



Higher Education in Balochistan: Status and Way Forward

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Abstract: Education plays a dominant and vital role in an individual's personal and professional growth. The growth and progress of a society without education is only wishful thinking. Globally, the education system has been divided into three phases that include primary, secondary, and post-secondary, also called tertiary or higher education (HE). HE is considered the last and highest stage of formal education. HE is a significant game-changer that enhances gainful employment opportunities and improves the country's value system, civic sense, and socio-economic uplift. The HE of Balochistan is still lagging and is not capable of bringing forth a way forward for the socio-economic development of the people of Balochistan. This study aims to address the problems and current status of HE in Balochistan and provide policy recommendations to sort out those issues. The methodology for conducting this study was based on a detailed survey of the universities. A questionnaire was circulated among the vice-chancellors of the universities and the former vice-chancellor of the University of Balochistan, as well as the former Chancellor and Governor of Balochistan, across the province. The study concluded that the universities are facing severe financial constraints in revenue generation; they may not fulfil the demands of the university.

Introduction

Education plays a dominant and vital role in an individual's personal and professional growth. The growth and progress in a society without education is only wishful thinking. Education provides employment, economic and social freedom, mobility, both national and international, economic well-being, problem-solving skills, and empowerment. (Harry, 2005) It further refines individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors and motivates them to follow a decent, civil, and sustainable lifestyle. Undoubtedly, it plays a prominent role in the human capital development of a country. However, it can only be

achieved by providing quality education. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved without considering Goal Four which is related to quality education. Quality education is therefore considered to be the major indicator of the sustainable development agenda 2030. (SDGs,2022)

Globally, the education system has been divided into three phases that include primary, secondary, and post-secondary, also called

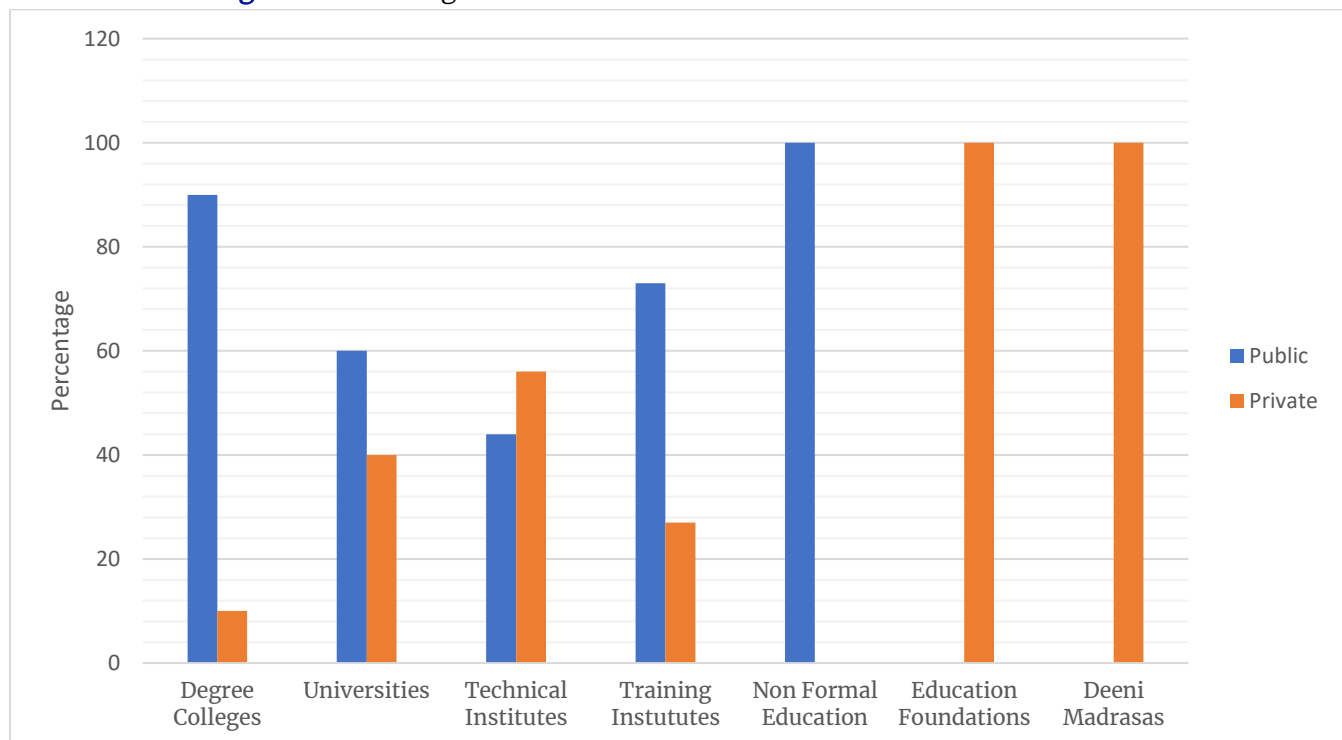
tertiary or Higher Education (HE). HE is considered the last and highest stage of formal education. (William, 2022). that produces individuals who work professionally to better themselves, society, and the economy. (Bashir et al, 2021) It gives an individual a chance to excel in the domain of his own choice and preference. Therefore, the purpose of HE is to provide and create knowledge that will give solutions to the problems faced by societies. (Bashir et al, 2021) It is evident from the existing literature that HE has various and complex results. These outcomes can be divided into two categories that include personal and collective benefits. The personal benefits include the growth of individual capabilities, earnings, skills, employment, knowledge, and social status. Some of the indicators of personal or individual outcomes can be measured, like their earnings and access to decent work on the strength of their degree. The collective outcome can be seen in creating and promoting new knowledge, scientific or

humanitarian/social, that helps the society, the government, technological development, and creates socio-economic opportunities for the society. (Simon, 2021) Therefore, HE is a significant game-changer that enhances gainful employment opportunities and improves the country's value system, civic sense, and socio-economic uplift.

