

STATE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR UNIVERSITIES IN PESHAWAR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The state of social science research and its growth at higher education level is an issue of serious concern among academia. HEC even does not comprehend the issue in deeper context as social science exercise greater role in resolving social issues and inject social change in society. HEC takes some initiatives which are no doubt a good start but there is need to do more in this regard. This study focuses on the impediments that cause a decline in social science at Pakistani Universities. It is also included private sector universities which have been sharing considerably in higher education in Pakistan. District of Peshawar is taken as area of research where the public and private sector universities are selected for survey. In order to substantiate the findings, evidences are also taken from universities located other than Peshawar. Qualitative research methodology is applied for the interpretation of data and explanation of findings.

The social science research at public sector universities has been neglected since the establishment of Higher Education Commission in Pakistan. HEC did very little to improve the dismal state of social science. The history of great academic traditions in Pakistani universities is not very impressive. Irrespective of particular disciplines, universities in Pakistan are continuously being failed in the creation of knowledge which is the prime objective any university. Universities' roles are vital in economic, social and political development of a nation. Philosophical discourse on universities' role in society is not the objective of this study, however there is a large consensus that universities are supposed to provide solutions to the problems of human civilization. Problems can only be resolved through investigations. Universities perform academic investigations to keep the wheel of progress moving. Our social and material developments are rest on academic investigations. In the absence of research, Pakistani universities fail to perform this role. German Scholar, Von Humboldt assigned three roles to a university, that is, creating knowledge, disseminating knowledge and social change¹. The primary functions of universities are to produce knowledge and to impart knowledge. Universities are effective research factories that produce high-skilled human resources.

It would not be unfair to say that in Pakistan, universities' contribution in the production of Knowledge and imparting knowledge is disappointing particularly in social science and generally in all disciplines². Total annual research output of Pakistan's academia is lower than other countries of South Asia. Critiques of academic research in Pakistan list number of factors that include: lack of funding, lack of research techniques, lack of material resources, institutional patronage and inter-university linkages. These factors, no doubt, hinder the research process but above them, in my view, is the individual's determination in pursuit of knowledge.

The state of social science research in Pakistan shows gloomy picture despite of a significant quantitative growth of social science departments and social scientists. Council of Social Science (SOCC) indicates growth of social sciences institutes from 39 to 149

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from the year 1963 to 2001³. Since 2000, the job-oriented field of studies replaces the traditional disciplines of social sciences. Business Administration, Mass Communication, Library Science, Strategic Studies, Social Work, Population Studies and area study centers and institutes have established in Public Sector Universities. On the other hand, private sector universities and institutes have mushroomed in Pakistan but with limited focus on business administration and Information Technology programs.

A very small number of researches produced during last six years got published in international indexed journals. Zaidi points out those local journals of social sciences that do not meet the criterion of international journal. Regularly published journals are less in numbers. Universities research journals usually invite host universities' teachers for contribution. Three examples are important that show the trend: The *Journal of Research: Humanities* of Bahauddin Zakariya University produced one volume each and one issue of each in 1999 and 2000 with total number of pages 140. Out of twenty papers in two issues, seventeen papers were contributed by the faculty members of the same university⁴. Karachi University published Journal of Social Science and Humanities, joint volume 1 and 2 1996-2000 that covered the period of five years. Out of twenty contributions nineteen papers were contributed by the faculty members of the same university⁵. This trend is still continued⁶. The journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Peshawar University and other universities' journal usually invite papers from the faculty members. Along with these quantitative indicators, qualitative analysis reveals serious problems that include plagiarism, rephrasing, down loading of material and cut and past approach.

This research is based on personal interviews with selected faculty members from the research population and administrative staff to explore the reasons that hurdle in quality social science research.

QUANTITY PREVAILS OVER QUALITY: MUSHROOM GROWTH OF UNIVERSITIES

Growth of private sector universities is phenomenal in big cities of Pakistan. Karachi set the trend initially that followed by Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar other big cities in Punjab and Sind. The incapacity of public sector universities in providing higher education to the growing population was felt strongly since 1985.

