



Evaluation of Higher Education Policies: Case Study of PhD Programs in South Asia

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Abstract

This paper aims to compare quality of higher education in Pakistan and India. In this regard, data were collected concerning policies regarding admission and completion of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India through websites and notifications of Higher Education Commission (HEC) and University Grant Commission (UGC). The policies for admission and award of PhD degrees in both countries are then compared separately using Qualitative Comparative Analysis. There were four major admission criteria. Out of these four criteria, in three cases, rules set by HEC of Pakistan are relatively strict as compared to the rules set by UGC in India. Similarly, there are eight major criteria for the award of PhD degree after admission in the PhD program. Out of these eight criteria, the rules set by HEC in Pakistan and UGC in India are same for the two criteria, whereas, in the remaining six criteria, the rules set by HEC of Pakistan are strict as compared to the rules set by UGC in India. Hence, it is concluded that procedures for PhD programs in Pakistan are relatively better than that of procedures for PhD programs in India.

Keywords: Higher Education, PhD degrees, and Qualitative Comparative Analysis.



Introduction

Pakistan and India have a common history. Much of the areas of these two countries have remained a unified territory under the Delhi Sultanat, Mughal Empire, Company Rule, and the British Raj. Hence, present day Pakistan and India shares, if not a very pleasant then at least a common history (Majid & Hussin, 2020). Furthermore, these two nations got their independence from the British rule in August 1947. Although, there had never been a truly unified culture that could have held the people of sub-continent together, yet they were living in the same country for hundreds of years.

Prior to the partition of sub-continent, its population consisted of two major groups. These were the Muslims and the Hindus. However, since the religious, social, and cultural values of the two groups were not only inconsistent in nature but were rather contradictory as well, therefore, these two groups that were living on the same piece of land for hundreds of years could not have emerged as one nation. This not only resulted in difference of opinions but often resulted in bitter animosity between the two nations that were living on the same piece of land; and had resulted in an atmosphere where the idea of a unified sub-continent could not have worked. Mahratta rebellion against the Mughal Empire was one such example which led the people to think that the idea of a unified sub-continent was nothing but a myth.

Furthermore, since the British had become the rulers of the sub-continent after overthrowing the Mughals who were Muslims, therefore, there was a strong resentment against the British in the Muslims, whereas, for the others in the region, it was merely the change of masters, albeit from a local to a foreign master. Hence, there was a tendency among the Muslims to resist the British rule, whereas, Hindus had the reasons to accept the British rule. This subsequently changed the political and social landscape of the sub-continent and Muslims were soon reduced to nothing more than third class citizens in an already enslaved sub-continent. Hence, from the very beginning of the British rule in the sub-continent, the Hindus were favored, and the Muslims were systematically alienated from the power centers in Delhi. This is evident from the fact that the very demand of Pakistan was the resultant of sense of discrimination that the Muslims had or at least one can say that it was the resultant of the supposed discrimination that would have arisen after the independence of the British government.



Problem Statement

It is a well-known fact that almost all the major cities of sub-continent became part of what is known as India today and Pakistan was left with only one major city i.e. Lahore. Thereby, one can assume that institutionally, India may have edge over Pakistan as it had inherited nearly everything that was present in the sub-continent prior to the partition. Hence, there is a strong reason to believe that as the ultimate inheritor of nearly all assets of the undivided sub-continent, India should have better institutions including the educational systems particularly higher education system. However, it has over seventy-five years since the independence of both countries (Basharat, & Sajjad, 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that seventy-five years is quite a long time and situation may have changed. Hence, there is a need to evaluate the higher education systems of both countries. Therefore, this research study seeks to compare the higher education system especially the procedures pertaining to the award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India.

Significance of the Study

Since, this study seeks to qualitatively compare the PhD degrees programs in Pakistan and India, therefore, this study will provide the insights to the educational policy makers in Pakistan and India about the PhD degree programs in the two countries. Hence, this will provide the opportunity to the educational policy makers in Pakistan and India to learn from the policies governing the PhD programs in each other's countries. Hence, this research paper is significant for the educational policy makers in Pakistan and India.

Literature Review

History of PhD

Doctor of Philosophy or more commonly known as PhD is the highest level of qualification (Park, 2005). The degree has its roots in medieval Europe. It was basically the award of a license to teach in the thirteenth century rather than the recognition of ability or achievement in research (Park, 2005). It is because of this reason that Simpson (1983) suggested that master's and doctorate were the only qualification in the medieval universities and thereby cannot be regarded as equivalent to the research degrees of today.