Status of Higher Education in Pakistan

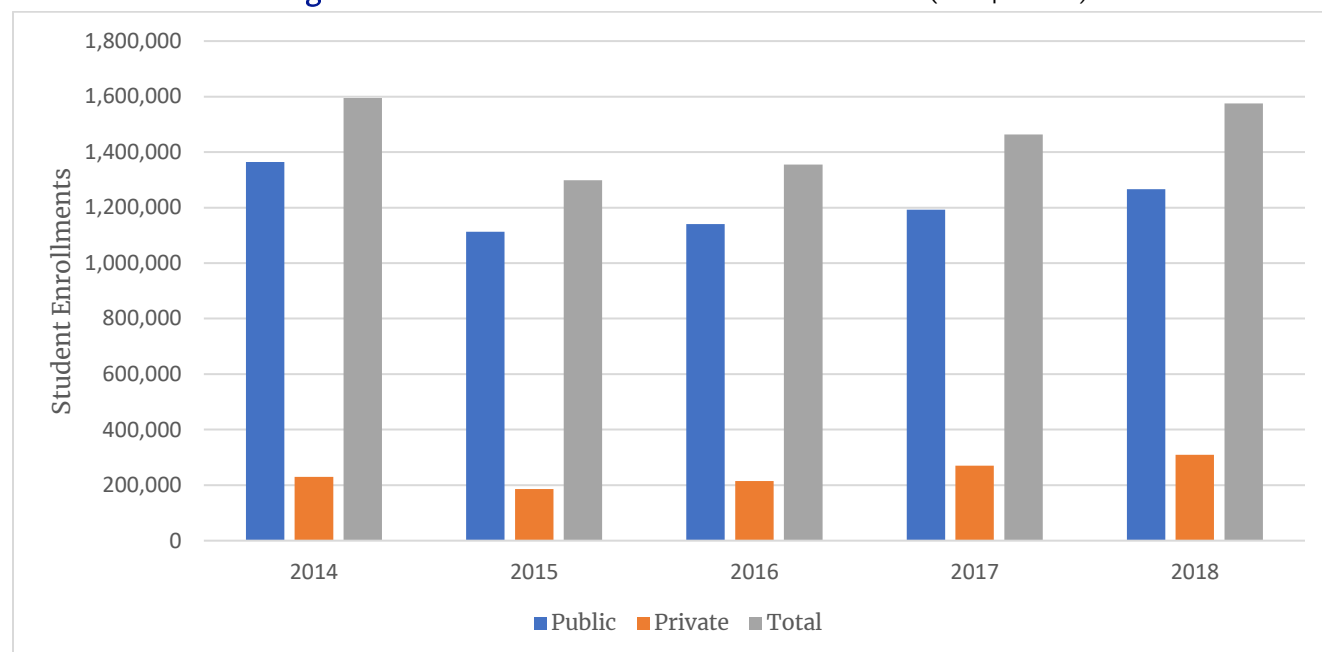
At the time of Independence, Pakistan had only one Higher Education Institute (HEI), the University of Punjab. Over time, the HE institutions in the country have been gradually growing in numbers, and currently, there are 186 public and private sector universities and degree-awarding institutes. Of these, 60% (111) of the HEIs are in the public sector, while 40% (70) degree awarding intuitions are in the private sector, Fig 1. (GoP, 2021) In those public and private HEIs, the enrollment of students is gradually rising, as seen in Fig. 2.

Figure 1. Percentage of Public and Private Sector institutions in Pakistan.



Data Source: Pakistan Education Statistics (2017–2018), Government of Pakistan, Author's compilation

Figure 2. Student Enrollments in HEIs of Pakistan (2014–2018)



Data Source: Pakistan Education Statistics (2017–2018), Government of Pakistan, Author's compilation

Pakistan's Education Policy 2009 highlighted the challenges faced and laid down a strategic vision for the uplift of HE. Though HE in Pakistan is progressing slowly and gradually and is playing its role in producing knowledgeable, skilled, and technical graduates, it is still unable to excel in research, innovation, and technological developments. (Khushik and Arnaud,2018) Compared to the other developing countries, Pakistan's economy is facing lower outcomes due to low investment in the HE, besides other factors. It has been found that the financial returns to individuals and institutions, as well as enterprises, are much higher due to HE than due to the lower levels of education. (Bashir,2022) Unfortunately, Pakistan has been expanding HE and liberalizing/promoting its access without correspondingly matching and correcting the governance and funding systems. (HEC,2022)

The current status of HE in Pakistan is unsatisfactory, indeed, alarming as it is facing serious issues, including old-traditional methods and the costly fee structure of the universities. Privatizing public sector universities has further hampered the HE for middle-class students. It is

near impossible for the majority of parents to finance their children to pursue HE in the current economic crisis. (Murtaza,2022)

Higher Education in Balochistan

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, having an area of 347,190 square km and a population of 12,344,408 people. Balochistan's geographical positioning, coupled with years of negligence, long distances, infrastructure, and a deteriorating security situation, has impeded the socio-economic growth of the province. At the time of Independence, Balochistan inherited only nine high schools and no colleges. Over the years, the development and expansion of education have been taking place, and now there are nine public sector universities in the province. Still, the province faces sluggish growth in HEIs and student enrollment. One of the fundamental reasons for low enrollment is the out-of-school children (60–70% as per UNICEF)(Ali,2022) and low primary school enrollment since they are the nurseries that provide strength to the HEIs. Without considering the primary and secondary

education issues in Balochistan, the HE objectives cannot be achieved. (Bashir et al,2021)

Balochistan, till 1970, had no HEI, and HE was linked with the University of Punjab. The first HEI was the University of Balochistan, established in 1970 by an ordinance by the then Governor of Balochistan. The second major university in the province was Khuzdar Engineering University, established in 1994. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), established in 2002, is responsible for providing funds to public sector universities and the mandate to promote research culture and development in the country. (Sofia,2019) After establishing HEC, the number of public and private universities in the province rise to nine. More than 5,000 teachers and approximately 30,000 students were enrolled in HEI in 2020, against just 3700 students in 2002. More than 80 science, technology, arts, and humanities programs are run at these universities. They contribute to human capital formation and return rates to the Balochistan people.