With the increase in Population the need of more universities was felt in the mid 1980s when population growth rate in Peshawar has got momentum in 1980. In the decade of 1980s, Pakistan was hit by waves of immigrants from Afghanistan were one of the reasons in the population increase⁷. Arrival of immigrants accelerated the market forces that attracted investors from other districts of NWFP to the city of Peshawar. In consequences, number of private schools and colleges opened up in due course of time in Peshawar and its suburb. On the other hand Peshawar University was the only institution of higher studies to accommodate growing number of applicants. In the meanwhile the financial institutions, telecom and NGO sectors moved in quickly to capture the booming markets of Peshawar. Very soon these sectors were in need of skilled human resources to expand their operations and to capture the untapped business opportunities in the province.

To meet the gap between the available human resources and sectoral needs, private sector took initiative in 1985. Private institutes started to provide graduate programs for

engineering and computer sciences. The big push occurred in 2001 when Governor of NWFP granted charter to four universities working in the district of Peshawar. Let us have a quick analysis of the situation of the universities operating in Peshawar region.

These universities at the inception developed their faculty with the help of senior retired professors from public sector universities. Initially they focused on market oriented disciplines in which the Business Administration and Engineering are popular. This trend is still continued⁸. Some universities are now gradually focusing other disciplines of social sciences and specialized field like fine arts and life sciences. Only two universities have social science faculties but due to very minimal turnover of students these faculties are not functional. The field of management science is active in all six universities. The trend of management studies is so strong that the Agricultural University, Peshawar and NUML, Peshawar have also started MBA programs, although both universities are supposed to offer agricultural studies and modern languages.

Universities' owners and universities' academia are at odd terms and conditions. In matter of framing policies, owners' approaches are seemed short-term and profit oriented. While, the academic decision making also requires the consent of the investors to meet the financial cost of the policy implementation. Owners face a formidable problem of generating revenue to meet the annual expenditure of universities. Private sector universities are not yet included to get government funding neither they receive any grant from donor agencies. There are two obvious reasons; first, universities are quite recently established and none of them have an impressive research faculty. Universities' research base is not that strong so it could get grant-obtaining projects from private sector. Though, it is understood that the period of ten years is not enough to establish a strong research infrastructure and faculties at universities, however trends can be and must be set in order to determine universities' future ranking on the basis of research.

A fair analysis of policy documents of universities selected for this research and primary information from the selected institution reveals a disconnect between written policy and its implementation. For example, attendance policy, admission policy examination policies are made by the competent authorities but their will to implement are not seen. Some very important areas are neglected all together that include faculty development programs, funded research, university-sponsored training programs for faculty.

Faculty hiring process which is critical and very fundamental for quality research is vulnerable to maneuvering by any of stakeholder. At part-time faculty hiring, which later on becomes the regular faculty in most cases, individuals' liking prevails though under the guise of hiring process through internal posting. Promotions are based on quantitative numbers instead of quality research out put. Besides the teaching load in morning, teachers demand more courses in evening to meet their financial needs. In some cases faculty members teach eight to ten courses altogether from 9am to 8.30pm that seems humanly impossible if one wants to deliver quality teaching. In addition to that they are also asked or desired to perform administrative functions. Under such circumstances, research out put of the faculty is not expected to be promising.

RESEARCH FOCUS

This research focuses another important set of reasons that is largely related to research skills and writing skills of a researcher along with the aforementioned factors. This research focuses on two important aspects of research that are application of proper

research methodology and writing. These problems are common among faculty members of public and private sector universities.

