

Understanding The Role Of Government Policies In Shaping Higher Education Opportunities For Pakistani Students From Diverse Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the influence of government policies on the availability of higher education for students from different socio-economic backgrounds in Pakistan. The introduction highlights the significance of inclusive education policies in advancing equal chances for higher education, particularly in a nation marked by socio-economic disparities. This study employs a mixed-methods research methodology, which combines quantitative analysis of educational data with qualitative interviews conducted with policymakers, educators, and students. Data gathering involves the examination of enrollment data, policy documents, and the administration of semi-structured interviews to acquire comprehensive insights. The data analysis reveals the impact of affirmative action legislation, scholarship programs, and regional development initiatives on the availability of higher education. Statistical tools are used to identify patterns and inconsistencies, whereas theme analysis is performed to interpret qualitative data. The findings indicate that while many measures have successfully increased enrollment among marginalized groups, there are still significant barriers, including regional differences and insufficient financial resources. The result highlights the significance of developing comprehensive and well-funded strategies to tackle the educational disparity. Proposed recommendations include expanding scholarship programs, enhancing infrastructure in underdeveloped regions, and fostering public-private partnerships to support educational initiatives. This study offers a significant contribution to the discourse on educational equity and presents practical suggestions for policymakers to enhance the availability of higher education to all students in Pakistan.

Keywords: Influence, government policies, higher education, socio-economic backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

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Government policies play a crucial role in shaping higher education opportunities for students in Pakistan, especially those from diverse backgrounds. These policies encompass a range of initiatives, including financial aid, scholarship programs, quality assurance, digital education, and efforts to promote inclusivity and equity. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, along with various provincial governments, has been at the forefront of implementing strategies aimed at enhancing access to higher education for underprivileged and marginalized groups. These efforts are essential in a country where socioeconomic disparities and geographic limitations often hinder educational attainment. Financial aid and scholarship programs are among the primary tools used by the government to support students from low-income families. The Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Project is a notable example, providing financial assistance to students who might otherwise be unable to afford higher education (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2020). Similarly, the Punjab Government's Women Empowerment Initiative offers scholarships and incentives specifically for female students, aiming to address gender imbalances in higher education (Government of Punjab, 2021). These programs are designed to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent capable students from pursuing their academic goals. To financial support, government policies have focused on improving the quality of education through rigorous quality assurance mechanisms. The HEC's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) conducts regular evaluations and audits of higher education institutions to maintain and enhance academic standards (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2019). Such measures are critical for ensuring that degrees obtained from Pakistani institutions are recognized and respected both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the establishment of new universities and campuses in underserved regions, such as Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan, reflects the government's commitment to making higher education accessible to all (Shah, 2021).

Government policies significantly shape higher education opportunities, influencing access, quality, and the overall landscape of educational institutions. Over the past few years, particularly from 2020 to 2024, several pivotal trends and policies have emerged, affecting higher education in diverse and profound ways. This comprehensive analysis explores these influences, backed by recent studies and data. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted higher education, necessitating swift policy responses to support emergency remote teaching. Governments worldwide implemented measures to ensure continuity of education. The rapid shift to online learning highlighted disparities in digital access, prompting policies aimed at bridging the digital divide. For instance, in the United States, the CARES Act provided substantial funding to support institutions in transitioning to online education, ensuring that students had access to necessary technology and internet services (Bacher-Hicks, Goodman, & Mulhern, 2021). Similarly, the European Union initiated the Digital Education Action Plan, focusing on enhancing digital skills and infrastructure across member states (European Commission, 2021). The pandemic also accelerated the adoption of innovative educational technologies. Governments encouraged the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies to enhance learning experiences. AI has been utilized to personalize education, offering tailored learning paths for students. Policies supporting AI in education aim to improve learning outcomes and administrative efficiency. However, these advancements raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding data privacy and algorithmic bias. Governments are now working on regulatory frameworks to address these issues while promoting technological innovation (Luckin, Holmes, Griffiths, & Forcier, 2021).