Approximately Rs 3 billion is being spent yearly on all the universities of Balochistan; still, the universities face a severe financial crisis, and the revenue generated from these universities doesn't meet the expenditures. The HEC Act of 2002 allows the universities to open sub-campuses in remote areas of the country, keeping in view the population, literacy rate, colleges and enrollment on those campuses. The questions of universities extension policies to districts where the basic infrastructure of education, literacy rates, the prevalence of multidimensional poverty, and inputs are lacking will create serious policy apprehensions and implications for the strategic development of the provincial education system. The political pressure from politicians and notables to open sub-campuses in their respective districts for political gains will further deteriorate the existing structure.

Looking at the trends of HE both nationally and internationally, the HE of Balochistan need

reforms to modernize the education system at par with the technologically developed countries. In devising new policies for the upliftment of HE, the strengths and weaknesses of all the erstwhile policies must keep in mind since HE is an essential source of converting society towards progress and peace. Keeping in view the overall deteriorating security situation of the province, HE can play a vital role in the stabilization and prosperity of the province. (Bashir et al,2021) The HE of Balochistan is still lagging and is not capable of bringing forth a way forward for the socio-economic development of the people of Balochistan. Thus, the research problem in analyzing the status of HE in Balochistan for its way forward must be coined before specifying the objectives of this research study. Therefore, this study aims to address the problems and current status of HE in Balochistan and provides policy recommendations to sort out those issues.

Identification of Research Parameters

In Balochistan, due to general poverty and socio-economic backwardness, students cannot afford to pay fees usually charged at the university level. Besides that, the population is sparse and too scattered in small villages. The economy of scale cannot be applicable in Balochistan to offset the economic burden. The criteria for admission to HE are also not appropriate. Consequently, many students seek admission to degree programs where there is a state financing mechanism for running the study programs. Ignoring this situation, there is a tendency to open new universities and sub-campuses in Balochistan, overlooking costs and returns, affordability constraints by the state, and violating policy guidelines of HEC. Political considerations and local vested interests drive this tendency. This is done by ignoring the cost-benefit analysis of establishing new universities and/or opening sub-campuses which do disperse the meager provincial resources. If the provincial HE is not professionally regulated, it will further deteriorate the existing state of the HE in the

province. Therefore, to devise significant policies, an in-depth analysis of the current status of HE in the province is vital.

Aim of Research

This study aims at evaluating the status of HE in Balochistan and the problems being faced to make policy recommendations for improvement.

Objectives of the Study

To carry out an in-depth analysis of the status of HE in Balochistan, the following objectives are being followed:

1. Status of management of education from primary to HE levels, integration, frequency of coordination, and linkages of growth and recommend future policy guidelines.
2. Rules governing the management of HE in universities of Balochistan, degree of adherence/violation to HEC policies, and universities' Acts. Regulatory suggestions for improvement.
3. Status of existing universities, sub-campuses, cost and benefit analyses in terms of private/social returns compared to the financial costs and conditionalities for expansions in the future.
4. Performance and the general practice of administration of universities, role of the Chancellor's office, loopholes / common digressions, checks and balances, and remedies.
5. Status of state/student share of financial burden, adherence to HEC guidelines, existing management of financial outlays, emerging costs, and suggestions for improvement in the short and long term.
6. Existing standards of meritocracy and suggestions for ensuring it at all the tiers of HE, from governance to management to students.

Study Methodology

The methodology for conducting this study is based on a detailed survey of the universities.

Following the study's research objectives, 48 open-ended questions were distributed into the A to K sections. This questionnaire was circulated among the Vice Chancellors of the universities across the province (for details, please see Annex-A). Only two Vice Chancellors responded from eight public sector universities in the province. In addition to the circulated questionnaires, information was also gathered from the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Balochistan and the former Chancellor/Governor of Balochistan based on their experience and knowledge of HE in the province. To that extent, this study has a limitation. However, each statement of objectives carries its share of the research methodology designed for this research to accomplish the academic reliance and validity of the results. The analysis and findings are fairly sound for arriving at policy recommendations for the HE in Balochistan.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the obtained data from the VCs of universities in Balochistan is categorized based on the objectives of the study. The analysis has been divided into eleven parts, starting from A to K, based on a pre-developed Questionnaire that collected the respondents' relevant information. In addition to the Questionnaires, the study further explored the impediments of the new HE Act passed by the Provincial Assembly in May 2022, applicable to all universities, and its likely impact on the HE in Balochistan.

Part A: Status of Education in Balochistan

In response to a question on the status of education in Balochistan, one of the respondents narrated that education in Balochistan, from primary to higher levels, has not been coordinated at the provincial level. That the primary, middle, secondary, higher secondary, and Madrassas have never been evaluated as one wholesome, mutually integrated endeavor in education. There is a lack of coordination among the major stakeholders starting from primary to the higher level of

education. This lack of coordination thus impedes curriculum development from primary to tertiary education. In response to the curriculum development at the university level, the respondent replied that it is well-defined and implemented in true spirit across all the disciplines at the university level. National Curriculum Review Committees (NCRCs) developed curricula and are followed in all the significant fields of academia. The NCRC is mainly composed of experts from academia and other related fields. The NCRC revises the curricula after every four years. Furthermore, the mechanism of policy audit following the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) from the office of Quality Assurance aims to conduct an annual review of each program. The Institutional Performance Evaluation (IPE) is conducted annually at the institutional level. It includes three experts from the university and two experts from outside the university.

In response to the same question, the respondent argued that a lack of coordination from primary to higher levels of education in Balochistan exists. The curriculum at the federal level is coordinated through the ministry of education and other departments. Likewise, the education policies are followed at the federal level, but the policies are not appropriately implemented at the provincial level. There is no audit of policy-following from the primary to college level, but at the university level, the audit policy-following is conducted through different evaluation committees that include the MS/Ph.D. review committee, university evaluation committee, plagiarism committee, and other quality assurance committees.

