

Higher Education System in Pakistan: Its Ills And Remedies Outline

1. Introduction

Thesis statement:

Education serves a foundation for intellectual growth of a nation. Unfortunately higher education system of Pakistan is facing certain ills such as Academic and Curriculum-related issues, low research output, lack of Governance and institutional infrastructure and access and affordability barriers. Their remedies are updating syllabus, promoting research, reforming infrastructure and addressing affordability barriers.

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M T W T F S

2. Flaws in Higher Education System

a) Academic and Curriculum-related issues

- Out-dated and irrelevant Curriculum
 - HEC Report - 2022 about Syllabus
- Neglect of interdisciplinary measures
- Compliance oriented learning over Creative thinking
 - British Council report about Creative thinking
- Preference for quantity over quality
 - World bank report 2021 about quality of Education

(b) Research and innovation challenges

- Minimal research output and innovation deficit
 - UNESCO Report 2021 about innovation
 - Global Innovation Index
- Lack of International Collaboration and Global engagement
 - Times Higher Education World University Ranking 2024
- Universities as Degree Mills, not creative hub
 - Pakistan Institute of Education - 2022

(c) Governance and institutional issues

- Bureaucratic Governance and inefficient administration
 - For example University of Punjab
- Politicization of academic institutes
- Shrinking space for academic freedom
 - Allegation on Dr. Junaid Haferz
 - Variety of Democracy Project 2023
- Promoting inefficient faculty

(d) Poor infrastructure and resource limitations

- Inadequate infrastructure and academic facilities
 - HEC Report by about infrastructure of institutes
 - For example - University of Punjab
 - - Bahauddin Zakariya University - Multan
- Underfunded Libraries, Laboratories and classrooms

only 0.4% of Total GDP
- Hygiene Issues

(e) Access and Affordability Barriers

- Low access to institutes from remote areas

NESCO Report - 2023
- High Tuition Fee and Education Expenses

For example NUST

→ Gender Parity in Enrollment

UNESCO Report about Female-to-male enrollment ratio

3- Remedies for the Problems

a) Addressing Curriculum-related flaws

a) → Updating Old syllabus every year

→ Promoting interdisciplinary approach

- Mushtaq Gurmani School of Humanities and Social Sciences

→ Creative thinking over cram-based learning

- Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training

→ Preference for quality over quantity

- HEC initiative - NQF

(b) Enhancing Research and innovation

→ Increased investment in Research and development

- HEC "National Research project for universities"
- HEC "Technology development Fund"

→ Strengthening Industry - Academic linkage

- NUST linkage with industries through Technology Incubation Centre (TIC)

→ Promoting high impact Publications

- Tenure Track System by HEC

- International Centre for Chemical and Biological sciences at University of Karachi

(c) Reforming Governance and institutional framework

- Promoting Transparent and accountable administration
 - Inquiry of NAB - 2018
 - Reforms by KPK Government in 2021
- Depoliticizing University appointments
Article 19 in 1973 Constitution
- Ensure Freedom of Higher Education Institutes

(d) Improve Infrastructure and Funding

- Promoting infrastructure academic facilities
Public Sector Development Programme in University of Quador
- Enhance funding for Libraries, Laboratories + classrooms
HEC - digital library Program in University of Punjab
LUMS - modern and digital libraries
NUST - state-of-the-art and Biotech labs
- Solving Hygiene Issues

(e) Addressing access and affordability issues

- Introducing Need-based Scholarships and Financial aid
 - Ehsas Undergraduate Scholarship Program
 - Sindh Endowment Scholarships
- Subsidizing Tuition and Transportation for poor students
 - Punjab Education Foundation Program
 - Balochistan Education Endowment Fund (BEEF)
- Ensuring equitable access regardless of gender
 - Services by Allama Iqbal Open University for women

