Higher Education in Asian Context: A Study of Students' Attitude towards Higher Education in Pakistani Universities

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Abstract

Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan was established in 2002. Since its establishment, HEC has introduced many interventions and inputs in higher education and emerged a major initiative in Pakistan. Many studies about HEC initiatives were undertaken to explore improvements made by HEC interventions. No study was done to explore impact of HEC inputs on students' attitude. This study was an attempt to explore the attitudes of students towards higher education in changed context in public universities of Pakistan. The sample of the study was the students enrolled in teacher education programs in different public universities of Pakistan. Four universities were conveniently selected including Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of the Punjab, the pioneer institute in teacher education. Self-reporting method was adopted to facilitate the respondents to reflect their attitudes regarding higher education. An instrument named "Students' Attitude Scale" was administered by the author. The purpose of the study was to explore impact of different factors on students' attitudes towards higher education, impact of program inputs on students' attitudes towards higher education and find out the difference between the attitudes of male and female students towards higher education. Independent sample t-test was applied to find out the difference between male and female responses. This test indicates that there is no difference in attitudes towards higher education between male and female students of different universities. The results of the study suggest how different inputs and contexts makes positive attitudes towards higher education in different universities. The findings of the study have implications for teacher educators and curriculum developers how to enhance attitudes towards higher education by providing appropriate inputs. This study also has implications for policy makers at HEC and university administration to plan need based inputs to make conducive environment for shaping students' positive attitudes towards higher education.

Keywords: Higher education, students' attitude, institution.

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Introduction

The aims purposes and outcomes of the higher education has always remained under debate. Back from time when universities were emerging, it was believed that higher education prepares the people who fulfil needs of a society with their own cognitive growth. Higher education has direct link with demand of labour market and ultimately to the development of the country, many reports like report on higher education (1963), UGC report (1984) and other reports also agreed and argued the link between higher education and economic growth. The popular Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, Dearing, (1997) highlights the importance of higher education as, "the new economic order will place an increasing premium on knowledge which in turn makes national economics more dependent on higher education's development of people with high level skills, knowledge and understanding and on its contribution to research."

Tepperman and Blain (1999, p.671) stated four reasons for poorer investment into higher education, "one is cost of higher education; another, the decline financial return on these cost, third, the low return in job satisfaction and finally, a low return in the form of upward social mobility." They also pointed out that the higher education is a long term investment but not rewarded in the same way as invested. Sometimes the people entered in a profession without higher education and get more as compared to joining profession after higher education. They highlighted the benefits of higher education in different dimensions like benefits to society, person's economic development and overall development of a country.

In Pakistan higher education sector has improved with the establishment of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. The HEC progressed rapidly by allowing the establishment of new universities. HEC in its medium term goals 2005-2010 highlights the importance of higher education as:

In the modern economy institute of higher learning are the pillars on which the edifice of knowledge based economy is built. The Higher Education system in a country is linked in inextricably linked withal aspects of economy as well as general education system.... the Higher Education serves as engine of change that not only impact economic development but also serves to strengthen the entire system of education.

Although in Pakistan, since its inception in 1947, every education policy highlighted the need and importance of higher education. The National Education Policy Govt. of Pakistan (1998, p.103) described the importance of higher education in National Education Policy as:

Higher education is today recognized as a capital investment and is of paramount importance for economic and social development of the country. Institutions of education have the main responsibility for equipping individuals with advance knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in the government, business and other professions.

The education policy clearly lay out role of the higher education in Pakistan and describe that there is a direct relation of higher education with economic development. The higher education is also very important to prepare personals which play vital role in the economic development of the country.

An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related (Allport, 1935). An attitude is a state, which is developed as a result of interaction with the system or components of the system.

Measurement of attitude is not an easy and simple task due to its abstract nature which is complex and difficult to explain. As Marlene and Lynn (1999, p.31) describe attitude and its measurement as:

> The concept of attitude, like may abstract concepts, is a creation- a construct. As such it is a tool that serves the human need to see order and consistency in what people say, think and do, so the given certain behaviours, predictions can be made about future behaviours. An attitude is not something we can measure and examine in the way the no of cells in some area of the skin or measure the rate of heartbeat of a person.

Measurement of attitudes of a particular variable not an easy task. For this purpose understanding, the whole frame work of how human beings feel, think and respond to the environment. Measuring complex attitudes, like attitudes towards school or university, facts, feelings, beliefs about the whole system because the level of interaction has many layers within the system, like teachers, environment, curriculum, personal needs, market needs and programme needs. These variables are not easy to change. In educational settings, curriculum input, environment and instructional strategy are changed that influence on attitudes. In this study these variables were analysed.