Talking about the status of education in Balochistan, the respondents believe that the education system in Balochistan, from primary to higher secondary level, has not been coordinated at the provincial level. The government has failed to implement policies in its true spirit, and there is a huge gap between the provincial education department and the level of higher education. The

curriculum development process is not up to the primary to tertiary level mark. However, the universities follow a proper mechanism to enhance the standard and quality of education and research programs. The universities are coordinating appropriately with HEC at different forums to uplift higher education in Balochistan. The curricula development mechanism for higher education is adequately maintained by a statutory system that includes the board of studies, faculty, and academic council. Experts from all walks of life participate in the meetings of the board of studies and recommend curricula for all disciplines.

Similarly, there is a proper mechanism for the audit of “policy-following” at the university level, like the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Institutional Performance Evaluation, followed simultaneously by various committees like MS/Ph.D. Review Committee, University Evaluation Committee, and other Quality Assurance committees. While in professional institutes including medical, engineering, veterinary, and agriculture, the concerned regulatory authorities, for example, Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC), Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), and Pakistan Veterinary Council (PVC), carry the audit of “policy-following”. Compared to the higher education institutes, the provincial coordination mechanism is negligible or nonexistent at the primary and secondary levels.

The respondents highlighted that colleges and schools are the academic nurseries for universities. At the same time, they criticized the overall education sector from primary to a higher secondary level that which has not been coordinated at the provincial level. If it is not appropriately coordinated at the provincial level, how is it possible that the enrollment ratio in HE is increasing day by day? In 2018–19, the government of Balochistan allocated an amount of Rs. 12.45 billion for 205 existing and 449 new development projects. Out of that total amount, Rs. 1.77 billion has been given for primary

education, Rs. 4.15 for middle, Rs. 3.03 billion for secondary education, and Rs. 2.11 billion for college education. The share for universities in that allotted amount was Rs. 0.57 billion, Rs. 0.74 billion for general education, and Rs. 0.069 billion for technical education. While talking about the literacy rate, they assured that with time, the literacy rate of Balochistan has increased in both urban and rural areas.

Part B: HEC Policies/Rules

In reply to the questions about the policies and rules of HEC, respondents declared that HEC rules and policies are implemented in line with the guidelines. Considering Balochistan's peculiar environment, it is hard to bring professional academicians and experts due to financial constraints and poor civic facilities on the whole in the province. The University Act is consistent with the HEC model Act, but the Act needs to be revised as there are provisions in the Act that contradict each other concerning the powers and authorities of statutory bodies of the university, like the Senate and Syndicate. Regarding the appointment process for important statutory positions, the Act must involve and, indeed, give full credibility to the university's recommendations. To ensure the proper and smooth functioning of the university, statutory bodies like the Syndicate and Senate must be given authority to avoid lengthy approval processes. No individual senior official outside the university may have arbitrary discretionary power to annul the decisions of Committees/Selection Boards. Most of the academic and administrative issues are created or linger on when authority is not fully vested in the person of the Vice Chancellor/Statutory Bodies responsible for the management/administration.

Further discussing the HEC rules, the respondents stated that all the rules and guidelines given by HEC are functioning smoothly without any conflict with the ones being followed by provincial HE. The rules and guidelines laid down by HEC are achievable in Balochistan. There

is no instance of such undoable policies being laid down by HEC. The University Act (prevailing before the new Act passed by the Provincial Assembly in May 2022) is generally in line with HEC policies and guidelines; however, it needs significant amendments and improvements about the Senate, Syndicate, and job security of the Vice Chancellors. There are also inbuilt hurdles to implementing the Act in its true spirit, like the total number of members of the Senate is 130, and it is impossible to conduct Senate meetings with that number. The University Act was passed in 2010, and till now, the meeting of the Senate is not summoned. There is less chance of deviations from the HEC policies because the HEC has a proper mechanism to implement those rules. Creating a new mechanism to avoid conflicting provincial/HEC policies and guidelines is necessary. A Higher Education Council for Balochistan ought to be formed by the province to oversee the issues between HEC and universities.

Both the respondents believe that the policies and guidelines from the HEC are implemented in letter and spirit. Financial constraints and Balochistan's peculiar environment are the biggest hurdles to bringing top academicians from across the country. The higher authorities must take serious steps to look into the powers given to the Senate and Syndicate. The recommendations and consultations from the university should be highly endorsed in the appointment process for vital statutory positions.

Part C: Chancellor & Provincial Cabinet & HE

In response to the role of the Chancellor's office in conformity with the University Act, they stated that the role of the Chancellor is to administer the strategic functioning of the university. As the Chancellor remains busy with other administrative matters of the province, certain approving authorities ought to be vested in statutory bodies like a Syndicate. The Selection Board should be the recommending body for faculty appointments, and administrative cadres and Syndicates may be empowered to appoint

people to these positions. The Chancellor exercises the executive authority as Chairman of the Senate. The Chancellor is the head of the University Senate and has control over the decision-making process for strategic issues. The Senate of the University may be redesigned with no more than 15-20 members. The statutory bodies need to be empowered to involve different experts from different walks of life. The primary example of this issue is the University Act, which was amended and tabled in 2015 in the provincial Assembly without involving the key players from the university. Members from National Assembly and Provincial Assembly also tend to approach and intervene in the routine operation of university affairs, but so far, through proper and responsible mechanisms, these interventions have been managed properly and affably. The funding via Grant-in-aid from the provincial government might be decided by an autonomous body having representation from the academicians, administrators, trainers, and policy experts. While approving the University Act, representation from the academicians, trainers and policymakers from educational set-ups should be ensured. The Statutory Bodies should be autonomous, inclusive, and participatory in university affairs.

Addressing the same questions, one of the respondents specified that the role of the Chancellor conforms with the University Act. The executive authority always rests with the University Senate. The University Act should be amended to provide a new mechanism to maintain the power structure balanced among the statutory bodies and Chancellor. There is not a single point where CM/Cabinet has deviated from the University Act. However, influential people from all walks of life intervene and try to influence the university, which creates hurdles affecting the progress and performance of the university.

