



Role of Higher Education Commission in supporting students with lower economic conditions in attaining Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract-In Pakistan Majority of the population belongs to the lower or lower middle class, and it is a big hurdle for them fulfil the requirement of their children for attaining the higher education; especially for those families who are falling in lower class. Therefore most the parents prefer to involve their children after completion of secondary education for earning purposes. In such situations students who are interested in getting higher education look for support from different institutes especially from High Education Commission. In Pakistan HEC is most important actor for supporting students in Higher education. With the support of HEC thousands of Pakistani students are on the scholarships for the doctorate, masters and graduate programs in the different fields of education in Pakistan and outside Pakistan. Many other initiatives have also been initiated by HEC to support students in attaining Higher Education. There are certain challenges that HEC is facing i.e. Insufficient education budget in the Annual budget of Pakistan, which has significantly limited the strength of HEC, the changing and instable political situation, every new political management attempt to change the policies of HEC and lack of resources to work on innovative technological researches.

Keywords: Role of HEC, Attaining Higher Education, Poor Students, Economic Problems of Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the term which can be defined as the educational and qualification level to be greater than intermediate that can be employed to serve the nation in upgrading the educational system, research and development of the country. The mode of higher education in Pakistan provided by the various high-ranked Universities, research centres and higher education colleges which are controlled and regulated by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) (Parveen, et.al, 2011).

The expenses for the education are rapidly increasing which has proved to be a big hurdle in attaining the higher education for the students who belong to the lower or lower middle class. For this purpose, the students and the institutes are looking towards the HEC to resolve the issues (regarding attaining the higher education) of the lower class students by developing efficient and effective policies and strategies (Akhtar & Kalsoom, 2012).

Pakistan well behind from the rest world in the field of education especially in Higher education despite many universities in Pakistan are offering higher education in the country. In this advanced period of technology the education system of Pakistan is lagging behind. To get quality higher education many Pakistani students are enrolled in the universities of the developed countries. After the establishment of HEC the standard of higher education has been improved. HEC is playing vital role for the development of higher education in Pakistan.

Role of HEC

Over the last 12 years, there is an increase on spending on higher education can be observed by Pakistan and the governments seem firm to overturn the years of insufficient investment in what is broadly determined to be an education system which is weak (Afzal, et.al, 2013). This is particularly significant for the developing countries of the world like Pakistan, where unemployment, poor economic and social indicators and escalating inflation rate are developing frustration among the youths; at times sever enough to permit extremist factors to attract them towards the militancy and other crimes.

Higher Education Commission was established in the year 2002 and has been leading the reform initiatives of higher education by the government, with the definitive aim of transforming the whole country to the economy which is based on knowledge (Afzal, et.al, 2013). Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF) of HEC focuses priority areas are: increasing an uncomplicated access of everyone towards attaining the higher education and elevating the significance of directions to the state priorities via the endorsement of quality in research and learning (Afzal, et.al, 2013).