Private sector has become significant provider of higher education in Pakistan. Rapid growth of universities and affiliated colleges in big cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar is observed since 1995. This study focuses on Peshawar city where a number of private universities obtained charter from NWFP government during last ten years. This research focuses on following aspects:

- Issues related to social science research
- Methodological issues in Social Science Research
- Identifying problems of writing social science research
- Future of social science research

RESEARCH POPULATION

In academic debates a consensus has been found that disciplines of history, philosophy, literature and management studies are included in social sciences. There is a long debate on this issue. For the purpose of this research, a working definition of 'social science' has been derived and population parameters are set accordingly. This research includes following disciplines of social sciences for study:

Sociology, Social Work, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, International Relations, History, Philosophy, Management Studies, Mass Communication and Literature.

Population of this research is comprised of all the permanent faculty members from social sciences of the public and private sectors universities located in the city of Peshawar.

Peshawar University is the only public sector university in Peshawar that offers social science disciplines at graduate level. While we count six universities in private sector that offer specialized disciplines of social sciences and have been completed their ten years since the charter granted. Total number of teachers from public sector is almost double than the private sector universities. Total number of teachers from social science disciplines at Peshawar University is 120. While the total number of regular teachers, from six private universities, are 50. So the research population is 170 all together but with two distinct contexts, that is, public and private.

The population size is manageable and respondents are easily accessible. So we prefer descriptive statistics in order to summarize and present data and measures correlations between dependent and independent variables.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This research generates primary data and uses secondary data in support of the inferences of this study. Secondary data deals with the policies, infrastructure, research facilities and researches published during the period 2000 to 2006. This study exhaustively covers significant qualitative data for this research. Intangible and immaterial data, like events, words, gestures, tones and responses are carefully utilized as an important source to infer on objectives of this study. For study policies, qualitative data are collected around an important theoretical assumption, that is, increased number

of students does not hold institution as university and teaching alone does not lead to innovative expansion of universities.

Primary data are collected on research instrument that is constructed to measure the relationship between dependent and independent variables. In this research two dependent variables and six independent variables are developed:

Dependent variables:

1. Quantity of research, that is, number of publications
2. Quality of Research that is ranking of the journal, application of research methodology, citation, writing of research

Independent Variables:

1. Number of years in service
2. Government scale (18, 19, 20, 21)
3. Teaching load
4. Administrative responsibility
5. Number of course on researches methodology & writing attended
6. Number of training Programs on research methodology & writing attended

Our research methodology suggest normative and critical social science approaches to examine the current state of social science and forecast universities' future as viable institutes of higher studies.

Research methodology issues and research writing skills' problems are examined through the published work of teachers during the years 2000- 2006. Research writing, the second aspect of this research, is the published work with focus on common problems of plagiarism, citation, qualitative argumentation, logic and interpretation of qualitative data.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The context of the research is important in this case. We gather specific information that helps us building arguments around our variables and assumptions. The conceptualization and operationalization for this research happen simultaneously during the data collection process⁹. Grounded theory offers an appropriate framework to develop inductively derived theory about the issue¹⁰.

The respondents of this research study are resided in Peshawar. Peshawar is a small city where people and specially academia are socially well-connected. We adopted direct and indirect strategies to get the data. During the process we confronted with problems in obtaining data from private sector universities. In Peshawar, private sector universities do not disclose the basic information which is supposed to be public. For example on questions 'how many regular teachers on payroll?' None of the private sector universities disclosed this information on phone and even on personal visits. So we tried to contact teachers, directly through social contact and attempted to get information through informal discussion.

In public sector universities, we accessed the data easily through direct and indirect contact. We collected the data from the departments' offices and confirmed it from the

chairmen. Information on research publication are cross examined by the chairmen, concerned teachers and confirmed by checking the journal in which it was published. Some respondents were not willing to provide personal information by saying that it has nothing to do with the research performance.

Institutional data were easily collected through the social science departments of Peshawar University. While private sector universities' data, that is, total number of regular teachers, salary, experience, researches, courses, etc were not easily accessible. Universities' personnel are strictly instructed to conceal information. During data collection process from private universities, we were suspiciously interrogated by universities' personnel. We use personal contact to acquire data from private sector universities.