The respondents believe that there should be a balance of power among different stakeholders to ensure the smooth functioning of the university. The University Act should be amended

to enhance the power of the Statutory Bodies following the power exercised by the Chancellor. There are political interferences from influential people in admission, appointments, promotions, and other cases frequently, but they are managed and resolved in addition to addressing the role of the Chancellor's office in conformity with the University Act. Regarding the provincial University Act of 2015, the Act had been approved without considering the significant stakeholders of the university.

Part D: Quality Management

The BTTN team asked four questions on quality management in higher education in Balochistan. Respondents highlighted that the quality assurance had been managed well. However, there are instances when the university is faced with challenges in the making taking decisions when influential persons try to affect the decisions made due to ethnic/racial lines. In reply to the question about quality assurance standards, the respondent stated that the university has Annual Self-Assessment Reports (SAR) and Institutional Performance Evaluation (IPE) devised to ensure quality assurance standards. There is a platform, the Deans' Committee, which manages the administrative staff. A systematic approach is designed involving the Selection Board, Syndicate, and Senate for the appointments to the posts of Registrar, Controller of Examinations, Treasure, and Heads of Directorates. At the same time, the Pro-VC has been appointed directly by the Chancellor without consulting the Vice Chancellor. To ensure best management practices given trust and team building process, the Pro-VC must be selected based on the recommendations of the VC. In addition, the faculty development and training are being run by the Directorate of Human Resource Development (HRD), which is assigned the task of providing training to the newly recruited staff.

On similar questions, the respondent explained that there are problems in ensuring

quality standards at the university. It becomes difficult to follow the HEC fixed policies for the experienced faculty in specific subjects and stick to the fixed number of admissions in professional degrees to maintain high quality. The HEC quality-education standards for developed cities of Pakistan and Balochistan should not be the same. The university has developed a mechanism to ensure the quality assurance standard in faculty appointments, student admissions, CGP standards, and research. The administrative staff is mostly on board, but some deviations still exist that need to be addressed. All the appointments to key positions are made following the University Act. Further, for training purposes, HEC has stopped the scholarships for faculty development and training. However, looking at the needs of the modern and technical era, the university puts its efforts into managing the training possible within its constrained resources for faculty development and research.

Taking the guidelines obtained from the respondents, it was observed that a proper mechanism to ensure quality management in the higher education institutes of Balochistan does exist, though not necessarily meeting the requirements of HEC. The universities developed some functional bodies, including SAR, IPE, and the Deans' Committee, to evaluate the quality assurance of academic and administrative staff. Similarly, it is noted that all appointments on the key posts except the Pro-VC are made through the university's statutory bodies. The university runs self-dependent HRD programs to train the faculty and staff to improve their skills and abilities to enhance the faculty's capabilities. The respondents also highlighted issues regarding the quality assurance standards due to the policies being devised by HEC for both the developed and underdeveloped regions. The quality assurance standard from HEC regarding faculty, enrollment, and admissions should account for the environments in the Balochistan universities.

It was observed that universities need inclusive decision-making at the administrative

level that will help in the integrity and development of the institution. The decentralization of power is an evolutionary process that requires time, but there should be coordination among the university management, the statutory bodies, and the Chancellor's office to build an environment of progress and development at the university. It takes almost two years for a teacher who has qualified to appear before the university Selection Board for promotion, sometimes 3-4 years even. The primary reasons for delays in holding selection boards are that the government's rules in advertising the position for scrutiny take months. Furthermore, convening the selection board and the availability of its member due to their busy schedules is another factor in the delaying process. The recommendations from the Selection board go through various statutory bodies for approval. Thirty-two departments are operating under six teaching faculties. Having said this, the primary responsibility lies with the vice chancellor, who must undertake the process with a sense of urgency and hold a Selection Board within a year, if not within a few months of the qualification of a teacher. Taking one particular case in a university, the total number of faculty is 634, and the university has 167 PhDs, 348 MS/M-Phil, and 119 BS/Masters from across the country. The number of regular faculty members is 599, 35 serve on a contract basis, and 143 are on study leave. Out of 634 faculty members, 7 members enjoy extra-ordinary leave without pay, and 6 will join back within the next three months. To accommodate deserving teachers in higher ranks, a pool of vacancies should be at the disposal of vice-chancellors who can accommodate teachers in higher ranks, especially as the establishment keeps fluctuating.

Part E: Management Challenges

On questions regarding the management and challenges faced by the university, respondents expressed that frequent interventions from external notables and politicians become the

major cause of frequent delays on several important matters. Besides, delays also occur as the decision-making, and administrative approvals follow a vertical path. The meetings of all the approving bodies like the F&PC Academic Council, Selection Board, Syndicate, and Senate are likely to be conducted every year; however, it takes almost one year for a teacher to wait after qualifying even when vacancies exist, due to late convening of Selection Board for promotion. The delays occur because the process of the Selection Board takes time from advertisement to shortlisting, convening the Selection Board, and approval of those recommendations from the Syndicate and Senate as per the procedure. The other main hurdle in the process is the availability and consent of the Selection Board members and the Senate's meeting to approve the Minutes of the Selection Board. The qualified teachers are awaiting Selection Board are few, and when the university needs faculty for various departments Selection board is convened. In one university, 48 departments include various BS, MS, and PhD programs. The total number of faculty members in the university is 197. Out of the 197 members, the university has 84 PhDs and 113 MS faculty members. Four faculty members have been on leave for more than a year.

Regarding the university's management challenges, both the respondents expressed that it is the legal procedure and provisions of the Act that cause delays in the Selection Board. They both stated that they had to follow the Act's provisions, from advertisement to shortlisting the candidates, convening Selection Board, and final approval from Syndicate and Senate. The availability and consent of the Selection Board, Syndicate, and Senate members is another factor in the delay of these Selection Boards. In addition, the VC addressing the challenges suggested the recommendation that the decentralization of power and coordination among different statutory bodies is the need of time.

