

Crisis in Academia: Declining Student Interest in Universities

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Silicon Valley in United States of America (USA), which has the highest Unicorns per capita in the whole world, is the global hub of technology, innovation, and startups. It possesses world's most famous tech companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Netflix, and Tesla. One of the most prominent reason for these achievements is the modern universities of the USA which are leading the world in technology and innovations. On the contrary, developing countries which are having no more than one unicorn are the ones whose universities are struggling with multiple academic crises, leading to decline student interest in universities. Due to academic crises, universities lose their credibility and creates an environment where degrees are prioritized over discovery and innovation which ultimately reduce students respect for universities. Consequently, students of such universities are left far behind the students of those countries which have world's best universities; hence, unable to compete globally. Academic crises which are responsible for losing students interest in universities are out-dated curriculum, lack of appropriate infrastructure, teacher-centered approach which is hampering student's critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, absence of well-trained faculty, exploitation of talent in the guise of unpaid internships, and absence of market-academia links are the

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major academic crisis which are declining students interest in universities. Implications of these crisis are in the form of brain drain, declined literacy rate and hampered economic growth. The way forward to counter these academic crisis would be investment in research and development, updating curriculum, increasing funds for universities and aligning education sector with modern world needs. This essay would bring to light Academic crisis which are responsible for declining students interest in universities, its implications and some practical measures to counter these crisis.

There are multiple academic crisis which leads to decline students interest in universities. Some major crisis are out-dated curriculum, teacher-centered approach, little focus on research and innovation, inappropriate infrastructure, and unpaid internships. As manifestation it can be noted that students enrollment in universities is significantly declining especially in developing countries. According to Pakistan's Economic Survey 2024-25, the total number of students enrolled in higher education institutions fell by 13% in Fiscal year 2023, down to 1.94 million. Moreover, trend of students brain drain from developing countries to the developed countries for better education facilities as well as for job opportunities in the face of multiple academic crisis.

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According to UNESCO data, the number of internationally mobile students worldwide rose from 2.1 million in 2000 to nearly 6.9 million in 2022. These factors depict that students, especially in developing countries, are losing their interest in universities due to academic crisis which consequently undermines human capital and hampers socio-economic progress.

It is an out-dated curriculum that is the first cause of academic crisis which reduces students' interest in universities. ~~the~~ higher education system in universities is mainly based on old and out-dated curriculum which has very little relevancy to the real-world needs. It has been rightly stated that we teach algebra to all, when 5% of them only use it and we do ignore teaching parenting while all of them are to become parents one day. It reveals that the education system should be based on real-world needs instead of theory-based rote learning. Furthermore, there is no little focus on STEM model and vocational skills. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics which is being followed in many countries including Japan and Finland. So, due to these old methods of education, which lack relevancy to the modern world, students lose faith in the higher education system. Therefore, old and incomprehensive curriculum declines students' interest in universities.

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Students' interest in universities is also declines due to lack of appropriate infrastructure of universities. There are very few purpose-based campuses. Majority of the institutions are lacking suitable infrastructure which would facilitate students especially female students and differently abled students. Similarly, there are only few universities which have proper hygienic cafeteria and washrooms, while majority of universities have open air cafeteria and unhygienic washrooms. Furthermore, universities are lacking modern laboratories for research facilities. According to many educational reports, in Pakistan there are total of 269 universities, out of 269 universities, 160 are public while 109 are private universities. Most of the public universities have inadequate buildings. Almost 55% universities have inadequate buildings with no proper hygienic cafeteria and washrooms. This inappropriate infrastructure leads to decline student interest in universities. Hence, it can be stated that lack of proper infrastructure also contributes to declining student interest in universities.

Along with inappropriate infrastructure, teacher-centered approach is also an academic issue which serves as a factor for declining student interest in universities. Teacher-centered approach is a method of teaching where teacher solely play a leading role via imposing their instruction on students. There is no environment

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for open-book discussions, and debates are discouraged. Reward is given for obedience while discouraging questioning sessions. Students have had to obey teacher's instructions by hook or by crook. Resultantly, this environment hampers students' critical thinking abilities and constructs such personalities which are unable to resist status quo. Shahid Siddiqui in his book 'Education: Inequality and Freedom' rightly says that In chains of schools efforts are made to produce student of same brand like programming of computer. It reveals that educational institutions promote reward conformity and discourage debates. Consequently, students become frustrated of such education system. Therefore, teacher-centered approach in classrooms declines students' faith in universities.

