

The Prospects of Higher Education among the Females in Pakistan: A persisting challenge

¹Saqib Khan, ²Irfanullah Khan, ¹Farhatullah Khan_PhD, ¹Dr. Rashid ur Rehman
Raqibaz Khan, ¹Tufail Nawaz, ³Naseem Bakht Yar

1.Department of Business Administration, Gomal University, Dera Ismail khan, Pakistan

2.Department of Public Administration, Gomal University, Dera Ismail khan, Pakistan

3.Bachelors of Business Administration, FAST School of Business, Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

It is an admitted fact that educational sector is the backbone of socio-economic development. The higher education is the only way-out for the developing countries to enable them face the challenges of the present highly scientific world. In terms of gender, the population of female is more than that of male especially in those countries where the education rate is comparatively lower. In this regard, the female population in Pakistan is making an all-out effort to bring them out of the darkness of ignorance through educating themselves. In this struggle, they are facing social, domestic, cultural, political, marital and financial restrictions. Up-to some extent, the situation is getting better as far as the female education at the higher secondary level is concerned. At the higher education level, the picture in this regard, is still bleak. The reasons behind and the implications of this national dilemma needs to be analyzed to frame long term policies based upon the modern vision.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education plays a vital role in human resource development which is the only asset upon which a country can be proud of. Investment in the human resources are the only lacking factor which is creating a void to be filled by taking certain bold decisions. It raises the productivity and efficiency of individuals and thus produces skilled manpower that is capable of leading the economy towards the path of sustainable economic development. Like many other developing countries, the situation of the education sector in Pakistan is not very encouraging (Memon, 2007). "The low enrolment rates at the higher level, wide disparities between regions and gender, lack of trained teachers, deficiency of proper teaching materials and poor physical infrastructure of the institutions indicate the poor performance of this sector" (Zubair, 2008).

Presently, the issue is how to make females capable of acquiring higher education in the face numerous restrictions as mentioned above. The highly educated woman can share her skills and services in the betterment of national economy which can bring a self-sustained social change countrywide (Haider, 2008). "It is also documented that how their participation not only acts to de-mystify university life, but in focusing on female as academic achievers, shows how female can act as role models for other women" (Iqbal & Iqbal, 2011). At the global level, the kinetics of higher education is not a new phenomenon but in present corporate culture the speed and level of emergent is significant. "The major trends are shaping higher education according to international scenario but in Pakistan inequalities between academic institutes are continuously increasing and our country reveals severe deficiency and the demand for increased access of quality education remain strong" (Ahmad & Lodhi, 2011). "Today as the wealth or poverty is depending upon the quality of education and is considered as benchmark for the success of nations so the countries are realizing the emerging need of educational development and taking adequate steps to enhance the standard of education". HEC (Higher Education Commission) also taking steps to improve the female quality of education but is facing certain difficulties to ensure it (Bilal & Imran, 2012).

2. HIGHER EDUCATION PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

The only standard education provides the base for reducing poverty and enhancing social development. "An educational system of poor quality may be one of the most important reasons why poor countries do not grow. In Pakistan, the quality of education has a declining trend. It is realized that science education in particular is reaching lowest ebb and needs to be improved urgently" (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2002). There is acute shortage of teachers, laboratories are poor and ill equipped and curriculum has little relevance to present day needs. "The colleges generally are not doing well. Tracing causative factors responsible for the present state is a critical need". These include defective curricula, dual medium of instruction at college level, poor quality of teachers, cheating in the examinations and overcrowded classrooms (Government of Pakistan, 2002). In Pakistan efforts have been made to organize the curriculum in accordance with our ideological, moral and cultural values as well as our national requirements in the fields of science, technology, medicine, engineering and agriculture (Saeed, Gondal & Bushra, 2005). "The rise in supply of educational infrastructure or removal of the supply side constraints can play an important role in raising literacy and female education". The budget allocation for the

social sector development has been very low throughout and is evident from the budgetary allocation for education (Memon, 2007).

2.1 Indicators of quality education

The quality indicators can be divided into three classes: educational inputs, educational outputs and educational processes. "Inputs include financial measures, physical measures and manpower measures associated with the resources that are provided for the female students at each educational level. Financial measures are generally summarized by educational expenditures per student". Physical measures include the age, environment and comprehensiveness of such facilities as classrooms, laboratories and libraries and the provision and use of international materials and equipment (Saeed et al., 2005). "Human resource measures include the number of personnel of different types, often expressed as ratios in relation to student numbers at each level". They also include background information about these personnel such as educational qualifications, experience and perhaps knowledge competencies and attitudes (Memon, 2007).

"The educational outputs refer to the consequences of the educational process as reflected in measures such as the levels of knowledge, skills and values acquired by students while educational processes refer to all processes from curriculum development to final assessment including admission, teaching and learning". These quality indicators are difficult to measure. There are different approaches to address this problem. Some researchers identify five different approaches in measuring quality in female higher education (Zubair, 2008). These include the definition of quality; however, it is imperative that quality should be initially defined before specific mechanisms are identified. "One of the most difficult problems in quality management and in assessing quality is how to strike a balance between external evaluators and internal evaluators". The current situation enjoys the benefit of nearly four decades of thinking in this regard, including the various conflicting approaches about whether attention should be given only to the output or whether both the inputs and the throughput should be taken into consideration (Ahmad & Lodhi, 2011).

