**Higher Education and Financial Constraints**

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April 19, 2023

The recent reports in print and electronic media about the financial poverty of universities in Pakistan have stirred panic not only among academia, scholars, and students but also among the state-loving citizens of Pakistan. According to the news, a university in south Punjab could not credit salaries to its employees timely in the current month. A few days earlier, a university in the northern province of Pakistan was reported under the protests of employees who were unpaid for several months. Another university could not receive new appointments of treasurer and other relevant bodies, hence rendering the university function to a halt, especially in the financial matter. Agreed that there is a financial situation in almost all the world, but the financial constraints of Pakistani universities are more because of mismanagement than lack of funds and resources.

This situation is more visible among public sector universities while private universities prosper academically and financially. Day by day, additions are being made in the private sector. They neither lack students, admission, or funds and mostly earn a profit after paying their liabilities. Many funding grants available to public sector universities are not available to private universities, but still, they are proving themselves better players in the field. Managers of these universities are not as highly qualified as are in the public sector universities, neither in the administrative section nor in the academic section. But these universities are providing student-oriented facilities at the next level. The student feels more attracted to the comfortable classroom environment and outside instead of the simple and age-old traditional classroom setup.

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However, all blame may not be laid at the doors of public sector universities. Some socio-political realities are also contributing to this situation. One of the evident reasons is the introduction and launching of BS programs at public sector colleges at very low fee structures. So, most students would prefer to join these colleges instead of universities with a higher fee structure than these colleges. Consequently, very few applicants resort to universities. This is a separate debate about whether colleges can provide quality education without trained faculty to teach such programs. Also, the infrastructure at such an institution is mainly low in quality regarding labs, libraries, and IT. Moreover, private colleges have also been accorded BS affiliation by multiple universities, drastically affecting the revenue generation of the public sector universities. At the higher level of MS and PhD programs, admission vacancies are very few, depending on the availability of capable faculty. All this has resulted in the thin storage of money for public sector universities. Moreover, the financial crunch at the Government level has also forced the government grants and institutions like HEC to feel limited in their usual support for public sector universities.

Whatever the case, universities cannot be made to suffer financially and must be saved by introducing some reforms to generate revenue. One of the programs has already been launched by the HEC in collaboration with NGOs to run commercial projects by the universities and earn money from the dividends of these projects. Many universities have launched such projects, which proved a big success. There is a need to enhance these projects. Besides, universities must engage as many faculty members as possible so that they can engage a maximum number of MS and PhD admissions to earn more and spend more, ultimately reaching the level of self-reliance.

Moreover, a system of endowment funds and donations should be launched on the patterns of American and European universities. Besides, the government should also allocate some sources of income to the universities and leave their management to the universities to raise their income. The Alumni organizations can play a significant role in this respect. The government of Pakistan may also curtail a few unnecessary expenditures at the political level and may invest the same for the grants to the universities.

Above all, political interference must be banned altogether, the key posts must be filled on merit, and there must be zero tolerance for the unnecessary involvement of political figures in these appointments. These appointments must be made on a timely and regular basis to avoid delays in the universities’ smooth running. To ensure better management of resources and expenditures of the universities by appointing capable and professional individuals who may not let the resources wasted on unnecessary projects of the universities. For now, universities must launch an austerity regime to be adhered to strictly. No great utilization of funds by the officers of the universities must be permitted to save precious funding. It is not just the higher education institution’s responsibility to fight with the strait jackets of finance; all citizens need to join hands to make our HEI useful, productive, futuristic, prospering academically, and contributing the most to the uplift of society.

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