

SOCIOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN**Madiha Salik, ZHU Zhiyong and LIU Baocun**

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Corresponding Author Email: salik5353@hotmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to present a sociological understanding of higher education, primarily in Pakistan. Using both theory and empirical evidence it will explore issues relating to the impact of social factors on higher education. Particular attention is paid to the role that higher education plays in promoting social mobility as well as social reproduction. The paper examines the various perspectives on: the application of sociological theories to issues in higher education, access to college, quality and efficiency, relevance of education, inadequate research activities, class, race and gender-based differences in educational outcomes and retention.

Keywords: Sociology, Higher Education, Social factors and social mobility.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world universities are guiding and co-operating with the industrial and agricultural development organizations and they are developing their economics rapidly and meaningfully. There is a close link between higher education and development. Education is a social process, and individuals participate in social activities of a community. Educated individuals can control the environment and make community healthy in all walks of life and develop the area economically. But only those highly educated individuals can do this that really learns. Learning of individuals depends upon a number of factors. Therefore objective of this paper is to explore those factors and to analyze them in order to see their distinctive impact on students' achievement in higher education. A range of factors affects students' academic achievements at graduate and postgraduate level, which may be grouped into institutional environmental factors, personal factors, socio economic factors, career factors etc. Those students who are interested and actively engaged in studies show significantly high academic performance (Linnakyl et al 2004). Students' mind-set towards a picky subject has a positive impact on academic performance (Bos & Kuiper, 1999). Previous academic base and achievements, motivational factors, teaching methodology and classroom environment significantly influence academic performance (Romer 1993; Von Rhöneck, Grob, Devadoss and Foltz, 1996; Schnaitmann, & Völker, 1998). Better socio-economical condition and high Parents' educational level and interest influence the quality of education for their children (Bos & Kuiper, 1999, Rainey & Murova, 2004). The local environment and family traits with respect to study habits significantly influence academic achievement (Linnakyl et al, 2004; Henderson & Berla, 2006). Institutional environment indicated by characteristics such as the teachers' leaning towards improving educational performance and their prospect for pupil accomplishment are vital for student

achievement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Yvonne Beaumont Walters, Kola Soyibo, 1998; Schneider, 2002; Karemera 2003). Guidance services provided by the institute or community play a significant role in accomplishment of good academics (Chaudhary, 2006). Siegfried & Fels (1979) concluded that students learning also depend upon the student's capacity to learn. Gutman & Midgley (2000), Henderson and Mapp (2002), Van Voorhis (2001) found that "students whose parents take interest in their studies score higher grades and enrolled in higher-level programs. In Pakistan, the developmental indicators are not showing positive results. The participation rate at higher education is low comparatively to other countries of the region. There are problems of quality of staff, students, library and laboratory. Relevance with society needs, research facilities, financial crisis, arts students more than science students, weaknesses of examination, ineffective governance and academic results are not at par with international standards. Considering the issues and problems of higher education in Pakistan, the researcher selected this research.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL FACTORS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Due to wider inequalities in Pakistan society there is large impact of social factors on higher education. In Pakistan society gender inequalities hindering the woman participations in getting higher education and women has no property & political right in the area, which is negatively affecting development and higher education. Most of the female are totally dependent on men economically, which is also the reason of their exclusion from getting higher education because they cannot afford expenses of higher education on their own behalf. Gender discrimination and inequality hinders poverty alleviation and female education helps in poverty alleviation. Women fertility right helps in poverty alleviation while discrimination in higher education and jobs, distribution of resources affect poverty alleviation.

As March and Blackburn (1992) point out, a number of inequalities in society, both structured social inequalities, which relate to occupational stratification, and social inequalities relating to consumption, affect higher education. Higher qualifications generally lead to higher status jobs and also, those with parents who have been to university themselves are likely to be more supportive towards their children in this respect (Foskett and Hesketh, 1996). The element of 'choice' involved in decisions to progress on to higher education means that a range of factors, can be influential, and over a number of years prior to entry.

Individual differences

The societal factors which continue to have the greatest impact on higher educational administration is: the individual differences among students. Some common factors relating to individual differences among students are the following: one's social class, sex, the effect of the peer group, and the cultural values instilled by the family and larger culture. As one might expect, attitudes toward higher education are less favorable among lower-class pupils than among those from higher socio-economic classes. Students from wealthier families generally place a greater emphasis on the need for higher education

and strive to attain good grades. According to Turner (1979), "They also have more accurate concepts of their scholastic abilities and higher vocational aspirations than lower-class young people".

Educational and family background

In Pakistan parental education, parental occupation and family income have all been shown to have influence on decisions about higher education and especially at an earlier stage of education. Metcalf (1997) suggests parental education is a stronger influence in the earlier stages than parental occupation. Parental support is also identified as an important factor in encouraging higher education entry research undertaken.