All skilled and qualified staff in any conceptual framework based on the exploration of attitudes of the students studying at university level towards their studies. Zina (2006, p.112) states "a credible design is reliant upon three key pre 'prerequisites': the design addresses the question; it is suited to the researcher; and ethics approval, resources, time and access necessary to accomplish the task."

Attitudes are developed by interaction of students with different components of the system, like environment, curriculum and programme needs and provisions. It is easy to measure attitudes of the higher education student towards one component of the system, but there were rare studies found for attitudes towards whole system. Marlene, Lynn and Carol (1999) suggested techniques to measure complex attitudes, such as Self Report, Reports of Others, Stoichiometric Procedures and Records. In all techniques different data collection tools are used.

Different research studies explored the attitudes of the students towards some particular components of the higher education but there was a need to investigate attitudes of students towards overall higher studies. This research study was carried out to explore overall attitude of students towards higher studies in Pakistani universities. This study was designed to find out the answers of questions as; (1) what is the impact of university context on students' attitudes towards higher education? (2) What is the impact of programme inputs on students' attitudes towards higher education? (3) Is there any difference between the attitudes of male and female students towards higher education?

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature based on data collected through survey for investigation and comparison of students' attitudes towards higher studies in the Pakistani universities. The population for the study was identified as students were doing their MA in Education from public universities in Pakistan, during session 2013-2014. Due to financial and time constraints this study was further delimited to four universities as below:

i)   University of the Punjab (UoP); being the oldest university and pioneer in Teacher Education (TE) programmes in Pakistan,
ii) University of Sargodha (UoS); one of the newly established universities in public sector,
iii) Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), Multan; the largest university from southern Punjab and, since its creation, is offering TE programmes,
iv) Islamic International University (IIU) from Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT); the oldest public university in ICT and offering TE programmes. The students of this university represent all parts of Pakistan

The total population of the study was 970 students who has been doing MA Education from public universities in Pakistan. A purposive sampling technique was used. All students, who were in their final semester, in above mentioned universities make the sample of the study.

To collect the opinion from sampled students, a questionnaire was developed on the five point Likert scale which was named as "Students' Attitude Scale". This questionnaire consisted of fifty five close ended questions on five rate scale. Respondents were asked to rate each item as per own perceptions and beliefs regarding their attitudes towards higher education as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SDA). In order to validate the questionnaires, the improved versions of the questionnaires were tried out on 15 students of M.A. Education at IER, University of the Punjab. The data was coded in SPSS and reliability of the instrument was analysed. The reliability of Students' Attitudes Scale with *Cronbach Alpha was 0.88* which shows high reliability of the instrument. To analyse the results of different components of higher education, within each set of data, one sample t-test was used. An Independent sample t-test was used to compare the results between male and female set of data.

Analysis of Data and Results

Table 1

Factor wise Analysis of all Universities

Factors	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Attitude	199	209.99	28.16	22.49	198	.000
Students' Self Traits	199	54.57	7.70	-202.43	198	.000
Program and Curriculum Inputs	197	41.83	5.02	-344.50	196	.000
Teachers/ Teaching Techniques	197	23.77	3.75	-528.33	196	.000
Higher Education	197	62.80	8.25	-173.88	196	.000
Achievements/ Skills	196	28.65	3.58	-532.86	195	.000

Comparing students' response of attitude regarding higher studies one sample t-test was applied of all the students enrolled in teacher education programmaes. The table reveals that the t value (198) = 22.49, p = 0.000 is significantly different which suggests that mean of attitude regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 165.

Comparing students' responses of self traits show that the t value (198) = -202.43, p = 0.000 is significantly different which suggests that Pakistani students' mean of self traits regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 45.omparing students' responses of programme and curriculum inputs unfolds that the t value (196) = -344.50, p=0.000 is significantly different which suggests that students' mean of programme and curriculum inputs regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 33.

Comparing students' responses of teachers/ teaching techniques regarding higher studies show that the t value (196) = -528.33, p = 0.000 is significantly different which suggests that students' mean of teachers/ teaching techniques regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 18.Comparing students' responses of higher education indicates that t value (196) = -173.88, p = 0.000 is significantly different which suggests that students' mean of higher education is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 48.

Comparing students' responses of achievement/ skills regarding higher studies one sample t-test was applied of all the students, the table reveals that the t value (195) = -532.86, p = 0.000 is significantly different which suggests that students' mean of achievements/ skills regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value i.e. 21.

In order to find out significant difference between attitudes among males and females students regarding higher studies, *independent sample t-test* was carried out. Tables below show this analysis.

