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Higher Studies in Social Sciences and Quality Issues in Social Sciences' Research

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Abstract

National Education Policy (1998-2010) states that in social sciences and humanities, the condition [of research] is far from satisfactory, shortage of manpower, lack of interest of talented students to take up higher studies in social sciences, lack of libraries and research institutes are some of the issues in quality of social sciences' research. In addition, lack of commitment towards social sciences, limited job opportunities for social sciences' graduates and teaching methods of social sciences are some other on ground realities, which kept the talented students away from taking up higher studies in social sciences. At M. Phil and Ph. D level, research work is compulsory, but students of this level face different problems in their research which affect their final product and leave many questions on the quality of research work. The objective of the study is to find out the quality issues in social sciences' research. The sample for the study was the academicians of social sciences taken from higher learning institutions. A questionnaire was developed on five point Likert scale for knowing the opinion of the academicians about the problems of quality in Social Sciences' research. Each statement of the questionnaire was tested by applying chi-square technique. Three aspects (lack of interest of talented students to take up higher studies in social sciences, lack of social sciences related material in libraries and research institutes and lack of support from higher learning institutions) were traced which are considered important for the of research in social sciences.

Key words: Higher studies in social sciences, Quality, Quality issues in social sciences' research.

1. Introduction

In the present world, there is a race of the best and all advanced nations are fully trying to defeat the others. Even every moment is bringing new and new changes in every field. This is not the case of one field, but this story is true for all fields of life. Now, the whole world has become a globe, a little change on its surface affect the other parts in different forms. New innovations and open access to maximum knowledge has facilitated the human kind on one hand and put many pressures on the education system, especially on higher education. Today, the functions of higher education are far different as compared to the past, now higher education is required to produce such persons who have knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of the global market. All over the world, higher education is considered as a changing agent as it is responsible to prepare the youth for national as well as for international market.

In Pakistan, social sciences is a neglected area, and there are some common perceptions about social sciences, firstly, those students join social sciences' subjects who are not able to study science subjects, and secondly, there is no need to work hard in social sciences' subjects because every student can pass it with a little effort. This situation starts right from secondary level, where students use their full potentials in science subjects and do not pay due attention to social sciences' subjects.

Around the world, new approaches for teaching social sciences' subjects are going to practices, old theories of social sciences are going to be tested and new theories are developed, but in Pakistan, a student of social sciences can pass all the papers of a subject with only one readymade material which is easily available in the market.

In Pakistan, social sciences subjects at higher level studies are criticized from many sides, obsolete curriculum, dull teaching methodologies and poor assessment system are considered the main reasons of this criticism. At Master level, there is option for selecting courses or research work and majority of the students select course work, but at M. Phil and Ph. D level, research work is an integral part. The main objective of this compulsory research work is to train the scholars for research so that when these scholars join practical work must have an ability to explore the new paradigms of their fields and utilize them for the improvement in their domains. Contrary to this, every year, many

research theses are completed in different areas of social sciences, but there is no use of these research work, because there are question marks on the quality of these research work. It is said that as the students who join social sciences' research have no background of research work, this deficiency creates different kinds of problems for them. Scholars claim that as there are no special training institutes for research work and no prior training for research work, so how they get mastery? . National Education Policy (1998-2010, p. 85) claimed that quality of higher education shall be improved through measures, such as, academic audit, revision of curricula, strengthening of libraries and laboratories, etc. What so ever the problem is, the last victim of these problems is the quality of research work. National Education Policy (2009) states, the delivery of quality education and research are the core responsibility of each institution of higher education. Higher learning institutions are well aware about competitive environment and are trying to overcome the existing gaps in quality and research.

2. Literature

Higher education is getting more and more attention in the rapidly changing environment, where the innovations in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have provided lens to see every activity happening on the surface of earth. The rapid means of communication and the digital revolution have opened wide vistas of the world. The rise of internationalization, globalization of economics, knowledge and culture and the concept of lifelong learning give a distinctive position to higher education both in international and national contexts (Isani and Virk, 2005).

