices. All the interviews were coded, annotated, and lightly recorded. Secondly, the open-ended questions were interpreted by decoding manageable themes in the thematic analysis of expert interviews that were done in the form of tables to reach the results and findings of the study. There are various approaches to thematic analysis, but that diversity means there is quite a little confusion about the nature of the thematic analysis, such as its difference from qualitative analysis. In this research, the researcher applied Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases approach, as this is arguably the most influential approach in social sciences because it provides a very usable and clear framework for conducting the thematic analysis. It was revealed that during this development procedure, the researcher needed to improve the transcriptions of the concepts which were founded in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For completing this assignment of thematic analysis in the first phase the researcher must listen to the recordings of the interviews several times. Then the researcher read and reread this transcription into the central idea of the answers to open-ended questions of expert interviews. The area, the central idea, and the repeated words were completed by this frequent procedure.

In the second phase of this stage, the researcher begins to organize all data in a meaningful and systematic manner, encoding it and reducing large amounts of data into small meaningful portions. Then coded all segments of the data captured or related to something of interest to the research agenda, the researcher encodes all the text, and the initial codes were generated.

In the third phase, the researcher examined the codes, and some were matched by the end of this step, the code was organized into broader themes specific to the research question. In the four phases, the initial themes that were identified in step 3 were reviewed modified, and developed. The researcher read the data associated with each topic and considered whether the data was valid and supported the themes.

The next step was to consider whether the themeworks in the overall recorded context, the whole documents were critically read for observing the suitability of themes. This procedure is important to check and explore any missing data in the documents during the coding process.

In phase five, the final refinement of the theme was done, whose purpose was to identify its essence, and each topic was approx. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher named and defined the themes in phase five, it is most important to define the themes.

Phase six reflected the final report of the interview data set, the researcher has written up all the reports according to the themes. In this step of the analysis of the data set the researcher tried to provide a concise, no repetitive, logical, interesting, and coherent interpretation of the story that was produced by the data according to the themes. Problems were then factored in, and the results were interpreted and turned into the options offered.

The privacy of the interviews of experts through this study, which had dressed the biases, and the holistic perceptions of the experts were condensed and systematically described without the use of direct citations of the experts, instead, understanding of the topic was summarized. The findings of this research study have been further elaborated keeping in mind the objectives of the research. All the recommendations coming through the discussion part of the research have been organized and placed in a sequence to address the objectives of the research. The domain of qualitative character, expert interviews were conducted; the semi-structured interviews used the research from the head of the departments in which the researcher was developed and used the sequence of open-ended questions and topics that required the detail during the discussion of usually in an accurate order. The methodology opted for this research has been discussed and consulted with relevant experts for conforming the results.

RESULTS

Conduction of the Expert Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. This type of interview provides a fair degree of freedom to move on with the discussion as the situation demands. It is rather dynamic than static. There were 20 experts HODs /Chairpersons were selected from different universities of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and Punjab as represented in Table 1

Sample for Qualitative Data

The following procedure was adopted:

- I. Interviews: /Heads of the sampled Department. The duration of the interview was 40 to 45 minutes.
- II. Social greetings and courtesies were exchanged, and the importance of the topic was highlighted. Conversational approaches were maintained to generate ease and reality.

- III. Subject; Challenges associated with degree programs, higher level of education, and curriculum taught in the universities.
- IV. Institutions visited by the researcher for interviews: sampled public and private universities of Punjab and (ICT) Islamabad Capital Territory as per the design of the study. The themes and sub-themes are highlighted in Table 4.18

The data were analyzed by using the themes and sub-themes.

Table 1: Thematic analysis of interviews

Views of Experts about Quality Education

Themes	Sub-themes	Respondents (Sr)
Quality Education	Lack of Conception of Quality in Higher Education	17 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13, 14,15,17,18,20)
	Take Some Bold Steps to Keep up with Trends	15 (2,3,4,5,6,9,11,12,13, 14,15,16,17,18,20)
	Increase Employability.	19 (1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13, 14,15,15,16,17,18,19,20)
	Misconceptions and limitations	15 (3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15,17,18)
	Lack of commonality	17 (1,2,3,4,5,6,9,11,112,13,14,15,
	Work and business skills	16 (2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12, 13,14,15,16,17,18)
	Strong links between industry and academia.	18 (1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,14,15,1,17,18,19,20)
	Quality in research and faculty development	19 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,14,16,17,18,19,20)
	Government's responsibility	20 (1,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 20,14,15,16,17,18,19)
	Manage and monitor quality	17 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,13,14, 15,16,18,19,20)

Experts believed that there existed a wide range of issues and problems that universities forget while adopting quality systems (the quality organization bundle). One of the experts expressed his point of view 'there is a large number of quality statements and parameters of the models indicates misconceptions and limitations that represent effective quality requirements.'