The published information on the universities' prospectus is found exaggerated. For example universities who have more than one campus out side NWFP, they published list of faculty that does not exist at Peshawar Campus. Visiting faculty is also included in the permanent list. We cross checked these information through personal interviews from faculty members and students. It is pertinent to mention here that the research questionnaire include information that is required by the Higher Education Commission.

The second focus of the research is on the language of research. We have selected published researches from Social Science Journal, University of Peshawar and Qurtuba University's quarterly research journal 'The Dialogue'. We randomly select articles from these journals and examined them from perspective of research methodology and language.

PROBLEMS IN APPLYING PROPER METHODOLOGY

Application of proper methodology is one of the weakest areas of social science research in Pakistan¹¹. What is theory? When should we use hypothesis? How should we test hypothesis? How can we quantify qualitative statements? And how can we explain empirical results in plain English? Etc, these questions are not yet cleared in researchers' mind. This statement is based on our study of various articles published during 2004-2006 in Social Science journal of Peshawar University. One reason is that courses of quantitative and qualitative data analysis and subjects like statistics, mathematics, research methodology, and quantitative data analysis are not yet included in social science curricula. In departments of social science, Arts and humanities faculties these courses are not offered at graduate level that seriously affect the quality of research of our students and teachers. Hashmi's also pointed out that the interdisciplinary orientation is drastically lacking in the growth of social science in Pakistan¹². This lacking is clearly manifested in the research papers written by university teachers in Pakistan which are usually single dimensional. And hence students are no exception. Their term papers are mostly downloaded through net and devoid of basic research techniques. Number of respondents indicates that their quantitative skills are not up to the mark. Their supervisory role, therefore, restricted to subjective and descriptive narration of research themes. We confirmed this 'cut & past' trend by studying students' writing assignments that clearly appeared as bundle of patchwork because of 'cut and past' habits.

Selecting a researchable issue, evaluate its originality and contribution to knowledge, framing of the research question(s), constructing hypothesis, selecting methodological approaches, constructing research instrument, prepare research design and using analytical tools are essential steps in social science research whether it is qualitative or

quantitative¹³. Only two percent articles attempted to adopt proper research methods while ninety eight percent was total narration. Applying inductive and deductive logics while using others' writing are hardly seen in the randomly selected articles. Logical persuasion and cohesion in research writing are seriously lacking and it is because of the language problem.

Research means to find something new or amend, modify, reject or redefine existing theories and idea. And for this, effective and clear expressions, written or oral, are required¹⁴. Most of the people find writing more difficult then speaking and it goes without saying that written words have more value than spoken.

Research writing is an art and writing a research in second language is even a greater task which requires the medium of flawless writing to express complex social phenomena clearly. There should be a flow in writing just like a flow of thoughts. The words are like bricks when placed together properly, they make a proper structure and a strong base for constructing a building of well organized ideas. Well knitted structure of writing makes it easier for the reader to understand the purpose and contents of writing.

English, as a second language, has always been found a difficult language to write in. University teachers do have this fear of writing, which was clearly evident in the published papers. As not being a native speaker of this language, faculty members find it a barrier in communicating the knowledge they have, because most of them lack the ability to express.

In randomly selected articles from two journals, we find a number of problematic areas in writing that include: Cohesion, diction, verbosity, stylistic problems and paragraphic construction in addition to aforementioned methodological problems.

Numbers of researches' titles do not describe the research succinctly. Robert Day defines a good title as the fewest possible words that adequately describe the contents of the paper¹⁵. Well phrased titles create curiosity in the mind of a reader and give a clear picture of the main idea of research.

Another flaw is the verbosity. In writing, the clarity comes with the logical use of words. Wordiness creates obscurities. Writing should have its flow but this flow should not be such that reader finds himself in the middle of nowhere and loses interest. Superfluous and unnecessary words make writings redundant. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he/she avoids all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but a piece of writing should be cohesive that makes the picture clear and multi-dimensional.