In addition, absence of well-trained faculty also contributes to declining student interest in universities. For a teacher, only being highly qualified is not merely enough; training is also required in order to deliver their knowledge in the best possible way. However, most of the universities lack any kind of teachers' training program. Many universities recruit fresh graduates who have no little idea of teaching. Similarly, recruitment of visiting faculty at low wages also hinders the performance of universities. Universities prefer the recruitment of visiting faculty because it costs less as compared to permanent faculty. For instance, visiting faculty is paid

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on the basis of number of lectures they delivered while permanent faculty are to be paid on monthly basis. Due to low wages and discrimination, visiting teachers and professors pay little heed to their job and they struggle to deliver their best. Consequently, students lose trust in education system. Therefore, absence of well-trained faculty is also responsible for declining student interest in universities.

Moreover, waste of talent in the guise of internships and medical housejobs also results in declining students' interest in universities. After completion of graduation, students are often required to work in market as an intern in order to gain initial experience. Although internships are essential for market experience, unpaid internships and medical housejobs tend to decline students' morale because they have to work for free for a complete year as house officer and for months as an intern. Some institutions even impose registration fee for the recruitment of internees. For instance, Liaquat National Hospital recruits medical students for internship on a registration fee of around six thousand per month. Resultantly, many students skip internships because of unaffordability and they lose faith in education system. Hence, exploitation of students' talent in the name of internships and medical housejobs plays a key role in declining students' interest in universities.

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Furthermore, absence of market-academia link is also an academic crisis that declines students interest in universities. Curriculum which is being taught in universities has minimal linkage to modern market demands. Universities are producing non-market ready work force who struggle finding appropriate job after completing their studies mostly because their academic background hardly matches the modern demands of industry. As an evidence, it can be stated that three million students enter job market annually and only 0.5 million find employment, leaving 2.5 million jobless which leads to increase unemployment rate as well. Furthermore, those unemployed persons are unable to find any highly paid vocational jobs or unable to freelance because they were not taught any technical or vocational skills alongside their degree. Consequently, students lose faith on education system which cannot promise them to land on a stable position. Hence, absence of market-academia link acts as a prominent factor leads to decline students interest in universities.

Meanwhile, lack of academic freedom is another academic crisis which reduces student interest in universities. Academic freedom can be defined as freedom to express ideas or challenge conventional thinking. Limiting academic freedom results in intellectual stagnation. Rising trend of banning students unions across the

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world indicates limited academic freedom under demagogue leaders. Even universities in the USA are facing limitations in their freedom of expressing their ideas and complaints. Similarly, in Pakistan, censorship, political influence and limited academic freedom is depicted through bans on students union such as student union ban of 1974 under the administration of Z.A. Bhutto and ban of 1984 under the Zia-ul-Haq regime. When students realise that in universities they cannot even raise their voices against oppressions, they lose respect for universities. Consequently, universities lose their credibility. Hence, limitation in academic freedom also leads to decline students' interest in universities.

Lastly, psychological and social pressure is another issue in academia which results in declining students' interest in universities. Students have to face huge societal pressure such as fear of getting poor results and fear of unemployment. Furthermore, there is huge societal pressure with minimum academic support. Many reports confirm the influence of social pressure on the academic performance. For instance, Academic stress and mental anxiety among the students of Khulna University of Bangladesh found large proportion of students experience academic stress and anxiety. Furthermore, there is little reward for hard work or creativity due to which

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students become distressed. In the face of multiple societal pressure and psychological stress, students' interest in universities significantly declines. Therefore, psychological and societal pressure serves as a significant factor which leads to diminish students' interest in universities.

The essay has previously discussed various academic crisis which are to be blamed for declining student interest in universities. This essay would further shed light on the major implications of declining student interest in universities.

To begin with the implications, first comes the brain drain. Brain drain can be defined as a process of moving ^{eminent} talent from developing countries to the developed countries for better opportunities in terms of better employment or education. In terms of education, developed countries offer standard and modern education which is one of the major requirements in order to align with the transforming world. As an evidence, PIDE report can be taken into account which says that 37% of the people want to leave country for better opportunities. When students lose trust in their country's universities and its education system, they prefer moving abroad for higher education; many find jobs there and never return back to contribute to country's economy. Therefore, it can be stated that brain drain is one of the foremost implications of declining student

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interest in universities.