Financial influences

Benefits and financial returns: A number of wider studies have investigated perceived benefits and financial returns from higher education in Pakistan. Callender (1997) showed that full time and part time students have similar motivations for entry to higher education, they both wanted the benefits of a university education, in terms of improving career progress and position in labour market, though younger ones tended also to value the experience of a university or college education.

Institutional Effects

Higher education institutions can have considerable influence on encouraging entry by non-traditional students but in Pakistan the progress is not according to the required level. Many have had widening access policies in place for some time, and a variety of 'partnership' and other types of activities are undertaken. Successful strategies for increasing participation in higher education specially among lower social class groups, are actually quite rare and much of current activity by HEIs is not seen to be sufficiently targeted on lower social class groups, or undertaken early enough in the education process to be as effective as could be (Woodrow, 1998).

HIGHER EDUCATION PROMOTING SOCIAL MOBILITY

Promoting increased social mobility requires reexamining a wide range of economic, health, social, and education policies. Higher education has always been a key way for Pakistan to find opportunities to transform their economic circumstances. In a time of rising inequality and low social mobility, improving the quality of and access to education has the potential to increase equality of opportunity for all Pakistanis. Modern universities can urge ministers to increase the number of university places to ensure poorer students can get better jobs and earn more money. Social mobility is a key government policy and ministers are keen to widen participation in higher education. Mostly it is expected the nation's colleges and universities to promote the goal of social mobility to make it possible for anyone with ability and motivation to succeed. But according to Robert Haveman and Timothy Smeeding, income-related gaps both in access to and in success in higher education are large and growing. In the top-tier

colleges and universities, almost three-quarters of the entering class is from the highest socioeconomic quartile. The pool of qualified youth is far greater than the number admitted and enrolled; hence America's top colleges could enroll more moderate- and low-income students without lowering their selection standards. Higher-income parents make enormous efforts to ensure their children's academic success, while children of poor parents begin the "college education game" later and with fewer resources. Students in poor and minority neighborhoods are less well prepared academically; ill prepared to select colleges, apply for admission, and secure acceptance; and poorly informed about the cost of attending college and the availability of needs-based financial aid. Sharply rising college prices during the 1980s and 1990s, together with the growing inequality of family income, have raised the cost of attending college far more for low-income students than for well-to-do students. Financial aid has risen more slowly, and the share targeted on low-income students has been falling. The authors offer bold policy recommendations to increase educational opportunities for low- and middle-income students. These involve the development of financing structures that will increase access for students from lower-income families. Public institutions could price tuition close to real costs and use added revenues to provide direct student aid for students from low-income families. Federal subsidies to students who attend wealthy institutions could be capped, with the savings redirected to students attending less well-endowed colleges, both public and private. Finally, federal and state governments could redirect to lower-income students the financial support they now provide colleges and universities.

The role of higher education in promoting social mobility is among the central issues in contemporary sociological and political debate. In modern societies of Pakistan, education has become an increasingly important factor in determining which jobs people enter and in determining their social class position. This has led some scholars to believe in the advent of open and meritocratic societies but the empirical evidence has cast doubts on this. In many countries the relationship between family background (i.e. social origins) and educational opportunity is still strong: people from more advantaged social classes have higher chances of embarking on a long educational career and gaining higher level qualifications than those from less advantaged classes (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). The acquisition of higher educational qualifications results in a clear advantage when they enter the labor market. Indeed, education has been found to be a crucial intervening link between the social background of individuals and their later class destination (Müller and Shavit, 1998), and this may reinforce social inequalities and reduce social mobility. Educational institutions and their admission, selection and certification processes may play a significant role in reducing or maintaining social inequalities. For reducing social inequalities in higher education of Pakistan, the government should follow the education system of Scotland then positive results can come. Over the last century Scotland has experienced very important and radical changes in its education system which have marked the transition from a selective system to a comprehensive one. Much research has shown the positive effect of the introduction of the comprehensive system in Scotland in reducing social inequalities in education (McPherson and Willms, 1987; Gamoran, 1996; Croxford, 2001). These studies, however, do not tackle the issue of whether the reduction in educational inequalities has brought any reduction of inequalities in individuals' subsequent occupational outcomes.

MAJOR SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF EDUCATION

The three major theoretical perspectives (functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction theory) each have different views on higher education.

The functionalist perspective argues that higher education serves many important functions in society. First, it socializes people and prepares them for life in society. This is not only done by teaching “book knowledge,” but also teaching the society’s culture, including moral values, ethics, politics, religious beliefs, habits, and norms. Second, higher education provides occupational training, especially in industrialized societies such as the United States. Unlike in less complex societies or in the United States prior to 1900 when most jobs and training were passed on from father to son, most jobs in the United States today require at least a high school education, and many professions require a college or post-graduate degree. The third function that higher education serves, according to functionalist theorists, is social control, or the regulation of deviant behavior. By requiring young people to attend school, college this keeps them off the streets and out of trouble.