PhD Degrees in Contemporary Era

Germans were the first to give the doctorate degrees a special status. This development in Germany owed much to the vision of *Friedrich Wilhelm Christian Karl Ferdinand von Humboldt* who founded the University of Berlin in the year 1810 as the first modern research university (Tenorth, 2014). Hence, the very idea of giving the doctorate degrees a special status was the brainchild of Humboldt. To acquire this degree, the candidates were required to attend various seminars, passing a comprehensive examination and submit a suitable thesis (Park, 2005). Furthermore, the basic emphasis of this newly found degree was on the originality and creativity of research work (Goodchild & Mille, 1997). Soon afterwards the degree became popular among the academic staff (Park, 2005). This is primarily because the academic staff is usually required to conduct research and write scholarly papers and these degrees were equipping the candidates with the set of skills that suits the most for conducting research. Since, no such degree programs that fulfill these needs of academicians were offered in other parts of the world, therefore, many academicians from across the world started moving towards Germany to enroll in PhD programs (Simpson, 1983). Once these students returned to their home countries, they brought with them the culture of research. Soon, the other universities in the world started following the example of German universities and introduced PhD degrees.

Quality of PhD Degrees

There have been numerous research studies regarding the PhD degrees. These studies have discussed various topics such as interest of students in pursuing PhD degrees (Ayoola, Kamp, Adams, Granner, DeGroot, Lee, & Doornbos, 2021), undergraduate GPA and PhD (Mendoza-Sanchez, DE Gruyter, Savage, & Polymenis, 2022), employability of local and international PhD students (Tani, 2022), success factor of PhD students (Young, VanWye, Schafer, Robertson & Poore, 2019; Van Roil, Fokkens-Bruinsma, & Jansen, 2021). Moreover, researchers (Belavy, Owen & Livingston, 2020) have also studied the topics that discuss the quality of outcome of PhD programs with respect to the inputs of the program. In this regard, researchers (Bacha, Rustum, Khan, & Khan, 2021) have also studied the quality of PhD degrees in Pakistan. Similarly, quality of PhD has also been discussed in the Indian context as well and it is found that although India produces more PhDs than US and UK in certain disciplines, however, produces fewer research than these countries (Pattanaik & Yanthan, 2019). This suggests that



there is something wrong with the quality of PhDs produced by Indian universities. This suggests that there exists a need to qualitatively compare PhD programs offered by Indian universities with what are being offered in other countries. In this regard, since India and Pakistan are in the same region, has similar historical backgrounds, and got their independence simultaneously, therefore, it is logically correct to PhD programs offered by the Indian universities with the PhD programs offered by Pakistani universities. However, to the best of researcher's knowledge, there is a scarcity of research that seek to compare the quality of PhD programs in Pakistan and India. Hence, this research study aims to compare the quality of PhD programs in Pakistan and India.

Research Methodology

Since, this paper seeks to compare the process of the award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India, therefore, it was quite essential to gather the data pertaining to the award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India. In this regard, it should be noted that although researchers in qualitative research usually collect the data collected through interviews or focus groups, however, there are other methods of data collection as well. For instance, Ghayas and Jabeen (2020) for their study collected the data using open-ended questionnaires, whereas Khan and Ghayas (2019) had used the annual reports etc for the purpose of collecting qualitative data. Therefore, following the precedence of Khan and Ghayas (2019), this research study has used the official documents such as notifications and information provided on the websites of HEC and UGC as the qualitative data. Hence, data pertaining to the rules of admission and award of PhD degrees were collected from the documents such as the official notifications and memos of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India. These notifications and memos were usually serving the purpose of communicating with the stakeholders and are then considered as the rules in the times to come and thus become the public property. Furthermore, these notifications are usually available on the official websites of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the University Grant Commission (UGC). In this regard, essential requirements for admission and award of PhD degrees in both countries were listed and compared separately. Hence, present research study is essentially a qualitative comparative research study.



Results

Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Policies Governing PhD Admissions in Pakistan and India

This section provides the comparison of policies governing PhD admissions in Pakistan and India. Results of the comparison are presented in the below table:

Table 1
Qualitative Comparative Analysis of PhD Programs in Pakistan and India

Criterion	Pakistan	India	Country that has comparatively difficult criterion
18 Years Education for Admission	Must	Required but there are relaxations in certain situations	Pakistan
Percentage of Marks Required in Previous Degree	60%	55% with a further 5% relaxation under certain conditions	Pakistan
Entry test	Required	Required	None
Qualifying Marks in the Entry Test	60%	50% with a relaxation of 5% SC/ST/OBC (Non-creamy layers)/Differently abled category	Pakistan

Results in the above table indicate that the criteria for admissions in PhD degrees consist of four major criterions. The first criterion is about the years of schooling. In this regard, it is found that HEC in Pakistan does not allow any individual to be admitted into PhD degree in any of the university in Pakistan if the candidate has not successfully completed eighteen years of schooling. On the other hand, the UGC in India is a bit flexible in this regard and allows the students to enter PhD programs in certain situations. Hence, Pakistan has a bit strict rule when it comes to years of schooling for admission in PhD programs.

