

A Study On The Equity Of Higher Education In Punjab In Context Of Equal Opportunities In Higher Education

Sara Maqbool, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Higher education is central to the development of a country. Without it, countries are bound to lag behind others in the race for development. Without human resources development and institution building, a nation cannot dream of progress and prosperity. The investment in higher education does not go unrecorded and its neglect does not get ignored.

The policies of the Government are placing greater stress on upgrading the skills of the vast resources of human capital in the country through measures promoting access to education, with a focus on enhancing the knowledge distribution power of the economy through collaborative network and the diffusion of technology, and providing the enabling conditions for change in the science system to maximize the benefits of technology.

The objective of the study was to investigate the extent of equal opportunities in higher education in Punjab.

The study was descriptive and survey type. The study was delimited to the higher education institutions of Punjab. The population included 18 public universities in Punjab. A random sampling technique was applied for selection of sample. Ten public sector universities were randomly selected for the above population. Ten teachers (5 male and 5 female) and 20 students (10 male and 10 female) were further selected from the sample universities.

Data were collected through questionnaires developed with the help of experts. Data collected were tabulated, analyzed using the Likert's five-point scale and chi-square. After drawing the conclusions, some workable recommendations were made for the improvement of higher education, bringing equity and access in higher education. The following conclusions were drawn from responses. (1) The concept of gender bias is prevailing in the developing countries of the world. (2) The study showed that there is indifferent attitude of teachers towards male and female students. (3) It was also found that the behaviour of the teachers was indifferent to rural and urban students. It creates region differences to breed. (4) The results showed that girls are not preferred to boys in selection of technical or scientific subjects. (5) The majority of the respondents pointed out those admission criteria effects the students with average grade to get enrolled in higher education. (6) Age restrictions keep the students with genuine problems away from higher education.

The following recommendations were made on the basis of conclusions: (1) The authorities must assure that fair access to higher education is provided without gender bias. (2) There should be establishment of public universities in rural areas to promote equity region wise. (3) There should be equal opportunities for girls in selection of the subjects of their own choice. (4) Teachers should be trained in a way that student belonging to any group or sex have equal behaviour of teachers. (5) Admission criteria must have some relaxation for deprived students. (6) There should be an alternate way in the selection of medium of instruction.

Keywords: equity, equal opportunity, gender bias, criteria, behavior

INTRODUCTION

A crisis in the educational system of Pakistan is demonstrated by the high rate of failure of students in examinations in the intermediate, graduate and postgraduate levels.

Isani and Virk (2003) lament the vast expansion of universities without paying enough attention to the academic quality, high standards, modern methods of teaching and learning, as well as academic freedom or academic ethics.

Much concern has been shown over the years about the state of education, particularly of higher education, in Pakistan. There have been debates, seminars and symposia, but no improvement has resulted.

We hear a lot of deterioration in the educational standards. Even the extent and nature of this deterioration has not yet been established. The reason is that different issues have been confused and there is no clear idea of the real problem.

There are two basic issues which, though very different, are usually mixed up. The question of deterioration of academic standards within the present system of education is yielding the results, which we, as a nation, aspire to achieve. What generally happens is that while taking on one problem, we find ourselves discussing the other; so keep shuttling our thoughts between the two issues, finally coming out with no clear idea of either.

As far as the present system of education is concerned, it will be very difficult to establish that any deterioration has taken place at any level. Quantitatively, as well as qualitatively, there has been a marked improvement and a clear advancement. There has been a manifold increase in the number of educational institutions of all categories. Education is perhaps one field where the growth rate has been much higher than the rate of the growth of population. If the population has doubled in the last 30 years, higher education has registered a more-than-tenfold increase. Thus, quantitatively there has been tremendous and unprecedented advancement.

The greatest treasure and asset of a nation is its number of educational institutions. They make or mar the destiny of a nation. The strength of a nation is built on human resources developed by its educational institutions which trains the brain, provides skills and opens a new world of opportunities and possibilities to the nation. The development of a nation and its education are closely related to each other. The importance of education is realized everywhere and is now on top of the political agenda of most nations.

Pakistan has paid dearly for neglecting education. The nation is divided because we are running three parallel systems of education. Our position in the comity of nations has gone down. Pakistan, after 58 years of existence, does not find itself in an enviable position. Out of 173 countries in the world, its ranking order in terms of human development profile comes to 138(UNDP, 2002). Seen in the perspective of human development indicators its profile in providing basic education, basic health care, safe drinking water, adequate nutrition, energy consumption and gender inequities presents to bleak picture.

This dismal picture can be changed into an optimistic one provided the nation shows commitment and its political leadership is serious in developing its human resources. The strength of a nation depends upon the quality of its higher education system. The example of developed countries shows a direct relationship between the quality of its educational institutions and the quality of its life. The development of higher education thus stands out as the single most important factor where investment would have immediate returns for socioeconomic development and would brighten the future of the country. The nation needs to assure itself that only through appropriate higher, scientific and technological education can we achieve a respectable level of human development and dignified status in the comity of nations.