The female education also provides a society with its scientists, engineers, managers, technicians and trained and trainable women. In a world where economies are increasingly based upon the availability of sophisticated skills and a well-informed citizen, education in rapidly progressing countries is considered a sound investment into the future (Haider, 2008). On the other hand, Pakistan's greatest need and its single greatest failure is its tragic failure to educate its female. "Nevertheless, female education remains a low-priority issue for the Pakistani state, evident both from historically low levels of funding and a chronic inability to take major steps towards reform now that funding is likely to increase" (Ahmad & Lodhi, 2011).

The purpose of female higher education is not simply to impart knowledge in certain branches of knowledge; it has deeper meaning and objectives. "The purpose may be multidimensional and may be termed as personal, social, economic and cultural. Female education and particularly higher education cannot be divorced from its milieu and social context". Religious, moral, historical and cultural ethos permeates through the fabric of the educational system of a country. Hamid et al (2012) found "In the time of rapid international, political and economic changes, the universities in developing countries are being transformed. Public expectations about access to female higher education direct concern about role that universities can play in innovation and economic development". The applications of principles of market economies to the university systems of all countries have created a new context for female higher education (Bilal & Imran, 2012).

2.2 Challenges in Higher Education

The developing countries are facing a critical period in their history and on that account; everybody concerned with female education has a responsibility for knowing what he is trying to do in bring up the next generation and why he is trying to do it. "Female higher education is faced with very severe challenges in the shape of various economic, social, political and moral changes and its future depends on the response made by its people to these challenges". Chauhan (2004) found "The problems plaguing the educational system of Pakistan and developing countries are multidimensional like population explosion, lack of resources, non-participation of the private sector, scarcity of qualified man power, inconsistency in the policies of various regimes, political instability, inefficient educational management system, wastage of resources and poor implementation of policies and program." The major challenges in female higher education include:

2.2.1 Quantity

Despite the constraints of resources, the quantitative expansion has been highly spectacular in the post-independence period. The institutions have not only been multiplied, the student enrollments at colleges and universities have registered exceptionally high rate of growth. "The numbers of new entrants is now more than

the total number of students in higher education prior to independence". The demand of female higher education has thus increased by leaps and bounds. In spite of quality control as well as consolidation, it will continue to grow constantly for a long time to come (Saeed et al., 2005). "The quantitative expansion is evident due to increasing aspiration of the people and social, economic and political forces influencing the development of female higher education. In the post-independence period, the role of female higher education has been very well recognized in the development of science and technology, as well as various arenas of human advancement" (Zubair, 2008).

2.2.2 Equity and Quality

The major breakthrough was evident in the democratic countries of the world where franchise was given to all adults irrespective of caste, creed sex, and economic or social status. Memon, (2007) stated "The ideal of equity was severely constrained by existing in qualities in the distribution of property and productive resources, low level of education and awareness among the people and strong influences exercised by individual and group to further their own sectional interest rather than total social interest" (Zubair, 2008). Development of society not only depends upon quantity of goods and services produced, but also on their quality. "It again leads to quality of life of the people and the quality of the society in general". It is rightly said that the philosophical basis of quality is the innate characteristics of a human being to attain a higher standard and the need of excellence for attaining a higher stage in the development.

2.2.3 Student Unrest and Emotional Integration

Among the challenges of female higher education is the vital role of addressing student's unrest. It is revealed from the literature that "The condition of higher education in universities and colleges is not satisfactory in the eyes of female students. Lack of physical and educational facilities is bringing much hindrance in the way of development (Saeed, Gondal & Bushra, 2005). The researchers states "Teachers are less motivated to do certain research work. Most teachers are not competent and they are teaching in higher education institutions." They have limited knowledge about subject matter they taught and many of them have no clear idea about the subject. "Even in Pakistani universities, the teacher at M. Phil and Ph.D. level, are not competent" (Memon, 2007).

Female education can play a vital role in strengthening emotional integration. It is felt that education should not aim at imparting knowledge but should develop all aspects of a student's personality. Zubair (2008) found that "It should broaden the outlook, foster the feeling of oneness, nationalism, a spirit of sacrifice and tolerance so that narrow group interests are submerged in the largest interest of country." "Students, the future workforces of the country, should be trained in democracy, its value and ideals so that they will have sense of justice which is conducive for the development of national integration especially in the particular situation of developing countries which are striving to build up a structure of democratic living" (Ahmad & Lodhi, 2011).