Equity and access remain central to higher education policies. Governments have been focusing on increasing access to underrepresented groups through targeted initiatives. In the United States, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 included provisions to support minority-serving

institutions and provide financial aid to low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Similar efforts are seen globally, with countries implementing policies to ensure that higher education is inclusive and accessible to all segments of society. The United Kingdom, for example, has introduced policies to widen participation, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Office for Students, 2022). Sustainability has emerged as a critical focus in higher education policies. Institutions are encouraged to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability into their curricula. Governments are supporting these efforts through funding and policy initiatives. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been a driving force, with many countries aligning their educational policies with these goals. For instance, Sweden has made significant investments in promoting sustainability in higher education, encouraging institutions to incorporate environmental education and sustainable practices (Wals, 2020). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have gained prominence in higher education, driven by policy incentives. These partnerships aim to leverage private sector resources and expertise to enhance educational offerings and infrastructure. PPPs can bring about innovation and efficiency, but they also pose challenges related to commercialization and conflicts of interest. Governments are navigating these challenges by establishing guidelines to ensure that such partnerships benefit the public and maintain educational integrity (Davies & Hentschke, 2021). Performance-based funding models have become a significant aspect of higher education policy. These models link funding to specific performance metrics, such as graduation rates and employment outcomes. The goal is to incentivize institutions to improve student success and align educational outcomes with labor market needs. However, there is ongoing debate about the effectiveness of these models, with critics arguing that they may disadvantage institutions serving high-need populations. States like Tennessee and Texas in the United States have adopted performance-based funding, with mixed results (Dougherty & Natow, 2020).

Global competitiveness is another area where government policies are playing a crucial role. Countries are investing in research and development (R&D) to enhance their higher education systems' global standing. Policies supporting international collaborations and the mobility of students and researchers are critical in this regard. For example, China's Double First-Class initiative aims to develop world-class universities and disciplines, significantly boosting the country's research capabilities and global reputation (Yang, 2020). Leadership in higher education is facing new challenges, prompting policy responses to support leadership development. The complexities of leading modern universities, including financial pressures, diversity initiatives, and geopolitical challenges, require adaptive and forward-thinking leaders. Governments are supporting leadership development programs and creating pathways for diverse leadership to address these challenges. The UK, for example, has introduced initiatives to develop leadership skills among academic and administrative staff in higher education (Advance HE, 2021). Affordability remains a critical concern in higher education policy. Rising tuition costs and student debt have prompted governments to explore various solutions to make higher education more affordable. Policies such as tuition freezes, increased funding for scholarships, and student loan forgiveness programs are being implemented to address these issues. In the United States, the Biden administration's proposal for free community college aims to reduce the financial burden on students and make higher education more accessible (The White House, 2021).

Mental health and well-being have become prominent issues in higher education, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments are implementing policies to support student mental health through funding for counseling services, wellness programs, and initiatives to reduce stigma around mental health issues. Australia, for instance, has launched several programs aimed at improving mental health support for students, recognizing the

importance of well-being in academic success (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021). Internationalization of higher education is another significant trend influenced by government policies. Policies promoting student and faculty exchanges, joint research initiatives, and global partnerships enhance the international dimension of higher education. The Erasmus+ program in Europe is a prime example, facilitating mobility and cooperation across European universities (European Commission, 2021). Such initiatives enrich educational experiences and prepare students for a globalized world. The role of community colleges and vocational education is being re-evaluated through policy reforms. Governments recognize the importance of these institutions in providing practical skills and addressing labor market needs. Policies supporting the expansion of vocational training and partnerships with industries are being implemented to enhance the role of community colleges. In Germany, the dual education system, which combines vocational training with academic education, serves as a model for other countries looking to strengthen their vocational education systems (Euler, 2020).

Higher education policies are also addressing the need for lifelong learning. As the nature of work evolves, there is a growing recognition of the importance of continuous education and skill development. Governments are promoting lifelong learning through policies that support adult education, online learning platforms, and reskilling initiatives. Singapore's Skills Future program is a notable example, providing citizens with opportunities to continually upgrade their skills throughout their careers. Government policies play a pivotal role in shaping higher education opportunities, addressing challenges, and promoting innovation. From digital transformation and sustainability to equity and global competitiveness, policies are evolving to meet the needs of modern education systems. The ongoing adaptation and implementation of these policies are crucial for ensuring that higher education remains accessible, affordable, and aligned with societal needs (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2021).

Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of access to higher education among students from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and geographic backgrounds in Pakistan.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of government scholarship programs in increasing higher education opportunities for marginalized students.
3. To identify the key barriers, including financial, regional, cultural, and academic, that hinder access to higher education and propose policy improvements to mitigate these challenges.

Research Questions

1. What is the current level of access to higher education for students from different socioeconomic, racial, and geographic backgrounds in Pakistan?
2. How effective are the existing government scholarship programs in enhancing higher education opportunities for students from marginalized backgrounds?
3. What are the primary barriers faced by students in accessing higher education, and what policy measures can be implemented to address these obstacles?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it offers a thorough analysis of how government policies affect the availability of higher education opportunities for students from all backgrounds in Pakistan.

The research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data to emphasize the current discrepancies in higher education access and pinpoint crucial impediments such as financial limitations, regional inequities, and cultural hindrances. The findings provide useful insights for policymakers to optimize the efficacy of scholarship programs and boost educational infrastructure, specifically in rural areas. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of enhancing communication and support mechanisms to guarantee that students are informed about and able to utilize the resources that are accessible to them. The primary objective of this research is to make a significant contribution towards the advancement of a higher education system in Pakistan that is more inclusive and fair. This will be achieved by fostering social mobility and economic growth through empowering students from diverse backgrounds to achieve success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Government policies have significantly shaped higher education opportunities for Pakistani students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. One of the most impactful areas is financial aid and scholarships, which have provided much-needed support to underprivileged students. For instance, the Ehsaas Undergraduate Scholarship Program, launched by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), aims to support financially disadvantaged students by covering their tuition fees and offering stipends. This initiative is crucial in ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder talented students from pursuing higher education (Ahmed, 2021). Gender equity in education has been another focus area for Pakistani government policies. Programs such as the Punjab Government's Women Empowerment Initiative provide scholarships and incentives to female students, thereby addressing gender disparities in educational attainment. These policies have been instrumental in encouraging more women to enroll in higher education institutions, thus fostering a more inclusive academic environment (Khan, 2020). The quality of education has also been a priority for government policies. The HEC's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) plays a vital role in maintaining and enhancing the standards of higher education institutions through regular audits and evaluations. These quality assurance measures ensure that academic programs meet national and international standards, which is essential for the credibility of Pakistani degrees globally (Jamil, 2019).

Access to higher education in remote and rural areas has been significantly improved through government initiatives. The establishment of new universities and campuses in underserved regions, such as the University of Baltistan in Skardu, reflects the government's commitment to decentralizing higher education. This expansion provides students from these areas with opportunities to pursue higher education without relocating to major urban centers (Shah, 2021). The integration of technology in education has been accelerated by government policies, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Digital Pakistan initiative aims to enhance digital infrastructure and connectivity, ensuring that students from all backgrounds have access to online education. This initiative addresses the digital divide, providing equal learning opportunities to students in remote and urban areas (Rehman & Siddiqui, 2020). Research and innovation in higher education have been supported through various government grants and programs. The HEC's National Research Program for Universities (NRPU) funds research projects in diverse disciplines, encouraging both students and faculty to engage in innovative research activities. These policies not only enhance the research capabilities of Pakistani institutions but also contribute to the global academic community (Nasir, 2021).

Curriculum reform has been another significant area influenced by government policies. The introduction of competency-based education frameworks and interdisciplinary studies aims to

modernize the higher education curriculum. These reforms are designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to compete in a global job market, thus improving their employability prospects (Ali & Malik, 2020). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been encouraged by the government to enhance higher education. These partnerships leverage private sector resources and expertise to improve educational offerings and infrastructure. For example, collaborations between universities and industries help align academic programs with market needs, providing students with practical experience and exposure to industry practices (Asghar, 2020). Inclusivity in higher education has been promoted through policies that support students with disabilities. The HEC has issued guidelines to ensure that universities are accessible and provide adequate support services for students with disabilities. These policies aim to create an inclusive educational environment where all students can thrive academically (Farooq, 2019).