4) Conclusion

The Essay

In the 9th Century,
during the Islamic world

The Essay

In the 9th Century,
the Islamic world witnessed a golden
age of knowledge when the **House
of Wisdom (Bayt-ul-Hikmah)**
in Baghdad stood as beacon of higher
learning, attracting scholars from across
civilizations. **Great scholars** like
Al-Khwarizmi (father of algebra), **Ibn
Sina** (expert in medicine), **Al-Farabi** (philosopher),
and **Al-Kindi** (mathematician and scientist)
studied, taught and wrote books that
later helped Europe in its scientific growth.
This example shows how higher education
can build powerful and advanced
civilizations. Today Pakistan stands
far from such glory. Although country
has many universities the quality of

higher education is low. Unfortunately Pakistan is facing many ills in the form of Academic and Curriculum related issues, low research output, lack of Governance and institutional infrastructure and access and affordability barrier. There are solutions to these problems are updating out-dated Curriculum, promoting research programs, reforming institutional infrastructure and addressing affordability barriers. The Concerned Authorities need to introduce practical reforms to bring education system in harmony with requirement of this modern era.

Robert M. Hutchins said

"Education is not to reform students or amuse them or to make them expert technicians. It is to unsettle their minds, widen their horizons, inflame their intellects, teach them to think straight, if possible."

One of the major weakness in Pakistan's higher education system is **Outdated and irrelevant Curriculum**

Many universities courses, especially in social sciences and humanities, still rely on the content designed decades ago, which no longer matches the needs of

fast-changing global economy. **According to a report by HEC in 2022**

Over 60% of undergraduate programs ~~has~~ in public universities have not been revised since last **10 years**. This

Outdated syllabus limits the student's ability to think critically, solve modern problems and to compete the world.

Moreover there is also lack of **interdisciplinary measures**. In most universities students

are restricted to their fields only and are rarely encouraged to explore subjects outside their areas of study.

This narrow approach limits the creativity, innovation and critical thinking.

In Pakistan a student of engineering

has little or no exposure to social sciences or, psychology. or communication skills which are essential in today's job market. Most of the universities focus on **compliance oriented learning rather than critical thinking**. Students are encouraged to memorize text books, follow rigid instructions and reproduce cram-based content in exams. This approach discourages creativity and problem solving skills. **According to a report by British Council Over 70% of Pakistani undergraduates lack soft skills and creative thinking.** Pakistani Universities always focus on quantity rather than quality of education. There are **240** HEC-recognized universities in Pakistan but many of them only produce number of graduates not skilled graduates. **A 2021 report by World Bank** highlighted that only **10%** Pakistani university graduates meet international skill standard.

Albert Einstein said

"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think"

Another weakness in higher education system of Pakistan is its **minimal research output** and **weak culture of innovation**. Despite having **240** universities Pakistan contributes only a small share to global research. According to a report by **UNESCO** in 2021

Pakistan spends only **0.3%** of its **GDP** on research and development - far below the global average of **2.2%**.

The focus often remains on publishing a large number of low quality papers to meet promotion requirements rather than producing a productive research that can lead Pakistan ahead in the field of science and technology. **China** and **South Korea** have rapidly advanced in research and development due to strong investment

in university based R and D and collaboration between academia and industry.

Moreover in today's interconnected world universities are expected to build global partnership, exchange knowledge and contribute to international research network.

Unfortunately most Pakistani universities remain isolated from global academia.

According to a report of Times Higher Education World University

Ranking 2024 Only a few Pakistani institutions rank in the top 1000 and even those show

limited collaboration with foreign universities.

Most of the universities are degree mills rather than a creative hub of learning and innovation.

Universities are producing large number of graduates every year. often without ensuring the quality of education or the skills.

A report by Pakistan Institute of Education in 2022 over 50%

of university graduates struggle to meet market demand.

Another major problem in higher education institutes is the domination of bureaucratic governance and inefficient administration. Today public universities in Punjab still have Governors as Chancellors, who appoints "VC", presides over Convocation and approves or vetoes key decisions. In practice the Governor acts on "Chief Minister" advice adding a layer of political oversight to even routine academic matters. This kind of political interference leads to the appointment of inefficient bureaucrats on important posts. This politicization of higher education institutions in Pakistan has severely damaged the credibility, autonomy and academic integrity. In **Punjab alone**, over **30 public universities** fall under the Chancellorship of sitting Governor, who may have no background in higher education. A notable example is the **University of Punjab** which has historically witnessed intense political