Part F: Sub-Campuses

On the issue of establishing the sub-campuses, the respondent of one university said that its campuses have 6 faculties and 32 departments. The number of degree program offerings is 60, out of which there are 32 undergraduate programs, 22 MS/M-Phil programs, and 6 Graduate PhD programs. The total number of students enrolled in undergraduate programs is 9769 (M: 8301, F:1468), MS/M-Phil programs 2007(M:1549, F:458), and PhD programs 83(M:50, F:33), respectively. The university has one main campus and four sub-campuses, and all the sub-campuses have been initiated in compliance with HEC requirements. There are seven teaching departments in the sub-campuses, and the total strength of the students in the sub-campuses is 170. The total number of faculty in these sub-campuses is 29. However, the respondent could not indicate the number of colleges located within 30 km of the sub-campuses.

While responding to the same questions, the other respondent explained that they have 48 departments that offer BS, MS, and PhD programs. The total number of faculty members in the university is 197. The full strength of MS students is 113, and PhDs in the university is 84. Four faculty members have been on leave for more than a year. The university's total number of study programs is 30, and the total strength of students on the main campus is 4411. In addition, two sub-campuses, A and B, are functional, and the number of students on these campuses is 645 and 304, respectively. The sub-campuses operate in ten departments with 54 faculty members. There are five degree-awarding colleges within 30 km of sub-campuses, and the total number of students in those colleges is above 3707, thus feeding the university's sub-campuses.

The government of Balochistan has already started programs for BS and BA (Hons) in the postgraduate colleges of the province. With the opening of these programs, it is

uneconomical/unnecessary to open sub-campuses in those areas where enrollment in higher education is very low. The university is already facing financial constraints. One of the respondents noted that they don't have money to pay the salaries in the coming few months—considering the financial deficit, investing that much huge money in sub-campuses is not warranted.

Part G: Managing Financial Liabilities

On the question of managing the financial liabilities of the universities, one of the respondents replied that the university is shouldering a 20–25% financial burden. The cost per student, as per the HEC formula, is Rs.130,000. The university faced almost 35–40% financial deficiency almost every year. The university has various income sources that include Federal grants through HEC, Provincial Grants through Governor Balochistan, student fees, consultancies, donations, and income from various research programs.

Along similar lines, the other respondent stated that universities and students finance 13% of total expenditures. The spending per student per annum is 226,583. HEC finances the expenditure per student in sub-campuses through development grants, and the total expenditure per student is the same as on the main campus. The current fiscal deficit is almost 20%, and it will increase to 22% in the coming year. The total expenditures being financed by the university other than students' fees is 4%. The other sources from which the university generates revenue include house rents deducted from employee salaries, three commercial banks and shops on rent, and dairy farms operating under the university.

From the responses obtained on the financial management of the universities in Balochistan, it is concluded that the significant burden of the deficit is on the shoulders of the provincial grants through the Governor's secretariat and federal

grants through HEC. Similarly, the universities are facing severe financial constraints in revenue generation; they may not fulfil the demands of the university. This will hinder the smooth operations of the universities in Balochistan.

Part H: Employment / Alumni

In response to the Alumni association and employment records, one VC expressed his views about the alumni association, that it is functional and knows the importance of the alumni. The Alumni Relation Office (ARO) is in continuous contact and engages all the alumni throughout the year. The alumni record is regularly updated regarding the activities taking place at the university. At least in one university, there is an Alumni Mentoring Program (BAMP) that delivers support, guidance, and resources to their alumni in their academic and professional pursuits. The big achievement of the university is that it has the honor of more than 8000 alumni working in 400 plus national and multinational organizations in 26 countries across the world.

The statistics of the last three years in one university show that in 2019, 24 alumni got jobs through campus drive (job fairs), 83 got jobs through self-efforts, 646 were placed in different organizations for the internship, and 2100 were facilitated through seminars, workshops, mentoring programs, individual and group counselling sessions. Similarly, in 2020, 76 got jobs through self-effort, 416 were placed in various organizations for the internship, and 1600 were facilitated through other means. In 2021, 220 alumni got jobs through job fairs, 129 alumni got jobs through self-efforts, 283 were placed in different organizations for the internship, and 1100 were facilitated through other means. Every alternate year, the university organizes job fairs to provide decent work opportunities to address employers' recruitment needs and ultimately contribute to the sustainable employment process. In 2021 the university organized a job fair under the theme of Network for success, and 75

companies and organizations participated; the total number of attendees was 3500.

The respondent disclosed that the alumni association setup is under process. The exact figure of graduates employed has not been recorded, but many graduates are employed in livestock, agriculture, fisheries, water resources management, education, banks, and other departments. The office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization arranges job fairs every so often.

Heterogenous responses have been received on the question of employment and alumni associations. At least one university has a proper mechanism to engage the alumni throughout the year. The ARO has the responsibility to update all the alumni regarding the events at the university. The university also has a BAMP program to facilitate its graduates in finding decent work and enhancing their professional careers. According to the data, 8000 alumni work with 400 plus national and international organizations in various parts of the world. Through its various programs like job fairs and other activities, the university has created numerous opportunities for its graduates. The recent job fair was organized under the theme of Network for success, in which 75 organizations from various walks of life participated, and the number of attendees was about 3500. While yet another university doesn't have an alumni association, work is underway to set it up the association. Graduates of the university work in various departments like fisheries, agriculture, livestock, and other departments. The office of Research, Innovation, and commercialization are occasionally responsible for conducting job fairs.

Part I: Building National Integration

On the question of building civic sense, countering negative narratives surging, including the national integration to make the student wise and reliable citizens of the country, the respondent declared that besides formal

education, at least one university provides a vibrant and colorful exposure to all the stakeholders of the university. The students are exposed to a world of creative and recreational opportunities in arts, sports, and other services that include cultural festivals, flagship events, Olympiad, and spring festivals. The monthly newsletter and quarterly magazine provide in-depth coverage of the events. On the same question, another respondent stated that the university arranges sports events, seminars, workshops, and tour programs in addition to formal education. The university also carries out debates, sports galas, food melas, and different functions to counter negative narratives and produce balanced patriots imbued with civic sense.