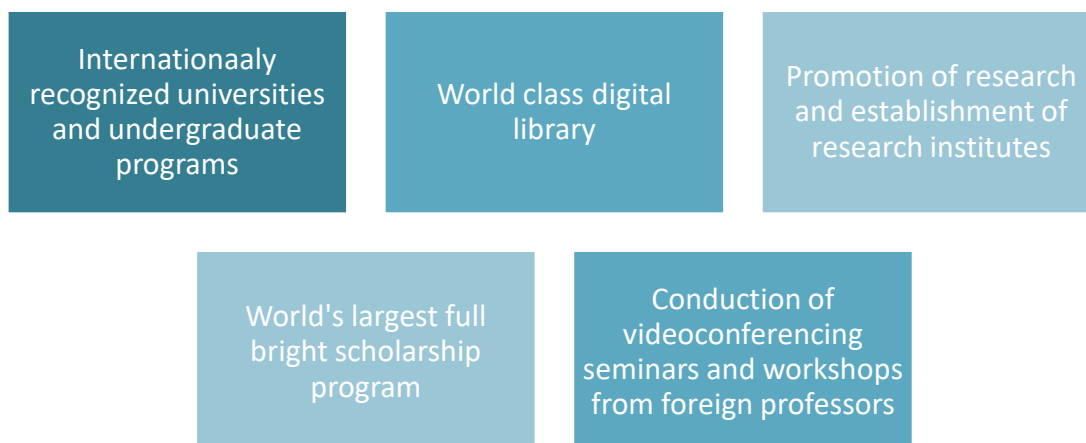
International Scholarship Programs

Thousands of Pakistani students are on the scholarships for the doctorate, masters and graduate programs in the different fields of education which are supported by Higher Commission in collaboration with other donors/stakeholders.

Increased rate of population has led to the serious economic demands on the budget of the country and thus increasing participation and access in attaining higher education will persist to be a main concern for the predictable future (Afzal, et.al, 2013). So the government of Pakistan is taking serious steps with the help of its higher education policy and HEC to provide access towards attaining the higher education for the students who belongs to the lower or lower middle class families.

HEC Challenges:

The role, policies and challenges that are being faced by the HEC were also identified. It is found that HEC has been serving for the higher education at full length of sincerity which can be proved by many of its activities and policies which include the international praise, world class digital library, research promotion by establishing the research institutes, world's largest full bright scholarship program, conduction of videoconferencing seminars and workshops etc (Parveen, Rashid, Iqbal et. al. 2011).



There are certain challenges that HEC is facing in order to maintain its curriculum and to regulate the on-going programs. The most common and major challenge for HEC is the insufficient education budget in the Annual budget of Pakistan, which has significantly limited the strength of HEC. Another challenge is the political situation where frequently, rapid ups and downs can be seen and every new political management attempt to change the policies of HEC. Other challenges include the lack of resources to work on innovative technological and research (Mukhtar, Islam & Siengthai, 2013).

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To Suggest recommendations for addressing the issues of problems faced by lower class students in getting higher education

- To understand the role and limitation of HEC in addressing the higher education issues of students with lower economic status.

Research Questions

The main research questions of the study are as follows

1. What are the policies of HEC to support the lower class students for attaining higher education?
2. What are the basic difficulties HEC face while supporting Higher Education in Pakistan?
3. What problems do students face while attaining higher education?

Lack of education budget

Political pressure

Lack of resources for innovation and researches

Scholarship abuse

Justification of the Study

In Pakistan majority of the population belongs to the lower class, they are hardly meeting their basic requirements of daily life. The parents of the economically lower class students could afford the heavy expenses of their children especially when they are getting higher education. So parents involve their children during or after completion of secondary education for earning purposes mostly they involve their children in lower levels jobs. The students who are interested in getting higher education always hope to get support from their institutes or HEC for the purpose of their further education. HEC is most important actor to support student with low income for higher education in the country. As higher educated population has a very great impact on the development of the country.

Further, the Government Universities of Pakistan are also supporting to the lower class families students to some extent, but a clear difference in policies were found among the Universities of different areas of Pakistan. The universities located in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are more active in supporting the students financially, where in Sindh especially in Baluchistan students get very rare less financial support while attaining higher education. HEC has very crucial importance for supporting students especially of deprived areas/provinces to ensure attaining and completion of their higher education. The outcome and the impact of this support will be seen in shape of developed and progressing Pakistan.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The population of Pakistan is mostly consists of the lower and lower-middle class families whose annual income is low as compare to their expenses and responsibilities. The youngsters who belong to the lower class families face a number of hurdles and difficulties in getting higher education as their parents are unable to meet their educational expenses and also they want their children specifically their sons to take part in the improvement of economic condition of the family. So, these youngsters are forced to quit their education or forced to do part time jobs along with their education due to which their studies are disturbed.