interference, both in administrative appointments and student union activities. **Academic freedom**, - the liberty to teach, research and express ideas without fear of Censorship or retaliation - is the cornerstone of education. Unfortunately in Pakistan this academic space is shrinking due to increasing state control. According to the report of Varieties of Democracy Project in 2023, Pakistan's Academic Freedom index fell from 0.54 in 2022 to 0.52 in 2023 in contrast to the global average of 0.588. In Pakistan in the name of freedom of speech many professors have been arrested in recent years. For example Dr. **Tunaid Hafeez** imprisoned since 2013 on blasphemy charges and Dr. **Amer Iqbal** of GCU lost contract after exposing administrative corruption. At the same time these corrupt mafias also appoint their favourite teachers to the important posts. These posts ~~are~~ remained vacant until their

Own favourite persons are ^{appointed} ~~care~~. There
kind of teachers spoil the future
of students.

As **William Arthur Ward** says

"The mediocre teacher tells. The
good teacher explains. The superior
teacher demonstrates. The great
teacher inspires."

One of the basic and
most important flaws in higher education
system is **poor infrastructure**,
resource limitation and **lack**
of funding. Many public universities
lack basic facilities needed for
modern learning such as equipped laboratories,
updated libraries, digital classrooms.
According to **HEC**, over 40% of
universities lack **sufficient labs**
and **research infrastructure** especially
in remote areas. **For example**
Bahauddin Zakariya University
Multan, despite catering to over 30,000

students lack modern research equipment, modern laboratories particularly in its science department. Similarly **University of the Punjab Lahore**, Pakistan's oldest and most prestigious public university, faces infrastructure strain due to excessive student enrollment and limited campus space, resulting in overcrowded libraries and outdated classrooms. All these flaws in public universities mainly due to **poor funding**. Furthermore Pakistan allocates only **0.4%** of its GDP to higher education which hampers the development of academic and research infrastructure. Most of the allocated amount is reserved for salaries while rest of the amount is not enough to maintain infrastructure and for other purposes. It seems as if states wanted more swords than pens. However **Edward G. Bulwer Lytton** said

"The pen is mightier than the sword"

Another most important and critical flaw is **unequal access and affordability** for all students, especially for students from rural areas and low-income families. According to **NESCO** report in **2023** the gross enrollment ratio for higher education in Pakistan is **10.9%**, significantly lower than the global average of over **38%**. In provinces like **Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan** and southern Punjab, vast geographical distance and poor road connectivity make it extremely difficult for the students to reach the nearest university. For example **Balochistan**, which makes up **44%** of Pakistan's land area has only around **9** recognized public universities, most of which are concentrated in Quetta. Similarly, in **southern Punjab**, districts such as **Rajanspur** and **Dera Ghazi Khan** have historically had limited higher education facilities, forcing students to migrate or abandon

further studies altogether. The problem is worsened by inadequate hostels and lack of digital infrastructure for remote learning. Moreover most of the government universities have high fee structure. **For example** Public University like **NUST** having tuition fee of about **PKR 80,000 to PKR 20,000** per semester. Additionally there is high hostel fee from **40,000 to 60,000** per year. This fee structure remains unaffordable for the families earning the national average monthly income of around **PKR 41,000** (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2024). Moreover not only regional disparity in higher education but also gender disparity exists in Pakistan's higher education system. Parents from remote areas don't allow their daughters to go for higher education in major cities. According to **HEC**, as of late 2024 women account for approximately **52%**.

of university enrollment. Memorable **UNESCO** data shows a **female-to-male tertiary enrollment** ratio of **0.96** in **2023** yet still short of the global average of about **1.16**. **Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W)** rightly said, about education

"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim"

It clarifies the importance of an education for men as well as for women. Unless these affordability barriers are addressed Pakistan can not progress in education

So far, the major ills in higher education system of Pakistan have been discussed. Now the essay will present its remedies