Another implication which is caused by declined student interest in universities is the low literacy rate hence failure to fulfill international commitment. When students lose interest in universities in the face of multiple academic crisis, they prefer foreign education. The ones who cannot afford foreign education, skip higher education because according to their perspective, there is no point in investing on gaining such degrees which does not pay any fair return. A degree from even the best public university does not represent a good chance of landing a permanent job and social mobility. Thousands of graduates compete with one another for every single government job. On account of these reasons many students skip education which ultimately results in low literacy rate; hence, unable to fulfill international commitment made by country. Therefore, low literacy rate is also caused by declining students interest in universities.

Additionally, declining student interest in universities also act as a factor which leads to hamper economic growth. When students lose faith in universities, they either leave country for better opportunities or they skip higher education; economic growth hampers in both the cases. In case of braindrain, when country's talent move abroad, country lose its future asset leaving behind illiterate workforce which contributes

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very little to the economic growth. for instance, Economic Survey of Pakistan reveals a GDP growth of 2.7% which is very low than the targeted GDP of 4.2%. Therefore, declining student interest in universities also serves as one of the factor responsible for declined economic growth.

Lastly, another implication of declining students interest in universities is inability to compete globally. In order to compete globally, modern and purpose based education system is the prerequisite which enables generations to embark on a path to development and innovation. However, if students lose faith in universities due to academic crises, they would be left far behind the emerging economies of the world. For instance, neighbouring countries are leaving Pakistan behind in 17 different sectors including research, technology, innovation, space technology and Artificial intelligence. Countries struggling with their education system crisis are possessing no unicorns, startup companies, as compared to the countries having modern education system, possessing more than 100 unicorn. These achievements are mainly due to less innovative education system. Therefore, reducing students interest in universities also decline the competitiveness of a country globally.

Although students^{are} losing their interest in universities due to multiple academic crisis, revival of their interest is definitely possible through major

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steps in the way of minimizing issues faced by universities. The first and the foremost solution for crisis in academia is the improvement of curriculum. Old and out-dated curriculum should be updated in accordance with the modern world needs. Furthermore, investment in research and development ought to be the next step so that students are provided with research facilities and modern equipments in order to conduct research. Moreover, funding of education sector should be increased so that appropriate infrastructure could be built. ^{Fund} Expenditure should be allocated according to internationally standard amount of 4% of GDP which is only possible if governments prioritize education. Many countries are putting endeavors in order to maximize their allocation to the education sector. which resulted in the boost of economies of those countries. Furthermore, due to investing \$ in research and development, many countries were able to maximize their exports. For instance, exports of India and Iran are continuously on the rise. The most important reason for this undoubtedly is the education system; what is taught at universities is helping the economy. Indian exports in fiscal year 2024 is about \$ 205.2 billion and expected to cross \$ 800 billion. Similarly Iranian exports are valued to \$ 98.2 billion despite economic sanctions. In the same way, other developing countries could also achieve

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prosperity if these countries pay major attention to the education system especially universities which are the factories of producing talent.

To conclude, there are multiple academic crisis responsible for declining students interest in universities which consequently cause drastic impacts on various sectors. However, practical measure can be taken onto account to revive ~~the~~ student interest in education systems. Some of the academic crisis leading to decline student interest in universities are out-dated curriculum, limited academic freedom, psychological and social pressure, lack of market-academia linker and teacher-centered approach. These issues further impose drastic impacts on country's economy, global competitiveness and various other sectors. Universities are so essential in the progress of country. If universities lose their credibility and the real purpose, would never be able to contribute to the country the way it should. Importance of universities can be depicted through Hitler's offer to Churchill during world war II. Hitler offered Churchill if he did not bomb German universities, Hitler would also not destroy his ones. Churchill immediately accepted the offer and said If England was destroyed and Cambridge and Oxford were spared then English culture would also survive. Although Britain was deprived of all her colonies and resources, it emerged as a respectable

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nation due to excellence in Higher education. Even today, this is the great lesson for the developing countries whose universities are struggling with academic crisis. To achieve prosperity and respects, countries must take its universities to excellence