Factors Affecting the Education

There are certain factors which affect the education of the lower class families which include the income level, number of family members, relationship between the parents or family environment and condition of their schools (Sarwar&Ashrafi, 2014).

The Income Level

The annual income of the parents is the major factor that affects the academic achievements and performance of their children. Parents with lower annual income cannot provide their children better educational facilities like the environment which provides effective learning techniques or the educational resources and materials which become restriction in the academic performance of their children (Afzal, Malik, Begum et. al. 2012).

Family Size

Family size is another factor that largely impacts the children's academic achievements. Children with less number of siblings are likely to receive more attention, cooperation and care from their parents and can have more access to the educational resources than children from large families.

Parental Relation

Azhar, et.al, (2014) mentioned another factor which affects a children's education is the type of relation between their parents. If there is separation or lack of understanding between the parents, then the child cannot concentrate on his or her study and cannot be able to perform well. Separation or divorce also decreases or lowers the socio-economic condition of a family (Azhar, Nadeem, Naz et. al. 2014)

School Environment

Student's educational performance and academic achievements also depends on the environment of school they attend. School environmental factors include school structure, classrooms designing and size, school composition and school climate (Sarwar&Ashrafi, 2014).

Higher Education Commission

According to Mukhtar, Islam &Siengthai, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) is an independent and autonomous organization which is constitutionally established for the purpose of primary funding, controlling, regulating, and accrediting the higher education programs in Pakistan. The main sections which are working under the HEC are listed below.

- Scholarship & Fellowship Faculty Hiring
- Attestation Services
- Research Support
- Quality Assurance
- Finance & Development
- Learning Innovation
- Statistics & Reports
- Curricular, Co-Curricular & Sports

(Mukhtar, Islam &Siengthai, 2013).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study has determine the role of Higher Education Commission in supporting students with lower economic in attaining Higher Education in Pakistan; this research has also revealed problems and limitations students while attaining higher education.

The study is based on the qualitative research because the main variables of the study are the difficulties of the lower class students and the role and policies of HEC and both of these variables cannot be measured or quantified in the numerical numbers.

The research study was focused on Punjab and Baluchistan Provinces. Student Who University Students, both boys and girls, were the target population.

The primary data for the study was collected through focus group discussions (FGD). Overall Four FGDs two in Punjab and Two in Baluchistan were conducted both on boys and girls sides.

The data allowed the researchers to look into the determinants and magnitude of violence against children. The children are expected to express their perceptions about their experienced violence. In each FGD, 6-9 University students participated.

The secondary data was focus on desk review from grey literature and peer reviewed literature in order to conduct a comparative analysis of the studies conducted on Role of Higher Education Commission in supporting students with lower economic in attaining Higher Education in Pakistan

After the data collection, the data was analyzed using the quantitative analysis tools so that the appropriate result could be drawn about the difficulties that are being faced by the students who belong to the lower class families.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations and restrictions that were involved in the study and due to which the researcher was typically bound to access the data from various means of information. The major constraints are defined below

The study could have been more authentic if the HEC officials or members were included and were target as key informant interviewers, who could share the actual progress of the policies and strategies that are being taken by the HEC.

The financial resources were not according to the need of the study, as the researcher has to travel all over the country in order to get the data samples, so there was greater need of the financial resources so that more cities could be covered

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The participants of the study consist of students of universities of Baluchistan and most them were belonging from the lower class families. All the students had very sound information and knowledge about HEC and its role in supporting students in attaining higher education. They target students very aware of problems of the poor student while getting higher education. During the group discussions it was shared that higher education is necessary for every individual to have their share in the development of the country..

As per primary data due low economic situations the education of many brilliant students has stopped their education. Many students dropped after secondary education, are involved in different illegal activities and most of the student has stopped education and involved in lower levels in jobs. Timely support from educational institutions or HEC in shape of financial support or scholarship could have let them completed their higher education.