The rapid means of communication and the digital revolution have opened wide vistas of the world. The rise of internationalization, globalization of economics, knowledge and culture, and the concept of lifelong learning, give distinctive position to higher education, both in international and national contexts. Through its contribution to lifelong learning, competitiveness and the pursuit of excellence, higher education has to play a significant role in society. Internationalization has put university education in the forefront of the world education map. Our universities will have to meet international standards and produce graduates who can compete globally. Accordingly, higher education institutions must be responsive to the challenges of a rapidly changing and challenging new world, expectations of society and growing demands of the rising student population.

Higher education is viewed as a source of great potential for the socioeconomic and cultural development of the country, and it is our conviction that through quality higher education, the nation can be transformed into a developed nation within a lifetime of a single generation. For that purpose, the higher education system needs to be

changed into a dynamic system to adjust to the changing items and invigorate itself through renewal of efforts from time to time. Factors, such as the distinctive nature of higher education institutions, international mobility of students and teachers, accessibility to computer-based learning, pursuit of research and scholarship and globalization of economy, underscore the international context of higher education.

Higher education helps in expanding various occupational categories. Qualified graduates get employment of professional, technical and administrative nature in the government sector and industry. A UNESCO expert writes, “I have attempted to examine the situation in European universities in different professions and specialization supplied adequate manpower to support the growing economies, without which, the level and quality of development that they achieved was not possible” (Sanyal, 1988).

There is a worldwide recognition that the universities, as centers of higher learning, are considered as potent agents of development in building a nation. They are important in terms of generation of knowledge, dissemination of knowledge, and utilization of knowledge. They are primary contributors to economic growth being a source of new scientific knowledge, its technological applications, and by training scientists and technicians. To see whether all of this happens in education, in general, and in higher education, in particular, without any discrimination, the present study was designed.

PROCEDURE

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of equal opportunities in higher education in Punjab.

SAMPLE

In Punjab, there were more than 18 public sector universities. All universities’ administrators, teachers and students who were readily involved in public universities in Punjab were the population of the study.

Out of the above-mentioned population, ten public universities were randomly selected as a sample for the study. Seven administrators, ten teachers and 20 students - both male and female - were randomly selected from each university to be included in the sample.

INSTRUMENTS

After going through the related literature, the researcher prepared three questionnaires, one each for Administration, Teachers, and Students, in order to collect data. Each item was to be responded to on a five-point Likert scale. Two open-ended questions were also asked in each questionnaire. For validation and improvement of the questionnaires, the same were pilot-tested on a small sample of administrators, teachers and students. The questionnaires were accordingly improved and finalized for data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: There is a gender bias in higher education.

Responses	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Total	χ^2
Administrators	7	8	45	3	7	70	86.7 *
Percentage	10	11.4	64.28	4.28	10	100	

* Significant df= 4 Table value at .05 level= 9.488

Table 1 shows that value of χ^2 was found to be 86.7, which is higher than the table value and was found significant at .05 level. Hence, the statement, “There is a gender bias in higher education” is accepted.

The results of this table support Karin and Olsson (2003) who claimed that gender-related discrimination was a violation of the human rights of women.

Table 2: Admission criteria make a hurdle in the access of higher education.

Responses	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Total	χ^2
Administrators	51	17	2	0	0	70	136.54 *
Percentage	72.85	24.28	2.85	0	0	100	

* Significant df= 4 Table value at .05 level= 9.488

Table 2 shows that value of χ^2 was found to be 136.54, which is higher than the table value and was found significant at .05 level. Hence, the statement, “Admission criteria make a hurdle in the access of higher education” is accepted.

The results of this table support Holmes (1992) who found that the most obvious barrier to attending higher education was the academic requirements that were placed on attending the institutions.

Table 3: Higher education should be for all.

Responses	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Total	χ^2
Administrators	2	19	24	14	11	70	19.76 *
Percentage	2.85	27.14	34.28	20	15.71	10	

* Significant df= 4 Table value at .05 level= 9.488

Table 3 shows that value of χ^2 was found to be 19.76, which is higher than the table value and was found significant at .05 level. Hence, the statement, “Higher education should be for all ” is accepted.

The results of this table support Formal (1995) who described that breaking down social barriers meant to give representation to the students from all backgrounds and ensure equity at higher education.

Table 4: Self-financing scheme creates difficulties for poor students in seeking higher education.

Responses	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Total	χ^2
Administrators	23	37	2	5	3	70	67.9 *
Percentage	32.85	52.85	2.8	7.14	4.28	100	

* Significant df= 4 Table value at .05 level= 9.488

Table 4 shows that value of χ^2 was found to be 67.9, which is higher than the table value and was found significant at .05 level. Hence, the statement, “Self-financing scheme creates difficulties for poor students in seeking higher education ” is accepted.

The results of this study support Karen (1993) who found that the cost of tuition and living costs affect access to higher education.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that all the respondents were of the view that acquisition of higher education was necessary and demanding of the age.