The second criterion for PhD admissions in Pakistan and India is about the percentage of marks in the previous degree. Upon carefully analyzing the policies governing the PhD admission in Pakistan and India, it is found that HEC in Pakistan does not allow any candidate to be admitted into PhD degree if the candidate has not secured a minimum of 60% marks in his/her previous degree. However, the UGC's minimum requirements to qualify for PhD admissions in India with respect to percentage of marks secured in the previous degree are 55% marks, and this too comes with a flexibility of a further 5% marks under certain circumstances. This effectively allows



certain candidates to be admitted in PhD programs in India with 50% score in the previous degree. Hence, Pakistan has strict rules when it comes to minimum requirement for percentage of marks in previous degree for PhD admissions.

The third criterion for PhD admissions in Pakistan and India is about the entry test. Upon carefully analyzing the policies of HEC and the UGC, it is found that both HEC and UGC do not allow the candidates to be admitted into PhD degrees without the entry test. However, the fourth criterion for PhD admissions in Pakistan and India is about the qualifying marks in entry test. Upon analyzing the HEC and UGC policies governing the qualifying marks in the entry test for PhD admissions, it is found that HEC in Pakistan does not allow any candidate to be admitted into PhD degree if the candidate has not successfully secured a minimum of 60% marks in the entry test. However, the UGC's minimum requirements to qualify for PhD admissions in India with respect to entry test is 50% marks, and this too comes with a flexibility of a further 5% marks for differently abled candidates. This effectively allows certain candidates to be admitted in PhD programs in India with 45% score in the entry test. Hence, Pakistan has a bit strict rule in this regard as well.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Policies Governing Award of PhD Degrees in Pakistan and India

This section provides the comparison of policies governing award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India. Results of the comparison are presented in the below table:

Table 2
Comparison of PhD Programs in Pakistan and India

Criterion	Pakistan	India	Country that has comparatively difficult criterion
Course Work Requirements	18 Cr. Hours – 36 Cr. Hours	12 Cr. Hours – 16 Cr. Hours	Pakistan
Comprehensive Exam	Required	Required	None
Date of Comprehensive Exam	Must not be later than 2 years after admission	Anytime	Pakistan
Research Paper(s)	Must	UGC has abolished the requirement of research paper for award of PhD degree in India	Pakistan
Internal Examiner(s)	At-least 1	Not Required	Pakistan
External Examiner(s)	At-least 2	At-least 2	None



Foreign Evaluator(s)	At-least 2 foreign evaluators from academically and technologically advanced countries	Not Required	Pakistan
Public Defense	Required	Presentation / Viva voice in front of departmental committee	Pakistan

Results in the above table indicate that the criteria for admissions in PhD degrees consist of eight major criterions. The first criterion is about the course work in PhD program. Upon careful examination of HEC policies, it is found that HEC in Pakistan requires that a PhD student must complete at-least 18 credit hours of coursework, whereas the UGC in India requires that a PhD student must complete a minimum 12 credit hours of coursework. This effectively makes earning PhD degree in India a relatively easier task than doing so in Pakistan. Furthermore, both the HEC in Pakistan and UGC believe that there is a need of comprehensive examination in the PhD degree. In this regard, the HEC of Pakistan requires that the candidate must be able to successfully pass the exam in the first two years after admission in the PhD program, however, the UGC in India is a bit flexible when it comes to the timeframe of comprehensive exam.

In addition to this, the HEC of Pakistan requires the PhD scholars to publish at-least one research paper in a well reputed research journal. In this regard, although UGC in India had similar requirements for the award of PhD degrees, however, the UGC has recently abolished these requirements. Hence, PhD degree can now be awarded in India with having published a research paper. Therefore, we are safe to say that as of this date it is difficult to earn a PhD degree in Pakistan as compared to India.

Moreover, the HEC of Pakistan requires that once the PhD thesis is submitted, it must be evaluated by at-least one internal examiner from the same university, at-least two external examiners (examiners from other universities in the country) and at-least two foreign evaluators (examiners from technologically and academically advanced countries outside Pakistan). In this regard, the UGC in India only requires that the PhD thesis is evaluated from two external examiners (examiners from other universities in the country). This effectively makes earning a PhD degree more difficult in Pakistan in comparison to India.