With low income family background it is very difficult in Pakistan to attain higher education. For several formalities fee has to be paid, most of the students have to travel from far-flung areas. Students from small cities and rural areas where there are no universities have to take residence in the city where university is situated. Travelling and accommodation expenses have to be bear by the students. This becomes unaffordable for parents with low income. As result the students drops from university and colleges while getting higher education. In case some students are supported by family despite of financial crisis then students remain in high depression and due family situations and could not concentrate on the study which is directly associated with rate of success for completing higher education. In Pakistan higher education is associated with many invisible expenses in the form of travelling, hidden fees, stationary expenses and other expenses. In such situation the role and importance of HEC is very vital to support such students in shape of financial support and scholarships; that they can attain their higher education.

HEC has initiated very good initiative for supporting students financially in term of scholarship and other supporting programs. HEC is providing enough funds for the development and upgrading of the universities so that the quality education can be ensured. However despite of HEC support to institutions/universities, University are not delivering that much effectively. Hence this also affects the credibility of HEC in public perception. Proper mechanism for monitoring of Universities also not in placed that the performance of the university could be evaluated and initiatives for betterment could be

taken. Management in universities are not properly utilizing the fund received due to lack of capacity, corruption and many other reasons.

Students, especially student with low income has many expectations from HEC. They are expecting HEC to provide more scholarship and provide financial support the poor student for support them in attaining higher education. Generally student expect HEC to contribute in fees, provision of high quality education in universities, development of student friendly policies in university and for scholarships, further they also expect HEC to review the hard and past policy and condition for getting higher education that common student from government institution can also get higher education.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results revealed that most of the students of Pakistan who belong to the lower class families have great interest in getting higher education and they believed that education is the essential element for the success of individuals. As through higher education respectable job can be possible only, but it is also helpful in increasing the mental capability and knowledge of a person. On the other hand, it was also mentioned that higher education is not much important because it does not guarantee the respectable job as most of the students remain jobless after having professional education due to the lack of references and background

The students whose educational life had been affected due to the financial instability are higher high and many students have stopped their education due to lack of financial crisis and as they have to contribute financially to their families. Since school till university very small number of students is completing their higher education. The students who have completed higher education have faced several difficulties in due to their lower or lower-middle class family backgrounds.

The difficulties which are faced by the students of different Government Universities are mostly related to the financial. The most common problems that have been faced by the students include payment of high fee, late fees submission, lack of concentration on studies due to family financial crisis, lack of appropriate scholarships and bearing extra invisible expenses.

The Universities in the country are supporting the poor and talented students to some extent, but a clear difference in policies were found among the Universities of different are within the country/Pakistan. The universities of Punjab and Khyber PakhtunKhuwa are providing good support the students financially and universities in Sindh are providing less financial support to student whereas in Baluchistan Universities have very rare and less support to the students due university financial crisis and other limitation as Baluchistan is the most deprived province of Pakistan.

Beside support from their institutions/universities HEC has very great role in the support the student both financial academically by providing the student financial packages, different international scholarships development and advancement of universities, promotion of research and management in Universities country wide in different thematic areas.

There are certain challenges and gaps Universities and HEC are facing in Pakistan. In sufficient or limited budgetary allocations/availability, improper policies that are not supporting the ground realities, political pressure and corruption. Due these limitations and gaps Universities and HEC are not delivering as required or as per the expectations of the beneficiaries.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the factors that are identified in this study, it can be concluded that the students from the lower or lower-middle class families are facing several difficulties and issues in completing their higher education. The role of HEC is important for supporting for supporting poor students for completing their higher education without support of HEC the completion rate of higher education among poor student will further decrease.

The HEC policies are not designed as per ground realities that can benefit every segment of the society. More broader policies by HEC has to be introduced that could benefit and fit to all class and levels of the students and institutions. Absence of well-established research institutes, worldwide digital library, degree accreditation and worldwide degree recognition are other are where HEC is lagging behind.

There is lack of specified policies for the students of lower class families should be focussed by the HEC that they could get higher education and became an active role in the development of the country.

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