National Education Policy (2009, p. 57) documented that in the global knowledge-economy, employers increasingly look to universities and colleges to deliver the well-educated workforce they require in the form of articulate, flexible, and readily employable graduates to remain competitive.

No doubt, science subjects are facilitating human kind in different forms as one can see the end results of science subjects. Social sciences subjects are as important as science subjects, social sciences deals with attitudes, behaviors and thought patterns of human beings and enable them to participate in the socio-economic development of the nation as well as create synchronization and harmony in the society. Social sciences have an important role to play in providing the knowledge base and inspiration for new policies that promote resilience, sustainability and social change (Brien, 2010). The social sciences encompass diverse concerns of society and include a wide range of content drawn from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, and sociology (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2006). Social sciences subjects can create awareness among the citizens about different issues and can help them in understanding the issues in a broader sense. Governments through the development of social science policies provide for the betterment of their citizens and the maintenance of a stable society composed of healthy, educated and a contented population (Wood, Walter, and Carrington, 2002).

National Education Policy (1992) accepted that a renewed effort is required to reconstruct the fabric of social sciences in curricular contents, in textual material, in teaching methodology and in research. National Education Policy (1992, p.41) describe the following strategies for the promotion of social sciences:

1. A separate training scheme will be instituted for developing high quality manpower in social sciences.
2. Centers of advanced studies will be opened in the universities and institutes of education in vital areas of social sciences.
3. Institutes of social sciences, one in each province and one at the Federal level, will be opened to undertake research on vital problems relevant to social needs of the country.
4. A National Council of Social Sciences will be established to collect and collate data.
5. Separate funds will be allocated from the National Scientific research and Development Boards for supporting good quality research projects in social sciences and languages.
6. Social sciences subjects (such as management sciences) which enhance employability of graduates will be introduced in colleges.
7. Social sciences clubs will be organized in schools and colleges under the aegis of the National Council of Social Sciences.
8. National awards will be instituted for creative research in social sciences.

9. The National Library will be provided more funds so that it is raised to the largest resource of social sciences material.

Inayatullah (2001) states the scope of social sciences in Pakistan in the following words:

Relevance and use of social sciences produced in Pakistan for understanding and development of Pakistani society is low. The social science knowledge produced is primarily for the use by state agencies and only marginally for creating social awareness of societal problems among the people most of whom being illiterate cannot understand and benefit from it (p.62).

Research is to be reconfirmed as a fundamental activity of institutions and the establishment and long term sustainability of a dynamic research sector in universities that engages stakeholders in its activities, is key to achieve economic competitiveness (National Education Policy, 2009). The importance of research has been realized the world over. The role of teachers has been re-determined. Now a teacher's job is not just teaching but getting involved in some useful research (Siddique, 2007). Brien (2010) states that:

Global environmental change is a challenge to traditional disciplinary research practices. The scale, rate, magnitude and significance of changes to the global environment have made it clear that 'research as usual' will not suffice to help individuals and groups understand and respond to the multiple, interacting changes that are now occurring. 'Research as usual' is unlikely to mobilize societies to press for the changes that are necessary for a more sustainable future (p. 32).

M. Phil and Ph. D degrees are not the extension of master degrees but this is the exclusive stage which prepares the scholars for the practical field. M. Phil and Ph. D scholars do not mean the absorber of knowledge but they must be able to generate new knowledge in their field. It is imperative that award of Ph. D degrees should signify original contribution to the world body of knowledge as certified by International experts (National Education Policy, 2009). There is an unfortunate negative attitude towards research in the Society at large. Even in the Universities and other institutions of higher learning, research has not been accepted and incorporated as an important and integral activity (Siddiqui, 2001).