Furthermore, public defense of a PhD thesis is a must in Pakistan. In this regard, the HEC of Pakistan requires that the date of public defense is to be announced through newspapers with an open invitation to anyone who wants to be the part of public defense. The attendees of the public defense are allowed to ask any question or raise any concern with respect to the PhD thesis. On the other hand, the UGC in India relies on presentation / viva voice in front of departmental committee for the defense of PhD thesis. Although, it must be a bit rigorous evaluation as compared to graduate level programs, however, on paper the process of evaluation seems to be quite like that of the evaluation of graduate level thesis in Pakistan.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

Results indicate that Pakistan has relatively strict admission criteria for PhD programs in comparison to the PhD programs in India. This provides the basis to understand the previous study of Batool, Sajid, and Shaheen (2013) which states that in terms of percentage, universities in Indian have more PhDs than universities in Pakistan. Hence, it can be suggested that the greater percentage of PhDs in the faculty of Indian universities is because of the relative ease in their degree programs in comparison to PhD degree programs in Pakistan. However, it is a known fact that India often produces more PhDs yet produces fewer research than other countries (Pattanaik & Yan than, 2019). This is mainly because Indian universities often give admissions to those who would have been unable to secure admissions in Pakistan or other countries. On the other hand, Nauman (2017) raised concerns about the lack of critical thinking skills in the students especially in the sub-continent. Therefore, it can be argued that once the candidates secured admissions in PhD, they must go through the rigorous process to make sure that critical thinking skills are inculcated in them. It is because of this reason, the criteria for award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India are evaluated. After the analysis of the criteria for the award of PhD degree in Pakistan and India, it is found that Pakistan has much better criteria for the award of PhD degree in comparison to India. This further explains as to why Indian universities often produce more PhDs yet produces fewer research than other countries (Pattanaik & Yanthan, 2019).



Conclusion

This research study aims to compare the criteria for admission and award of PhD degrees in Pakistan and India. In this regard, the criteria for admission and award of PhD degrees were compared separately. As far as the admission criteria is concerned, there were four major criterions. Out of these four criterions, the entry test requirement is same in both Pakistan and India, whereas, in the rest of three criterions, the rules set by HEC of Pakistan are strict as compared to the rules set by UGC in India. Similarly, there are eight major criterions when it comes to the award of PhD degree. Out of these eight criterions, the rules set by HEC in Pakistan and UGC in India are same for the two criterions, whereas, in the rest of six criterions, the rules set by HEC of Pakistan are strict as compared to the rules set by UGC in India. Hence, based on both the comparative analyses, it is concluded that procedures for PhD programs in Pakistan are relatively better than that of procedures for PhD programs in India.

Recommendation

Since, it is found that that the regulations for the award of PhD degrees in Pakistan are relatively strict in Pakistan in comparison to the PhD programs in India, therefore, one can argue that PhD programs in Pakistan are relatively better than the PhD programs in India. Hence, it is recommended that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan should not recognize the PhD degrees awarded by Indian universities equivalent to that of PhD degrees awarded in Pakistan. In this regard, it should be noted that although Jammu and Kashmir has been under the control of Indian authorities since the partition of sub-continent, however, the region has been an internationally recognized territorial dispute (Ali & Mustafa, 2021). Therefore, any policy that is made for the equivalence of PhD degrees of Indian educational institutions should not be applicable on the degrees awarded by the educational institutions of Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) should devise a separate roadmap for the equivalence of PhD degrees awarded by the educational institutions of Jammu and Kashmir. This can also help in creating a shock absorbing mechanism if the status of the disputed territory changes and area swaps hand soon. This is because separately recognizing the degrees awarded by universities of Jammu and Kashmir may help devising the bridge programs for recognizing PhDs degrees awarded by the universities in Jammu and Kashmir if the disputed territory changes hand. Moreover, it is also recommended that authorities in other countries should also



carefully analyze the qualifications of candidates having PhD degrees from India for the employments, postdoc fellowships and the visa processes. In this regard, it is recommended that they should compare the minimum requirements to earn a qualification earned at Indian educational institutions with the minimum requirements to earn that qualification at their own educational institutions before making any decision. On the other hand, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan should also compare the procedures of awarding the degrees in Pakistan with that of other developed countries so that the quality of education in Pakistan can be improved as well.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The research was limited only to comparing degrees awarded in India and Pakistan; however, there are several other countries in South Asia. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers should compare the degrees awarded in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Afghanistan as well. In this regard, it is also suggested that China and Iran also share the borders with Pakistan, therefore, it is suggested that similar comparative studies should also be conducted to determine the differences in degree awarding procedure in Pakistan China and Iran.

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