Table 2

Gender wise Analysis of different factors

Factor	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Students Self Traits	Male	15	56.33	6.82	-0.05	195	0.96
	Female	182	56.45	7.84			
Program and Curriculum Inputs	Male	15	40.33	7.12	-2.47	193	0.01
	Female	180	44.18	5.67			
Teachers/Teaching Techniques	Male	15	23.07	4.68	-0.81	193	0.42
	Female	180	23.88	3.65			
Higher Education	Male	15	25.80	4.95	-3.16	193	0.00
	Female	180	29.33	4.09			
Institution	Male	15	29.27	8.37	-3.21	193	0.00
	Female	180	34.12	5.36			
Achievements/ skills	Male	14	28.71	2.59	0.06	192	0.95
	Female	180	28.65	3.66			
Overall	Male	15	201.60	31.87	-1.72	195	0.09
	Female	182	214.84	28.35			

The table shows that in Students' self traits the t value (195) = -0.05, p = 0.96 is not significantly different which suggests that males and females students' mean of attitude regarding students self traits is not significantly different between male and female students.

Comparing students' responses of program and curriculum inputs the t value is (193) = -2.47, p = 0.01 is significantly different which suggests that males and females students' mean of attitude regarding this factor is significantly higher as compared to the test. Comparing students' responses of teachers/ teaching techniques shows that the t value (193) = -0.81, p = 0.42 is not significantly different which suggests that students' mean of males and females in teachers/ teaching techniques regarding higher studies has similar type of attitude towards higher education.

Comparing students' responses of higher education t-test shows that the t value (193) = -3.16, p = 0.00 is significantly different which suggests that students' mean of males and females in higher education regarding higher studies is significantly higher as compared to the test value. Regarding institution component, reveals that the t value (193) = -3.21, p = 0.00 is significantly different which suggests that male and female students' mean regarding institution is significantly different when comparing them. Comparing students' responses of students' achievement/skills components suggests t-test the t value (192) = -0.06, p = 0.95 is not significantly different which suggests that students' mean of male and female students' in this component is not significantly higher as compared to the test value.

Regarding overall mean of male and female students regarding higher education reveals that the t value (195) = -1.72, p = 0.09 is not significantly different which suggests that male and female students' mean regarding overall towards higher education is not significantly different when comparing them.

Discussion

There are different explanations and definitions of attitude and has dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. The purpose of the study was designed to explore students' attitudes towards higher studies. Reid (2006) also suggested that in education settings, attitudes are multifaceted in nature and the measurement of attitude depends upon the nature of the study and indicators under study.

Different methods are used to measure attitude but self-reporting method was used in this study which was also suggested by Marlene and Lynn, (1999) that "Self-Report" method is good to use to measure attitudes. He also suggested that questionnaire is a powerful tool to use for data collection when your respondents are well educated and able to understand the questions. They have sufficient self-awareness to provide necessary information and are likely to answer honestly and fairly. This study is designed to find out attitude of students towards over all higher education in totality and questionnaire was used because the respondents were doing their Master.

The study found that students have a positive attitude towards their institutions and teaching techniques use by their faculty during teaching. This finding is supported by Hofman and Kremer (2011) research study has proved that students' and instructors' own and perceived attitudes toward higher studies. This study also focused to compare attitude of male and female students and findings suggest that there was no significant difference between them towards higher education.

Conclusion

Overall results of the study show that Masters in education is not much popular in male students in Pakistani public universities. There are very low number of male students in all sampled public universities in Pakistan. Students enrolled in these universities, both male and female, took Master in Education on their own choice. Both groups, male and female, were similar in their self traits. There is a significant difference between attitudes of students in different components and different explanations can be done in this regard.

Majority of the students have positive attitude towards doing M. Phil / Ph.D. Attitude of students is more positive towards role of their parents in their higher education. The students have also positive attitudes towards the role of their peers and fellows in their studies. The students have shown positive attitude towards their teaching faculty. The students were more optimistic to get job after completion of their degree.

The overall attitude of male and female students towards higher education almost same, although there were some differences found in some components of higher studies.

Recommendations

This study suggests some recommendations for universities as follows. Faculty members of universities may be trained, through short courses on teaching methodology and student engagement techniques.

More learning support material and environment should be provided to existing institution so that should support students to enhance their attitude towards higher education.

Admission should be based on the observed potential that whether they have the essential requisites that are necessary for the achievement of objectives of higher studies.

It is recommended that further studies should be done to explore what are the underline factors that enhance students' attitude towards higher education.

The research sample may be broadened, a longitudinal qualitative studies may be conducted on a large scale sample.

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