Seventeen experts 85% argued, "We do not understand the concept of quality education, this lack of conception of quality in higher education is usually recognized as a cause." Because quality is a multidimensional concept that can mean many different things and be understood in many ways, the ambiguity of terminology with external and internal stakeholders and the multitude of ideas with the same or superimposed sensibilities,

procedures, and initiatives. Seeing a lack of commonality between the various explanations for the emergence of quality in higher education, experts noted that quality is difficult to explain and therefore motivates implementation.

Continuing the arguments, the most of eighteen experts (90%) pointed out, “We are asserting ourselves in a world community that is humbled by the day; It is the nature of the times to take some bold steps to keep up with growing trends. Approximately participant confirmed this in his explicit words. Our university has indeed been able to accept students from disadvantaged communities with nothing in return regarding work and business skills.”

More than above nineteen educational experts (95%) believed that our teaching and research must meet people's needs and that there must be strong links between industry and academia. Most of the fifteen experts (75%) expressed their views “We think their evaluation procedures introduced from time to time to ensure quality in research and faculty development. “More than nineteen experts (95%) believed that the quality of higher education needs to be improved to increase the employability of graduates. To approve these phases, governments need to allocate more funding to higher education institutions. Greatest percentage of eighteen experts (85%) said that Pakistan's future depends on the quality of higher education, so it is the government's responsibility to take appropriate and prompt steps and consider the future road map of higher education in Pakistan.

More student loans and scholarships are offered to give students access to international universities and join with students from all over the world to interact for future development. More than seventeen experts (75%) commended that point “We should teach technical work as well as business skills to our graduates so that they may be preparing for the job market.” Brain drains and educational inequality are complementary issues that affect the quality of education. Reduce tenure and increase performance-based contracts and achievements to enhance academic excellence. Competence appears to be one of the dynamic drivers for the introduction of quality, with most of experts emphasizing in “our institutions should provide more teacher training, support and development programs for the empowerment of faculty to enhance quality. “Respondents mention different types of training for students, administrative and academic staff in quality equipment, quality control, evaluation organization, ultimate learning and quality assurance.

Majority of experts focused on courses related to personal skills such as communication skills, professional development, organizational skills, change management and investigative and analytical skills. Most experts favored alternatives such as initiation services, quality management meeting or groupings, knowledge incorporation through participation in capture projects and software to analyze, manage and monitor quality.

Faculty training appointments at Pakistani universities also added to

the concern, as most appointments are said to be intrusive and inconsistent on the need cum merit scale. One of the experts argued, "In our universities discharged professors continue to receive unnecessary transfers and this hinders the professional development of young and energetic faculty members, this should be demolished."

Findings And Discussion

Perceptions and expert views about various challenges that higher education institutions existed that the Government, and policymakers when policy developing and implement as needed collaboration. The evolutionary attitudes on proceeded are fragmented in the all-encompassing development that mostly caused reducing speedily. These causes are the actuality of a diversity of quality explanations and models that point to misunderstanding and restrictions on effective solicitation of quality. This comprises a lack of normality that caused gaps in ideas for quality in Higher Education (HE). Since quality is a multidimensional concept that has many different meanings and definitions. This is related to external and internal stakeholders.

Most of universities seldom provided information related to job opportunities and business skills which were related to socio-economic development. Thus, higher education, degree programs, and curriculum encountered the international standard to cope with the modern-day market. Most educational experts argued that the education system and research must meet people's needs and there must be strong links between industry and academia. Also, with evaluation procedures from time to time that should be adopted. The quality of research enhanced the quality of education which seemed necessary for socio-economic development. Competence as a dynamic driver emphasizing teaching, training, development, and empowerment of faculty to enhance quality was highlighted. Others emphasized courses related to personal skills such as communication skills, professional development, organizational skills, change management, research and analytical skills were highly advocated. According to the perceptions of the Chairperson/Heads of the departments, there are many challenges faced by the education system in Pakistan in public and private universities. Consequently the Government has taken initiatives and steps to improve the higher education quality; however, there are many issues to be resolved. The ineffectiveness of the Government and HEC policies about higher education is hindering, challenges and issues to implementing quality education. International organizations such as World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, and DIFD have advocated the role relegated the social and economic development. Concerning quality education and SDG 4, practices, plans for training, and strategic plans on the part of educational experts HODs/chairperson of the departments highlighted training, policymaking, and funding for the accomplishment of SDGs.