CONCLUSION

Universities are supposed to be the intellectual pumping stations that pump intellectual ideas into various facets of our national life. However situation is quit opposite in Pakistan. What is happening in our universities can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Faculty members are only interested in publications that could make them eligible for next promotion.

- considerable number of teachers is involved in administrative work like tabulations, transcripts making, conducting colleges' exams and inspections of affiliated colleges
- Cases of favoritism and nepotism in hiring process are frequently occurred.
- Teaching has become more money oriented rather than research oriented.
- Doctoral researches are dangerously inclined toward compilation instead of original findings (with some exceptions).
- Private sector's universities do not seem prepare to develop a strong research base. Their main concern is to enrolled maximum number of students, teach them and award them degree after completion of the courses.
- Private sector universities hiring process is not based on equal opportunity.

Akbar Zaidi rightly pointed out lack of collaborative research among teachers and institutions. He mentions two interesting examples of limited institutional collaborations. Economics Department at Quid-E-Azam University in Islamabad is next to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics and Economics Department in Karachi University is short walk away from Applied Economics Research Centre. Such a close distances did not even facilitate collaborations between them. Instead, these departments and research institutions develop fraction between themselves. He further points out that the senior faculty seldom encourage junior faculty to come along with them¹⁶.

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION (HEC) ROLE IN PROMOTING SOCIAL SCIENCES

Higher Education Commission in Pakistan is playing an important role since its inception and promotes a competitive research-based culture in the public sector universities in Pakistan which previously plunged into an academic inertia. HEC's regulations for private sector universities brought a visible change in terms on accreditation on the basis of certain conditionalities.

In its early years, HEC ignored the social science disciplines and put more focus on science and engineering. With persistent efforts of leading social scientists and popular voice from the public sector universities, HEC has now given considerable attention to social sciences. The appointment of Dr. Eshrat Hussain was an important step towards the promotion of social science in Pakistan. As an eminent social scientist and esteemed economist of international recognition, Dr. Hussain, with profound vision of social science, is also aware of its dismal state in our public and private sector universities.

HEC's role is pivotal in standardizing private universities. Policy intervention is strongly suggested in all aspects of Universities HR policies except the financial matters (salary and tuition fee). For example instead of the wish of the owners or any other individual from top management, faculty hiring in private universities should be in accordance to the public sector criterion. That is for the hiring of lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor in the private sector, HEC, through its nominee, should be the part of selection board and its process to ensure the eligibility criteria set by the HEC. Performance-based salary criterion should also be introduced in private sector universities. Here the performance of faculty means, quality teaching, research publications, presenting papers in conference, book/manual writing or funded research projects.

Chairman HEC, Dr. Atta ur Rehman's letter addressed to vice chancellors of private universities regarding English Language Proficiency is another important step to

improve the quality of teaching at private sector universities. Monitoring and evaluation should be ensured with tight measures.

With special reference to social sciences in private universities, HEC should also allocate funds for holding workshops and conferences. Private sector universities' teachers are not yet granted funds and scholarships for higher studies in Pakistan and abroad. HEC can also announce some financial incentives for those who present papers in world class universities conferences and publish papers in international journals. In addition to that HEC should also organize international conference annually on social science in which leading social scientist may be invited from all over the world. The HEC supported committee of development of Social Sciences and Humanities have already made some contributions in this regard, but more efforts are needed to gear up the drive of quality research in the disciplines of social science at public and private universities in Pakistan.

Private universities are ready to play their role in promoting social science in Pakistan. Subjects like economics, mass communication, political science, public policy, sociology, psychology, entrepreneurship and NGO management are of great importance for the national economy and they also have a good job market. But what is needed is the patronage of the HEC in promoting private universities by building their images among the important stakeholders through collaborative actions and events.

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