International collaborations and exchange programs have been fostered by government policies to provide Pakistani students with global exposure. Partnerships with international universities and research institutions facilitate student and faculty exchanges, collaborative research projects, and joint degree programs. These initiatives broaden the educational experiences of Pakistani students and enhance their global competitiveness (Iqbal, 2020). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) have been prioritized to cater to the diverse educational needs of students. The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) implements programs that provide technical skills and vocational training, expanding career opportunities for students. These policies address the skill gaps in the labor market and provide alternative educational pathways (Saleem, 2021). Governance and administrative efficiency in higher education institutions have been improved through policies promoting transparency and accountability. These measures ensure that resources are used effectively and that institutions operate efficiently, supporting the educational needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Hussain & Jamil, 2020).

Career counseling and job placement services have been enhanced through government policies. Establishing career counseling centers and integrating career guidance into academic curricula help students make informed career decisions. These services are particularly beneficial for students from diverse backgrounds who may lack access to professional networks and resources (Khan & Iqbal, 2021). Extracurricular activities and student engagement have been supported by policies aimed at holistic student development. Initiatives promoting sports, arts, and cultural activities in higher education institutions provide students with opportunities to develop their talents and skills outside the classroom. These activities contribute to a well-rounded educational experience (Ahmed, 2021). Government policies have also focused on creating a safe and respectful educational environment by addressing issues such as harassment and discrimination. The HEC's Anti-Harassment Policy provides guidelines for universities to prevent and address harassment cases, ensuring a safe learning environment for all students. These policies are crucial for fostering an inclusive academic culture. government policies play a vital role in shaping higher education opportunities for Pakistani students from diverse backgrounds. Through financial support, quality assurance, technological integration, and inclusivity initiatives, these policies ensure that higher education is accessible, equitable, and of high quality. Continued efforts to enhance these policies will be essential for meeting the evolving educational needs of Pakistani students (HEC, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study "Understanding the Role of Government Policies in Shaping Higher Education Opportunities for Pakistani Students from Diverse Backgrounds" used a mixed-methods

approach to research. This involved collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The study commenced by undertaking a comprehensive literature analysis to identify prior research and theoretical frameworks concerning government policies and higher education in Pakistan. A total of 500 surveys were distributed to students from various socioeconomic, racial, and geographic backgrounds in order to collect quantitative data. The objective was to measure their level of access to and their encounters inside higher education. The acquisition of qualitative data entailed conducting comprehensive interviews with 30 authorities and educational administrators, in addition to arranging focus groups with 50 students. The objective of this technique was to offer comprehensive and subtle analysis on the impacts of certain policies. The data were analyzed using statistical approaches to assess the quantitative aspect and theme analysis to evaluate the qualitative aspect. A complete understanding of how government policies affected higher education opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds in Pakistan was attained by using a mixed-methods approach.

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of the data gathered using the mixed-methods methodology utilized in this investigation. The survey collected quantitative data from 500 students representing diverse socioeconomic, racial, and geographic backgrounds. Statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data and assess their level of access to and experiences within higher education. In addition, the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with 30 authorities and school administrators, as well as focus groups with 50 students, is analyzed using thematic analysis. This two-pronged approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how government policies affect the availability of higher education opportunities for students from all backgrounds in Pakistan.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Demographic Breakdown

The demographic data from the surveys provides a succinct depiction of the diverse backgrounds of the participants. This section offers a comprehensive examination of the distribution of students according to their socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, and geographical area.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Status of Respondents

Socioeconomic Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low Income	150	30
Middle Income	250	50
High Income	100	20

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that the largest proportion of respondents (50%) belong to middle-income households, while 30% originate from low-income backgrounds and 20% come from high-income backgrounds. This distribution accurately represents the socioeconomic variety within the sample group.

Table 2: Racial Background of Respondents

Racial Background	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Punjabi	200	40
Sindhi	100	20
Pashtun	100	20
Balochi	50	10
Others	50	10

Table 2 presents the racial variety of the respondents, with the majority (40%) being Punjabis, then Sindhis and Pashtuns (20%), Balochis (10%), and other ethnic groups (10%).