One of the most serious problem in higher education system in Pakistan is **Curriculum-related flaw** which must be addressed

by updating the syllabus annually according to the demands of modern era. There should be efforts and to promote and encourage interdisciplinary approaches such as motivating students to explore other subjects in addition to their specific fields. Promoting interdisciplinary approaches is critical to modernizing the Pakistan's higher education system and addressing its socio-economic challenges. This approach will promote creativity, critical thinking and innovation in ideas. Fortunately some initiatives have been taken in Pakistan. For example **LUMS** (Lahore University of Management Sciences) offers interdisciplinary programs that combine **economics**, **political science** and **sociology** under its **Mushtaq Gurmani School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, allowing the students to tackle the issues like development, governance and inequality from different perspectives. Moreover **NUST** (National University of Science and Technology) has

launched a research project that combines engineering, environmental science and public policy to address **urban sustainability** and **climate resilience**. Although **more than 60%** of undergraduates lack critical thinking but by combining their subjects in research projects will promote their learning ability and skilled-based learning. For example **Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training** works on integrating life skills and vocational training in the national curriculum and education reforms. Additionally to promote quality education in higher education system in Pakistan the **HEC** has taken an initiative to address this flaw.

through measures like **National Qualification Framework (NQF)** and ranking criteria for quality assurance. but implementation remains inconsistent. Hopefully in near future it will get implemented. Pakistan must prioritize **Teacher training, rigorous accreditation, and performance**

- based funding. Promoting quality over quantity is essential for the development of country.. Regarding Creative learning **Benjamin Franklin** said

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

Secondly, there are remedies for **research and innovation challenges** in higher education system in Pakistan. Although Pakistani Universities produce only **3%** of **Quality research**, it can be improved. Increasing investment in research and development is essential for transformation of Pakistan from a consumption-driven to a knowledge-based economy. For this purpose **HEC** has launched an **initiative** like **National Research Program for Universities (NRPU)** and **Technology Development Fund**. To close the innovation gap Pakistan must not only **increase**

the funds but also ensure transparent allocation. Moreover there is also a need to develop **link** between **academia** and **industry**. This will provide the students practical skills so that they can serve the Pakistan in a proper way. For this purpose **NUST** has developed strong linkages with industries in **IT**, **defense** and **engineering** through its **Technology Incubation Centre (TIC)**, which hosts **70** startups many of which are led by students and faculty members. There is also a need for promoting **Publications** and **innovations**.

The good and research based publications must be encouraged. For this purpose **HEC** "Tenure Track System and Research for Innovation grants" aim to reward quality publications by offering incentives for publishing in impactful journals. In Pakistan initiatives have already

been taken in researches, such as in the **International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS)** at **University of Karachi**, which houses advanced labs and has produced globally cited work in **drug discovery** and natural product chemistry. These kind of researches would help in future to make the country prosperous.

Thirdly, there must be reforms for to improve **Governance** and **institutional flaws** in higher education system of Pakistan. Transparent and accountable administration is the backbone of an effective higher education system. Yet there ~~are~~ ^{have been} multiple allegations on **Vice** of **University of Sargodha** and **University of Karachi** regarding misuse of universities funds and allocations of their favourite ones. For this purpose in 2018 **National Accountability Bureau (NAB)** launched inquiries against several university officials for

embezzlement and misuse of funds. Moreover

HEC has emphasized adopting transparent hiring practices, e-governance and **performance-based evaluation**

Moreover Universities must be independent and forward looking. University laws must prioritize academic needs over administrative control. Syndicate and Senators should have the final say in academic matters without multiple layer of governmental endorsement.

Leadership appointments - **VC**, deans and **registrars** - must be made through open, transparent and merit-based searches overseen by independent commissions that include **academic**

professionals and **industry experts**

Search Committees must be led by respected scholars not **retired**

generals or **bureaucrats**. For this purpose some progress has been seen, the

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government introduced reforms in the **University**

Act (2021) to ensure greater transparency

and reduce executive interference in academic matters. In addition to ensure freedom of higher education there multiple steps have been taken but unfortunately could not be implemented. Freedom of speech is the basic right of every person in Pakistan under the article **19 in 1973 Constitution**. Protection of students and faculty members from political influence must be ensured. By ensuring freedom of speech students will become able to speak for their rights and about any illegal activity in university. **Muhammad (S.A.W)** rightly said,

"Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand. If he is not able, then with his tongue..."