From the opinions and undergoing events in the universities of Balochistan, it has been observed that the students and management accord due importance to the co-curricular events. Furthermore, besides formal education, the responding two universities do provide a vibrant and friendly environment by providing opportunities for arts, sports, and co-curricular activities. In addition, the university is according to due attention through debates, seminars, and workshops to counter the negative narratives on ethnic and economic grounds, thus trying to build an environment of peace, harmony, and integration.

Part J: Meritocracy in HE

One respondent stated it makes all-out efforts to uphold meritocracy. It offers BS, MS, and PhD programs in various fields. It announces annual admissions for undergraduate programs in the Fall and May-June of the year in different news outlets and official websites. The candidates have their intermediate results, and those awaiting results are invited to apply for admission as per the eligibility criteria. The registration process for admission is done online through the student admission portal. After having the initial assessment, the students go through an entry test

arranged through a third party like National Testing Service (NTS).

Further, all the programs have different merit criterion that includes the eligibility criteria to be enrolled in a program, entry test score, and career marks. The list of successful candidates is then displayed on all the notice boards and the university's official website. A student who fails to submit his/her fee in due time as given in the merit list is considered vacant, and the waiting list is considered. The university has been endeavoring to find the hidden talent of the province through various programs. The public and private sector colleges are the enrollment nurseries for the university. The university arranges multiple outreach programs to create awareness in public for admissions to various programs offered. It further invites principals and teachers from various colleges of the province regularly and provides them with a detailed presentation about the admissions and academic performance of the campus.

The University Campus Management System (CMS) is responsible for maintaining the academic record. The university follows an internationally recognized and practised semester system. All the students and faculty members follow a dress code. A proper mechanism of checking dissertations and term papers through Turnitin is forced to control intellectual theft. The university provides better facilities to the students, including curricular and co-curricular activities, scholarships, fee concessions, laboratories, book bank facilities, and study tours. To ensure merit and evaluation of student performance, the university has an entire functional examination office that the Controller of Examination heads.

The university has been operating under its Act. The Chancellor is the chairman of the Senate. The syndicate is the executive body of the university that has the mandate to raise the standard of teaching, research, and publications. The Vice-Chancellor is the chairman of the

syndicate. Other statutory bodies include the Academic council (Academic regulations and policies), Advanced Studies and Research Board (promotion of research and advanced studies), Selection Board (recommending the selection of faculty and promotions to Senate and Syndicate), Board of Faculty (Scrutinizes the recommendations of the Board of Studies), Board of Studies (an advisory body to the Board of Faculty), Finance and Planning Committee (Advise the Syndicate and Senate on matters of finance and development), and Discipline Committee (Discipline related matters of staff and students). Regarding the promotions, placing as HODs/Directors/Deans, and appointments, the provisions of the Act and policies of the university are followed. All the matters relating to advertisements of positions, appointments, promotions, and placement are also followed in line with the Act.

In reply to similar questions, another respondent said that all the indicators mentioned are achieved through a merit-based process of academic, administrative, and development tasks. This was only made possible by implementing the Provisions of the Act in letter and spirit.

Having enough information obtained from the responses of vice chancellors' offices, it was observed that the universities are upholding meritocracy in the admission process for the students. It is presumed that the university offering different programs, including BS, MS, and PhD, are also based on merit. The admission process is transparent and follows a proper channel from advertisement to enrollment. To ensure merit in the admission of students, the test has been conducted by a third-party NTS. The merit list of the selected candidates is displayed on the university's notice boards and official website. To manage the students in HE of Balochistan, the university has conducted various outreach programs, a proper mechanism of academic discipline, international and refugee students, and support services for students. The

university follows an appropriate, well-defined, and developed semester system to ensure credibility and transparency. To ensure merit and transparency in the examination and evaluation of the students, there is a proper mechanism of CMS to control human error in maintaining the result records of the student. Looking after the university examinations, the examination office is responsible for it, and the Controller of Examination heads it.

Talking about the statutory bodies, the respondents stated that statutory bodies are intact and operating under the University Act. Governor Balochistan is the Chancellor of all the universities. Various statutory bodies have different powers and functions: the Senate (Chairman Chancellor), Syndicate (Vice Chancellor), Academic Council, Advanced Studies and Research Board, Selection Board, Board of faculty, board of Studies, Finance and Planning Committee, and Discipline Committee. The promotions and appointments of HODs, chairpersons, directors, and deans are made according to the provisions of the Act. These promotions and placements are being made through relevant bodies following the rules and regulations. As an autonomous body, the university has its own rules and policies regarding matters from the advertisement of positions to appointments.

Part K: Vice Chancellors' Recommendations

While focusing on the prevailing situation of the universities in Balochistan and talking about improving the standards of meritocracy from governance to management, respondents suggested some significant recommendations, which are given below in detail.

The respondents indicated that financial constraints must be mitigated. The public sector universities of Balochistan are facing huge financial deficits. As per National Finance Commission (NFC), the federal government is to allocate 9% as per the NFC award allocation

formula for the HE sector of Balochistan, but the federal government is giving just 4.71% to the public sector universities of Balochistan. The difference between the actual share and the awarded share affects the administrative and academic activities of the universities of Balochistan. The universities may not be able to give salaries to their staff in the coming months, which will create a possible brain drain from the universities, besides creating a socio-political and law and order issue. The government should increase the provincial grant-in-aid to the universities to overcome the financial deficit. The university may develop new academic programs and courses in technical and professional areas. It is time to create new research centres to expand opportunities for research and publications. The university must enhance its marketing strategies and financial support to attract the province's youth to higher studies. The university's capital and technological infrastructure should be maintained and improved.

Similarly, it is recommended that the rules and regulations be implemented in letter and spirit. The meetings of all the statutory and recommending bodies should be conducted regularly, and decisions should be implanted in their true spirit. Social and political pressure must be discouraged in the decision-making process. In addition, the mechanism of internal audit and accountability across the board should be improved. Furthermore, modern technology like biometrics and university management systems should be introduced to improve the quality and punctuality of the staff and students.