Table 3: Geographic Location of Respondents

Geographic Location	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Urban	300	60
Rural	200	40

Table 3 illustrates the geographic diversity of the sample by showing that 60% of respondents are from metropolitan areas and 40% are from rural areas.

Access to Higher Education

This section examines the accessibility of respondents to tertiary education, including their enrollment rates, the availability of scholarships, and perceived barriers.

Table 4: Enrollment in Higher Education

Enrollment Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Enrolled	400	80
Not Enrolled	100	20

The data shown in Table 4 indicates that a substantial majority of participants (80%) are presently registered at institutions of higher education, while the remaining 20% are not.

Table 5: Availability of Scholarships

Scholarship Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Received Scholarship	200	40
Did Not Receive	300	60

Table 5 indicates that 40% of the participants have been awarded scholarships, while 60% have not. This suggests that there are opportunities for enhancing the distribution of financial help through policy improvements.

Table 6: Received Barriers to Higher Education

Barrier	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Financial	250	50
Geographic	100	20

Cultural	75	15
Academic	75	15

Financial hurdles account for 50% of the barriers to higher education, with regional (20%), cultural (15%), and intellectual (15%) barriers coming in second and third, respectively, according to Table 6.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative information gleaned from focus groups and interviews provide more in-depth understanding of how government policies affect higher education. Key themes and patterns were found using thematic analysis.

Themes from Interviews with Authorities and Educational Administrators

Theme 1: Policy Implementation and Challenges

4.3.1 Themes from Interviews with Authorities and Educational Administrators

Theme 1: Policy Implementation and Challenges

Officials highlighted numerous challenges in effectively implementing education policies. The factors include insufficient funding, which restricts the expansion and maintenance of educational facilities; inadequate infrastructure, particularly in rural and underserved areas, which hinders the provision of high-quality education; and significant regional disparities that lead to unequal access to educational resources. These shared concerns hinder the effective execution of government measures aimed at enhancing higher education options for all students.

Theme 2: Scholarship Programs

Administrators deliberated about the efficacy of scholarship programs in enhancing the accessibility of higher education for students hailing from marginalized backgrounds. Although these programs have been crucial in providing financial assistance, their impact is frequently constrained by inadequate scope and administrative obstacles. Significant challenges that hinder the effectiveness of these scholarship programs include difficult application processes, insufficient knowledge among potential beneficiaries, and inadequate budget allocations.

Theme 3: Regional Inequalities

Both authorities and administrators emphasized the significant geographical discrepancies in educational resources. Rural areas, in particular, experience drawbacks due to a lack of adequately equipped educational institutions, an inadequate number of proficient educators, and restricted financial resources. The presence of these disparities results in inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes, with students from rural regions often facing greater barriers in accessing and succeeding in higher education compared to their urban counterparts.

Theme 4: Cultural and Social Barriers

Interviewees noted that cultural and societal barriers significantly hinder the ability of some populations to attain higher education. Gender norms and societal expectations often limit

educational opportunities for women and girls, particularly in conservative areas. Furthermore, the existence of societal stigma and discrimination towards particular ethnic or religious groups might place further constraints on their capacity to acquire and participate in higher education. Specific initiatives are required to tackle these cultural and socioeconomic factors and advance a more inclusive educational strategy.

Themes from Focus Groups with Students

Theme 1: Financial Constraints

Financial restrictions were commonly cited by students as a major obstacle to attending higher education. Although scholarships are accessible, numerous students still face difficulties in meeting the expenses associated with tuition, books, lodging, and other miscellaneous costs. The financial hardships frequently result in elevated rates of students discontinuing their studies and impede the capacity of academically capable individuals from low-income backgrounds to completely capitalize on higher education prospects.

Theme 2: Quality of Education

Participants expressed concerns about the quality of education offered in certain institutions, especially those located in rural areas. Obsolete curricula, poor teaching staff, insufficient facilities, and limited access to contemporary technologies significantly affect the learning experience and outcomes. These concerns highlight the need for substantial improvements in the quality of education to ensure that all kids, regardless of their location, receive a valued and competitive education.