Quality is perceived as something distinctive or special, something that cannot be attained by many (Common Wealth of Learning, 2010). Ehlers (2009) defined quality as a relationship among all the stakeholders and resources of an educational set-up. Aadil, Khan and Fahim (2010) highlighted some critical problems of quality in research observed in Pakistan with increase in numbers of Ph.D students such as lack of research skills and aptitude, motivation and passion. Insufficient resources, lack of proper guidance both in their studies and future career counseling could be the reasons for these problems. Batool and Qureshi (n.d) state that the gap [in Pakistani universities] between the present status and desired level of quality is critical and identifies the need a directed approach for enhancement of practices of quality assurance in Pakistan. Higher Education Commission claimed that quality in Social Sciences & Humanities is vital for the socio-economic development of any country.

Quality education in Social Sciences & Humanities plays a major role in the socio-economic development of any country. In Pakistan there has been sporadic development in this sector over the past years but no substantial effort has been undertaken until recently. The Higher Education Commission since its inception in year 2003 has taken a number of initiatives ranging from human resource development to providing research grants, and developing linkages at both National and International level in order to revive quality education in Social sciences and Humanities.

(Available at <http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Divisions/AECA/SocialSciencesArtsHumanities/Pages/Default.aspx>).

Higher Education Commission constituted a Committee for Development of Social Sciences and Humanities in Pakistan. The major objectives of this committee are:

- **Encouraging R&D in Social Sciences**

To identify diverse social and human issues in Pakistan through understanding and initiating plans for social transformation by encouraging research & development.

- **Faculty development**

To improve and develop faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities through indigenous and foreign Scholarships.

- Institutional and infrastructure development
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- To upgrade the existing resources and provision of institutional support to various departments/Centre of Excellence/Institutes of public sector universities across the country.
- **Quality Assurance Standards**

To review quality assurance, academic, faculty appointment, journals and other standards as they are applicable in the domain of Humanities and Social Sciences.

• Status Reports

To review and prepare reports on the state of education and research in different disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences.

(Available at <http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Divisions/AECA/SocialSciencesArtsHumanities/Pages/Default.aspx>).

3. Objective of the Study

Social sciences disciplines deal with diverse concerns of a society and provide options to resolve the problems through dialogue and understanding. The objective of the present study is to explore the quality issues in social sciences' research.

4. Sample for the Study

A total of 120 academicians, who are supervising M. Phil and Ph. D level students of social sciences, were selected through convenient sampling technique from higher education institutions of Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore.

5. Instrument

A questionnaire was developed on five point Likert scale (Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Uncertain=3, Disagree=2 and Strongly Disagree=1) for knowing the opinion of the academicians about the quality issues in social sciences research. The questionnaire was divided into three parts (i.e Lack of Interest of Talented Students , Lack of Libraries and Research Institutes and Lack of Support from Higher Learning Institutions). There were five statements in each part. The final version of the questionnaire was administered by the researchers and help was also taken by some colleagues and friends. A total of 100 questionnaires were collected within short time.

6. Limitations of the Study

The research was done with a small number of participants, selected through convenience sample technique from social sciences departments of public sector universities. So it does not provide such information that may paint a picture of every possible aspect of social sciences' research. It is appropriate that others may consider it with their degree of concern.

7. Validation of the Study

For validation, the questionnaire was presented to ten academicians of social sciences. The academicians pointed out some statements which required more clarifications. Changes were made in the light of their observations.

8. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, each statement was tested on significance level 0.05 through chi square technique.