To improve the mechanism from governance to management, the federal government should provide at least a share of 9% as per the NFC award allocation formula for HE to the universities of Balochistan. Balochistan's universities face severe financial constraints that will further deteriorate the HE in the province. The universities, it appears, will not be in a position to pay the salaries of staff and faculties in the coming months due to financial constraints

with serious repercussions. Furthermore, universities should develop and introduce the latest academic programs in the technical and professional fields to contend in the era of intensifying global competition. The establishment of new research centers is the need of the hour to promote the culture of research and development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A person with a higher degree is expected to earn a higher salary. People, even with bachelor's degrees, perform better in all aspects than high school graduates. A higher degree is better for society economically and socially. Higher education, however, should not be considered only as a tool to earn a degree to get a better job; rather, it should be seen as a personality development tool. During the studies, students work on critical analysis and engage in problem-solving. The role of higher education in the economic and social spheres of life is increasing in the coming decades, and in developing countries like Pakistan, its importance cannot be overlooked. Higher education institutions impart skills and knowledge to youth and equip them for shouldering the future responsibilities of a country. Similarly, this training makes them capable of solving real-life problems. The importance of HE in a province like Balochistan, which started 127 years late as a province compared with the other provinces of Pakistan, cannot be overemphasized. However, without quality, no education will do any good.

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees primary education to every child. HE is very expensive not only in Pakistan but, indeed, all over the world. The students are required to pay the fees, thus enabling the universities to run. HE is not every young man/woman's right. Only those who academically have a good record are even allowed in HE globally. However, in Balochistan, HE is being offered to any student, never mind, even if a low-grade achiever, at negligible cost; the bulk of expenditure is borne by

the state. Students also select courses that are often not marketable. Besides, students keep getting fresh admission in yet another subject after having earned a Master's degree, which is a luxury at the expense of the state, often for political reasons.

Accordingly, this research was aimed at exploring the status of HE in Balochistan and suggesting ways forward for improving educational standards. The research conducted a comprehensive survey of the willing VCs of the universities in Balochistan; their responses have been critically analyzed and have resulted in well-considered recommendations. This paper will be useful for the policymakers to respond to the issues about HE in Balochistan specifically and in Pakistan generally.

1. The public sector universities of Balochistan are facing huge financial deficits. As per National Finance Commission (NFC), the federal government is to allocate 9% as per the NFC award allocation formula for the higher education sector of Balochistan, but the federal government is giving just 4.71% to the public sector universities of Balochistan. The difference between the expected share and the awarded share grossly affects the administrative and academic activities of the universities of Balochistan. In the foreseeable future, it is highly unlikely that the fiscal deficit due to prevailing adverse economic constraints will reduce. The universities will have to manage within available resources. Enhancing the fees in Balochistan is not doable due to general poverty. The only option available and doable is to reduce the number of students/departments/faculty and manage within resources.
2. Sub-campuses have been opened rather lavishly with no consideration of per capita expenses and cost-effectiveness, more for political reasons than the actual need. Similarly, in one university, there are only 1600 students, which is not at all cost-effective. The existence of sub-campuses

ought to be reviewed critically. Where the number of students is very low, they should be closed and students/faculty absorbed by the parent university. As a minimum measure, those subjects which do not have demand in the market should be closed as soon as possible to reduce expenses.

3. Over a period of 2-3 years, most of the sub-campuses, which are not cost-effective in per capita terms of expenditure, should be closed down. The setback in districts of sub-campuses and the socio-political agitation is understood and should be expected. However, this initiative is better than all of the universities creating socio-political and law, and order crises as the available funding will not be enough to run even the main campuses, let alone the sub-campuses.
4. The opening of Sub-campuses should be stopped for at least the next 10 years. The proper focus should be given to the administration of the existing universities' main campuses to raise the standard of education. The amount spent on sub-campuses should be allocated to universities.
5. The government must focus and start from the school level to develop high-quality education, as schools are the basic nurseries for HE. Without concrete measures and improvement in primary and secondary education, the dream of achieving the desired results from higher education is incorrect.
6. The HEC should undertake faculty development programs. The HEC needs to establish Teacher's Training Academies (TTA) in every province, but most of all in Balochistan. These academies must be provided with the best teachers as trainers. The significance of this teachers' training should not be ignored as training will help them improve the standard of education. This will uplift the quality of education in universities.
7. The Balochistan Universities Act, of 2022 suffers from several anomalies. The Search Committee for the selection of a VC should be headed by an experience serving/retired VC rather than the Chief Secretary. It should put up names of three possible candidates to the Chancellor in order of merit, who should appoint the most deserving person as VC.
8. The tenure of the VC should be five years, as per HEC, and renewable without going through the Selection Committee afresh every time if the Senate has no cogent reason not to allow it. Academicians across the globe recommend that VCs need enough time to learn the management, formulate, initiate and ensure the implementation and continuation of policies to bring the ultimate fruitful results for the institutions. VCs, in any case, stand risen to the highest academic, and administrative appointment, and reverting them to lower ranks makes no sense.
9. There should be a proper mechanism to assess the performance through Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs), both for the faculty and staff. Selection Boards should give top weightage to the exhibited performance of teachers rather than their freshly acquired degree for promotion. A teacher whose ACR has been average for the past three years or has displayed indiscipline should not be even considered for promotion even if he/she has acquired a PhD.
10. The universities in Balochistan generally delay Selection Boards, some as much as by four years. The Chancellor should demand reasons for delay from the VC if the delay is of one year. He should arrange a mechanism that ensures that a candidate does not wait for over six months if he/she is eligible for the promotion.
11. To ensure quality education and standard, the universities of Balochistan must follow the practice of dropout system being practiced in other universities in the country.
12. Over-employment in universities is also a financial burden. The administration must control this and tailor the employment as per

the requirement only. Considering the looming financial crunch, fresh hiring for the next five years should only be on one year contract terminable at one month's notice or pay for both parties.

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