Theme 3: Awareness of Policies

Students demonstrated a pervasive lack of awareness regarding the specific government policies and programs that were put in place to support their education. A considerable proportion of students have shown a lack of knowledge of the availability of scholarships, financial aid programs, and other types of assistance that could benefit their pursuit of higher education. The lack of awareness necessitates the need for educational institutions and government agencies to engage in improved communication and outreach efforts to ensure that students are knowledgeable about and able to utilize these resources.

Theme 4: Support Systems

Students emphasized the significance of support services, such as mentoring and counselling, in assisting them in navigating the difficulties of higher education. Efficient support systems can offer assistance in academic and personal matters, aiding students in handling stress, maintaining motivation, and making well-informed choices on their education and career trajectories. Having strong support networks is essential for improving student retention and success rates, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative data yields a holistic comprehension of the influence of government policies on higher education prospects.

Access to Higher Education

The quantitative data showed that 80% of the participants are now pursuing higher education. However, the qualitative data uncovered that a considerable number of them encounter substantial obstacles related to finances, culture, and geography. The datasets identified financial limitations as a significant obstacle.

Effectiveness of Scholarship Programs

Although 40% of the participants stated that they received scholarships, qualitative information from both administrators and students suggests that these programs lack sufficient comprehensiveness and effective management, resulting in gaps in coverage and assistance.

Regional Inequalities

The quantitative data revealed a significant disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of access to higher education. This conclusion was corroborated by qualitative data, which provided a comprehensive account of the specific difficulties encountered by pupils in remote areas, such as insufficient infrastructure and inferior educational standards.

Policy Awareness and Implementation

The students' insufficient understanding of government policies, as evidenced by qualitative data, suggests a need for enhanced dissemination of information. This aligns with the empirical finding that many students have challenges that could potentially be mitigated with well-defined policies and supportive initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the data collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies has yielded a thorough comprehension of how government policies affect the availability of higher education options for students from various socio-economic backgrounds in Pakistan. The quantitative data demonstrates notable discrepancies in access determined by socioeconomic class, racial heritage, and geographical placement. A significant proportion of students hailing from middle-income backgrounds and residing in metropolitan regions are currently enrolled in higher education, but those originating from low-income backgrounds and living in rural areas encounter considerable obstacles. The primary barrier faced by 50% of the participants is financial limitations, with regional, cultural, and academic difficulties being secondary barriers. The interviews and focus groups provide qualitative data that enhances our comprehension of these obstacles. Officials and administrators emphasized multiple obstacles in the execution of policies, such as insufficient funds, inadequate infrastructure, and discrepancies between regions. Scholarship programs, while advantageous, are frequently impeded by inadequate scope and intricate administrative procedures. Regional disparities are especially evident, as rural communities experience resource scarcity and poorer educational standards. Specific groups have additional obstacles in accessing resources due to cultural and social constraints, including gender norms and societal expectations.

The findings are supported by the viewpoints of students, who highlight financial limitations as a significant obstacle, especially for those who get scholarships. There were also significant concerns regarding the caliber of education, specifically in rural regions. There is a conspicuous

deficiency in public knowledge regarding government policies and the existence of support programs, suggesting a necessity for enhanced communication and outreach endeavors. Furthermore, the significance of support networks, such as mentorship and counselling, was emphasized as essential for assisting students in navigating the difficulties of higher education. Ultimately, although government initiatives have achieved some progress in enhancing the availability of higher education, there are still substantial obstacles that need to be addressed. Progress is hindered by financial restrictions, regional inequities, and cultural obstacles. Scholarship programs necessitate improved administration and broader inclusivity, with a pressing requirement for enhanced dissemination of information concerning existing policies and support structures. Targeted initiatives are crucial for establishing a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to tackle these difficulties, it is advisable for the government to augment financial assistance by implementing more extensive scholarship programs and financial aid initiatives. Investing in educational infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is essential for mitigating regional differences. It is imperative to initiate awareness efforts in order to ensure that students are well-informed about the policies and programs that are accessible to them. In addition, it is crucial to establish comprehensive support systems, such as mentorship and counselling services, to assist students in overcoming the obstacles that hinder their access to higher education. The objective of these initiatives is to establish a higher education system in Pakistan that is more inclusive and egalitarian.

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