Sr. #	Statement	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	χ^2
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Lack of Interest of Talented Students							
1	Society gives less importance to social science' subjects and consider these subjects are only for average students.	26	57	4	9	4	101.9
2	More job opportunities with science subjects keep talented students away from social sciences subjects.	44	24	10	17	5	46.3
3	Lack of awareness about importance of social sciences subjects is one of the reasons that talented students do not join this stream of learning.	19	38	17	18	8	24.1
4	Talented students feel that fabric of social sciences does not meet the challenges of present era.	30	32	12	15	11	20.7
5	At higher level learning, parents encourage talented students to take up science subjects.	14	30	20	18	18	7.2
Lack of Libraries and Research Institutes							
6	Libraries provide fresh researches and contextual material of social sciences.	12	33	26	16	13	16.7
7	There are fully fledged separate cells for social sciences in higher learning institutions.	36	39	12	10	3	53.5
8	Research centers for the promotion of social sciences are available in the higher learning institutions.	21	31	20	21	7	14.6
9	There are research supporting facilities (Access to International repositories, journal etc) are available for the young scholars.	31	36	19	8	6	35.9
10	Research orientations/seminars are arranged for research scholars of social sciences to introduce them to new changing trends in research.	19	43	14	16	8	36.3
Lack of Support from Higher Learning Institutions							
11	Higher learning institutions provide modern tools for creative research in social sciences.	36	47	8	5	4	80.5
12	Higher learning institutions engaged research students in research projects.	24	43	14	11	8	40.3
13	Higher learning institutions trained research scholars for writing research papers for journals.	37	39	10	12	2	56.9

14	Higher learning institutions provide grant to students for publishing papers in journals and for presenting papers in conferences.	36	39	12	10	3	53.5
15	Academic staff show positive attitude towards young scholars' research and treat in caring manner.	28	32	23	14	3	27.1

df=4

 $\chi^2 \text{ at } 0.05 = 9.488$

9. Discussion

The respondents of the study agreed with the statements that society gives less importance to the social sciences subjects and consider these subjects are only for average students. More job opportunities with science background and lack of awareness about importance of social sciences subjects kept talented students away from learning of social sciences. The respondents were of the opinion that talented students feel that the fabric of social sciences subjects is not able to meet the challenges of the present era. The respondents oppose the statement that parents encourage talented students to take up science subjects.

The respondents agreed that libraries provide fresh material about social sciences' research and there are separate cell for social sciences subjects in the higher learning institutions. There were of the opinion that there are research centers for the promotion of social sciences, and access to International repositories and journals are provided to the research students in the higher learning institutions. The respondents were of the views that orientation programs/seminars are arranged for research scholars to introduce them to new changing trends in the social sciences.

The respondents agreed that higher learning institutions provide modern tools for creative research in social sciences and research scholars are engaged in research projects and are trained for writing research papers in the journals. The respondents agreed with the statement that higher learning institutions provide grant for research publishing papers and for presentations in the conferences. The respondents of the study agreed that academic staff show positive attitude towards young scholars and care them.

10. Findings

In Pakistan, society considered social sciences subjects are less important and only for average students. More job opportunities with science subjects and lack of awareness about importance of social sciences keep talented students away from social science' students. Talented students feel that fabric of social sciences is not able to meet the challenges of present era. At higher level learning, parents do not encourage talented students to take science subjects.

In higher learning institutions, libraries provide fresh material about social sciences. There are fully fledged separate cells for promotion of social sciences, access to knowledge available on web is provided by the institutions, research orientations/seminars are arranged for research scholars of social sciences. Higher learning institutions provide modern research tools for creative research in social sciences and research students are engaged in research projects. Higher learning institutions provide grants to social sciences' scholars for publishing and presenting research articles. The academic staff show positive attitude towards young scholars and care them.

11. Conclusion

No doubt, science and technology facilitated human beings in every field of life, but society can live without much technology but cannot survive without responsible citizens, and visionary leadership. Social sciences are responsible to develop a vision of the individuals to care the other members of the society and play a positive role in the development of the nation. The current study explored that social sciences are as important as sciences. Majority of the students want to join science subjects, but there is lack of awareness about the importance of the social sciences subjects and society give less importance to the social sciences subjects. For improving the standards of research in social sciences, higher learning institutions provide modern research tools, arrange seminars and provide fresh material on social sciences' research.

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