Another factor that was revealed by this study was that higher education should be for all, respective of their gender, race, colour and status. It was seen that the benefits of higher education to both individuals and society as a whole, including students from all backgrounds, may ensure a truly representative student body. The higher education could play its role in highlighting that breaking down social barriers within society equity in higher education could be achieved. The barriers at higher education could take the form of, for example, financial barriers or academic qualifications, such as “*numerus clausus*”. The aim of higher education should be to ensure that individuals from whatever background would be able to benefit from higher education and that higher education itself would be able to adapt to this more diverse student population. This diversity must be fully included and the skills brought by these students of different backgrounds and perspectives fully utilized, enabling higher education to face the new century with increasing confidence (Formal, 1995). Schwarzmayr (2001) observed that it was a fact that the more tertiary education a young person took, the greater their individual economic and social opportunities, and also that there was a benefit for society as a whole from increasing the educational attainment of the population. Therefore, it must be made clear to decision-makers and stakeholders within higher education that access must be free and equal and that there was adequate support for all students to develop their potential and to maximize their achievement. As higher education became more representative of society as a whole, the students would have different needs and these must be supported. This support should come from the student unions, the Institutions and governments in various ways.

The majority of the respondents were of the view that pre-requisites at higher education, including admission criteria, are a hurdle in seeking higher education. Holmes (1992) observed that the most obvious barrier to attending higher education was the academic requirements placed on attending the institution. This could come in many forms, such as the student needing to have their high school diploma, requiring specific grades or a certain combination of secondary school programmes. Higher education institutions were able to set their own entrance criteria which could vary widely. One of the most extreme cases of academic barriers to higher education came in the form of limiting the number of entrants being accepted into higher education in the form of a quota system. This was referred to by the Latin term “*numerus clausus*”, meaning restricted number.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of analysis of data, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. A vast majority of the respondents involved in higher education accepted that higher education is an asset to any nation. Respondents could understand its pivotal importance in the socio-economic development in any country.
2. It was found that there prevailed an understanding that higher education should be given respect of the discrimination on the basis of gender, wealth, race or socio-economic status.
3. The majority of the students were of the view that owing to rural areas became a problem in the environment of campus. They were being viewed that teachers, as well as administrators, behaved indifferently towards them.
4. The majority of the respondents reported that pre-requisites at higher education create hurdles to get access to higher education. To enter higher education, the problems of age limitation and high merit system were being faced.
5. It was found that the concept of gender bias prevailed in society. Male students were preferred over girls to enter higher education. It was also found that male students were preferred in the selection of science subjects.
6. The majority of the respondents reported that self-financing is a hot issue in the access of higher education. It became the status symbol. High cost of tuition fees restrained students from entering higher education.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Sara Maqbool is a doctoral student at Foundation University College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. She has been working for the University of Wah WahCantt Pakistan as lecturer since 2005. She has been teaching different subjects, curriculum, educational supervision, human development and learning and educational

philosophy. Her areas of research interest are management, education, training, higher education and educational psychology.

LITERATURE CITED

1. K. U. 1998. *Higher Education A Pathway to Development*. Oxford University Press, Karachi.
2. Alladin, I. 1995. *Racism in Canadian Schools*. Harcourt Brace and Company. Toronto. p. 23.
3. Alles, H. 2001. *Diversity in the Higher Education*. Stylus Publishing Company, U. S. A. p. 65.
4. Govt. of Pakistan. 1999. economic Survey. Finance Division, p. 38.
5. Govt. of Pakistan. 2002. Facts and Figures. Ministry of Education E .F. A. Wing, Islambad, Pakistan. pp.18, 9.
6. Gronlund, E. N. 1985. *Measurement and Evaluation in Teaching*. Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, USA. pp.6-9.
7. Isani, U. A. G. and M. L. Virk, 2003. *Higher Education in Pakistan. A Historical and Futuristic Perspective*. National Book Foundation, Islamabad. p.132.
8. Iqbal, M. 1986. Misali Ustad Sadar Mualeen Aur Mualmeen Ki Nazar Main (Unpublished Master Thesis). Institute of Education and Research, Lahore. P.69.
9. Rees, R. 1990. *Women Discrimination at Higher Education*. Pergamon Press, New York. p.77.
10. Rosalie, K. 1989. Higher Eeducation, Ills & Hopes, In: *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 19 No. 3 Paris, p. 8.
11. Sanyal, B. C. 1988. *Higher Education and the New International Order*. Frances Printers, London.p.312.
12. Schultz, F. 1998/99. *Multicultural Education*. Dushkin/McGraw.Hill, Akron, USA. p.57.
13. UNDP.2001. Human Development Report 2001. Oxford University Press, New York. p. 26.
14. UNESCO. 1961. The Value of Examination, Paris, France.p.7.
15. Webster, J. 1960. *New International Dictionary*. Merrian Publishing Company, Springfield, USA. p.32.