2.2.4 Administrative Reform and Faculty

In the last fifteen years or so, Pakistan and developing countries have been giving increasing attention to the problems of university administration. Haider (2008) observed "They have noticed that despite the resources available for university expansion, they have not been able to obtain the best possible results." Further they have also begun to realize that much of this is due to lack of proper administration and what the outcome is on the development of higher education. The current size of present faculty is very small according to the general international standard. Ahmad & Lodhi (2011) found that "The teacher/student ratio is very small even according to many third world countries standards. The quality of university education at the college has decreased because of the exiting faculty". "Many present faculty members are teaching courses which are not their own specialization". "Many faculty members in most of universities are just master degree holders with little or no practical knowledge and higher education experiences (Bilal & Imran, 2012).

2.2.5 Educational Policies and Academic Freedom

The faculty should have primary responsibilities for determining the educational policies of the institution. Government of Pakistan (2002) explains "If this responsibility is not conferred and defined by the character of the institution, it should be expressed in legislation of the governing board." "Educational polices include such fundamental matters as the subject matter and methods of instruction, facilities and support for the research work of faculty members and students, standards for admission of students (Zubair, 2008). The right of female academic freedom must be recognized in order to enable the faculty members, researchers and students to carry on their roles. Ahmad & Lodhi (2011) studied "The freedom of universities in making professional appointments, tenure research, salary scales and all academic decision." "Academic freedom and university autonomy are sometimes regarded as synonymous, but they are two quite different concepts, although they overlap at many points".

2.2.6 Courses and Curricula, Unemployment, Budgeting and Financing

The courses and curricula are not designed in accordance with the standard of female higher education of the present day. Saeed et al (2005) observed that “There is no continuity of some of the important courses: there is also no relationship between the related courses of common or similar knowledge.” Memon (2007) studied that “so many important and modern courses required for higher education are not taught at all.” “The curricula are not written in detail and are left to the professor’s personal likes, dislikes, interests or experience”. “While education cannot directly reduce unemployment, except by requiring more teachers, a reform of the educational system could help alleviate its impact especially on young people”. Zubair (2008) found that “There is a marked mismatch in terms of the field and specialization of graduates and the absorptive capacity of the labor market.” “In the sense of employment, the planners of higher education are handicapped in the assessment of the actual labor market needs for skills in various sectors of the economy”.

Central to all the foregoing is a new concept of budgeting and financing at the higher level. Ahmad & Lodhi (2011) observed “The conventional system of an annual budget is probably the most confusing and least understood.” “The budget of course, performs a number of essential functions which even the most frustrated will acknowledge”. (Hamid et al., 2012) identify “The concern here is with the budget as an instrument of academic planning which may promote the special aims of each college and constitute a practical means by which all university purpose may be realized ideally it must not only insure financial solvency of the university, but should also place responsibility and commensurate authority where it may be exercised most” (Bilal & Imran, 2012).

3. DISCUSSIONS

The education is basic in the human life, which is able to sharpen his faculties of mind and helps to grow harmoniously. This also helps to grow harmoniously in every sphere of life-Physical, intellectual social and emotional (Memon, 2007). Female education plays vital role in the progress of a country. Education is a lifelong investment in human resources development. The quality and quantity of educated manpower determine the strength of a nation. All developed and educated countries have recognized the needs of intimate relation of education of life and needs of the community (Zubair, 2008).

It is observed that with knowledge based economies and globalization, female higher education has become more important and in particular the quality of education is critical to national development. The problem with developing countries including Pakistan is that they have given a relatively low priority to female higher education. Without more and better female higher education, developing countries will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based economy Ahmad & Lodhi (2011). “The development of a modern society depends to a large extent on the nature and standard of higher education. Thus the role of higher education is to prepare competent, knowledgeable and far-sighted people for assuming various higher responsibilities”. The growing importance of knowledge in the modern world can hardly be overemphasized, especially in the era of globalization and in a global environment which is fiercely competitive. Particularly, higher education has enormous potential to promote prosperity in the developing nations (Saeed et al., 2012).

In Pakistan there was a time when higher education used to be considered a luxury in a society of mass illiteracy. However, towards the turn of the last century the need for highly skilled manpower started to be acutely felt every sphere of the society for self-sustained development and poverty alleviation (Bilal & Imran, 2012). Highly trained manpower not only contributes towards human resource development of a society through supplying teachers, instructors, researchers and scholars in the feeder institutions like schools, colleges, technical institutes and universities. They are also instrumental in bringing about technological revolution in the field of agriculture, industry, business and commerce, medicine, engineering, transport and communication (Hamid et al., 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

The present study explores the issues behind the poor quality of female education in Pakistan. The literature revealed that the present system of education in Pakistan is not performing well and this knowledge about the problems and prospects of the higher education will help the reader to understand the present status and find the possible solution for the female education faced in the country and will support to getting novel ideas. The development of a society depends to a large extent on the standard and nature of higher education. It is the responsibility of the higher educational institutes to produce knowledgeable, far-sighted competent people, equipping them advance knowledge and skills to fill the sphere of societies and the various responsibilities to lead the nation. As HEC takes certain initiative to achieve the success in respective fields but a number of internal and external factors proves as an obstacle to streamline the universities to achieve the quality of female education and to safe guard the national interest.

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