Sahih Muslim: 49

Fourth problem in higher education system of Pakistan is **poor**

infrastructure and poor funding

which remain critical barriers to the advancement of higher education. To promote infrastructure and academic facilities, the government must adopt a **need-based** and **regionally inclusive infrastructure development policy**. One positive

example is establishment of University of Quador funded under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP)

which aims to improve higher education in remote areas. In the same way out-dated and worn out buildings should be reconstructed and for this purpose it requires promoting funds. Moreover enhancing funds for laboratories, libraries and classrooms is essential to improving the academic quality and research capacity of Pakistan's higher education institutions. **For example NUST**

(National University of Science and Technology) - has state-of-the-art engineering and biotech labs and has received support from international donors and

private sector to build modern R&D facilities. Moreover **LUMS** (Lahore University of Management Sciences) has modern library with digital archives and access to international journals through **HEC" Digital Library Program**. Another example is the **University of Punjab** (New Campus) having recently expanded infrastructure, new classroom blocks, computer labs and seminar halls. To improve quality of education according to the modern world it requires modernization of classrooms, labs and libraries.

David Warlick says,

"We need technology in every classroom and in every student and teacher's hand, because it is the Pen and Paper of our time and it is the lens through which we experience much of our world."

Moreover maintaining proper hygiene in universities is essential

to ensuring a safe and healthy learning environment. To address this **HEC**

and **provincial government** must allocate dedicated funds for hygiene infrastructure such as handwashing stations, proper drainage system regular disinfection. Moreover cleanliness is part of **Iman. Muhammad S.A.W says**

"Cleanliness is half of Faith"
(Sahih Muslim)

Lastly it needs addressing access and affordability issues in Pakistani universities. For this purpose initiatives like **Ehsas Undergraduate Scholarship Program** have played a major role by offering over **200,000** need-based scholarships to deserving students across the country. **Sindh Endowment Scholarships** have helped bridge the gap for the students from underprivileged areas. Moreover

subsidizing tuition fee and transportation costs for economically disadvantaged students is a crucial step towards making higher education in Pakistan more inclusive and equitable in Pakistan.

For example programs under **Punjab Education Foundation** and **Balochistan Education Endowment Fund (BEEF)**

offer full or partial fee to the students based on financial need. **Services**

Institute of Medical Sciences also

offer half fee for the poor students who can not afford to college fee. from the funds collected by professors

University of Punjab and **University of Malakand** offer subsidized or

free shuttle services for students coming from remote areas. Moreover there must be equal access to universities

regardless of gender or region. As

most of the parents don't allow their daughters to go to big cities for higher education. For such students there must be online learning system

Women University Malton and Women University Swabi were created to promote female education in regions with low gender parity ensuring a culturally acceptable and safe environment for women to pursue higher studies. **Allama Iqbal Open University** serves over 1.4 million

students many of whom are women from rural areas by offering flexible, low cost distance education across Pakistan. Educating a woman means educating a generation **Brigham young said,**

"You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation"

To conclude there are multiple ills in higher education system of Pakistan such as out-dated syllabus, lack of quality learning, research and innovation deficiencies, lack of collaboration with International

institute, Bureaucratic control over education system, politicized academic matters, lack of efficient teachers, lack of hygiene, inadequate infrastructure underfunded libraries and access and affordability issues. Unless these issues are addressed Pakistan can not get prosperity. Its remedies are updating old syllabus every year, promoting creative thinking and quality based learning, increasing investment in research and development, strengthening Industry-academia linkage, reforming governance and institutional framework, improving infrastructure and funding and addressing access and affordability barrier. For this purpose **HEC** has introduced multiple reforms such as faculty development programs, Quality Enhancement cells, linking funding to Performance through annual evaluations, Tenure Track System to retain top academic talent, Digital Library, facilitating international collaboration with

bodies such as British Council and
Ehsan Undergraduate Scholarships Programs
for poor and needy students. Sooner
or later these reforms must must
be strongly implemented. Education
is the matter of life and
death for Pakistan. If

The Quid said

"Education is a matter of life
and death to our nation.
The world is moving so fast
that if you do not educate
yourself, you will be not only
completely left behind, but
will be finished up."

Only educated individuals
can take this sinking ship of
the country to safe shores.