This global goal calls for the collaborative role of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Pakistan with the World Bank, UNICEF and DFID.

This thematic analysis, interview-based, was responded by the academia to the theme of lack of conception of quality education in Higher education by taking bold steps to keep up with trends such as work and business skills development while the empowerment for seen of faculty towards personal skills (development) was responded by of interviewed faculty members. This approach was necessarily included in the interview based on thematic analysis response data because in the comities of course meetings, the dominance felt by the ministries of education at Federal or provinces and the faculty of a specific discipline, might not be heard with empowerment at a certain point but this now means the faculty must be regarded as an obligatory part from technical aspects. Such findings of our study positively coincide and remain in positive agreement with the work done at home by Kayani (2017) whereas the work done in other countries. An overwhelming majority (a greater percentile response as the outcome of the sub-themes of (1) To be a good teacher to produce a good product Such an outcome of the theme of faculty development, under quality education, gave in sight of the respondent which greatly coincides with most workers at home and elsewhere. Such an outcome reveals the real concern of academia but acting upon each of the sub-themes appears as a time-consuming factor. Although research and development in every project proposal R and D is an important component when approved at the planning and development ministry, GOP, Islamabad as well as HEC projects, the responses indicated there is a dire need for the sub-themes of promotion of research. This outcome of the study is quite in better agreement with the work done at home by Bukhari (2021), Zulfiqar (2021), and Ahmed (2021) whereas the researchers from abroad are many, but to shorten the prolongations of the subject, the work of Kuchinket (2016), Ackah (2019) and Donald et al. (2019) some other works have related research aspect as based on financial resources. Alon (2007) found financial support to be an excellent concept for strengthening societies. A student's financial situation, as the scholarship defines an inclusive package of impacts the relationship between educational performance and lending in the Pakistani education system. Some of the researchers have linked research and development simultaneously in the promotion of research in social sciences, with reference to education, as a subject and its outcome towards socio-cultural and socio-economic development and other benefits as referred to above in the relevant headings such as Elfaki (2017), Evans (2018) and Solmon (2002).

Conclusions

This research indicated that the higher education system contributes to development through its mission, and it has responded to

contemporary 21st-century challenges by enhancement of several courses such as introducing technical courses with applied executions for youth by way of enhanced job prospects in the market. The study examined the Higher Education Commission has set up a one-of-a-kind funding initiative to guarantee that universities in Pakistan have access to the greatest laboratory equipment and research facilities conceivable. Education also develops an individual's ability to be trained for precise jobs and to learn job-related skills. Individuals can accrue human capital, enhance labor productivity, and increase lifetime incomes because of these educational effects. Finally, this procedure results in economic expansion. Findings showed that low funding for the public education system has thus been one of the key causes of policy implementation failure in Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan's educational system urgently needs modification and modernization.

Though learning from other countries is universal, the consequences of the transformation fluctuate in each country. How transformations are structured and implemented determines their success and failure is sometimes the outcome of a hasty and untruthful adoption of a foreign model. Encourage scientific research, innovation, and collaboration between universities and industry, as well as bridge the gap between educational institutions and the commercial sector through research excellence and the provision of technical and technical personnel.

It is endorsed to innovatively receive a modification subsequently; it has been deciphered into indigenous exertions to gain the best effects from reforms. To begin, create a national human resource development strategy that prioritizes higher education excellence. The two are intrinsically linked: economic growth and higher education excellence. The capacity to interact and participate in groups, as well as the ability to absorb and develop technology, is all factors in attaining the intended economic advancement. Second, to find more cost-efficient and cost-effective instruments support for attaining higher education like university programs, e-learning, and virtual learning, as well as agreements to secure higher education quality through these methods. Third, a careful shift from mainstream government support of higher education toward public-private education collaborations, which will lower costs while improving quality. It is relevant to mention here that students perceived that the educational system in Pakistan is required to impart practical approaches to entrepreneurship in higher education. It is considered important as students start a new business after completing their education. Also, unemployment can be reduced if quality education is provided to the students.

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