The symbolic interaction view of higher education focuses on interactions during the higher studies process and the outcomes of those interactions. For instance, interactions between students and teachers can create expectations on both parts. The teacher begins to expect certain behaviors from students, which in turn can actually create that very behavior. This is called the “teacher expectancy effect.” For example, if a White teacher expects a black student to perform below average on a math test when compared to White students, over time the teacher may act in ways that encourage the black students to get below average math scores.

Conflict theory looks at the disintegrative and disruptive aspects of higher education. These theorists argue that education is unequally distributed through society and is used to separate groups (based on class, gender, or race). Educational level is therefore a mechanism for producing and reproducing inequality in our society. Educational level, according to conflict theorists, can also be used as a tool for discrimination, such as when potential employers require certain educational credentials that may or may not be important for the job. It discriminates against minorities, working-class people, and women – those who are often less educated and least likely to have credentials because of discriminatory practices within the educational system.

ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Access to college

The percentage of girls who complete secondary education determines or influences the proportion of girls accessing higher education. The location (urban/rural, remote/hilly/desert) of institutions affects girls more than boys, in particular in Pakistan where roads and public transport have not penetrated rural and remote areas. Availability of institutions/universities within reach is an important determinant. Travelling long distances in public transport is an important security issue and this is particularly

significant in societies where girls are not permitted to travel alone or have to be escorted. Early marriage, household responsibilities, pressure to work, family honor and related issues inhibit girls and women from access to college.

Class, race and gender based difference

Class, race and gender based differences and occupation-related identity issues exert a huge but differing influence on the abilities of young boys and girls. Cultural and religious norms governing gender relations exert a strong influence on access to higher education.

Efficiency and Quality

Teachers are perhaps the most critical component of any system of education. How well they teach depends on motivation, qualification, experience, training, aptitude and a host of other factors, not the least of these being the environment and management structures within which they perform their role. Schwille et al. (1991) presented a detailed causal model to explain grade repetition. They hypothesized that student characteristics such as gender, family influence, place of residence, age, prior repetition, national policies regarding language, school entrance, quality of instruction, and school characteristics such as management policies, coverage of syllabus, etc. act to influence repetition. They observed that these in turn affect student learning, student motivation, and self-esteem, the examination success rate, the enrolment rate, the dropout rate and the mean time required to produce a graduate.

Relevance of Higher Education

Policy makers in Pakistan have been preoccupied in seeking ways of making the content of higher education more meaningful and the methods of delivery more cost-effective within the context of nation building and economic development. The attention has been on the role of higher education in preparing youth to participate actively and productively in national building. The literature is full of such attempts at making education more relevant. The lack of social demand for education is related to the fact that families and communities do not value or are ambivalent about formal education. Serpell (1993) pointed to the parental disillusionment with the present education systems and expressed support for more relevant curricula; more closely related to the daily lives of students and providing practical skills for students. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) contended that the problem is even more acute with girls where gender bias in subject choices together with cultural factors limits girls' chances of progress.

Inadequate Research Activities

Research gives rise to curiosity and a desire to look for, and find, better solutions to our everyday problems or better explanations for whatever happens. Over the years, numerous manuscripts have written about a lack of research in Pakistan. The issue is discussed frequently in academic institutions too. In nearly all such discussions, lack of

funding and of adequate facilities are presented as the major reasons that research has not been conducted. Perhaps the single most significant impediment in Pakistan to research, and also quality higher education, is the near-zero tolerance for dissent in educational institutions. We have in place a hierarchical system, which operates at every level of society at the home, school, college, university and workplace. Research thrives best where there is a group with which one can interact — a 'critical mass' of critical thinkers. Ideally, the group should not comprise people from the same narrow field but from different areas. This promotes cross-fertilization of ideas. This is where universities have an edge over single-discipline institutes. Now that the Pakistan government is providing substantial research funds to public-sector universities, a major hurdle has been removed. The step is long overdue and thus commendable. It is now up to the universities to produce the desired results.

CONCLUSION

The attainment of higher education has increased among most social classes in all over Pakistan in the past half century. Nevertheless, social class differences in educational attainment have not significantly reduced. Education explains part of the relationship between parental social class and individuals' own social class but not all. There is still a strong direct effect of parental class on individuals' achieved class that is not mediated by education. Current theoretical frameworks for understanding student retention are integrating Indigenous perspectives on higher education and placing greater responsibility on institutions to remove systematic obstacles for college completion. There are various barriers to retention; for students, finding ways to reduce financial, academic, cultural, and social barriers are critical to college success. Accessible and improved higher education means more skilled workers, professionals, and leaders. Higher Education is the best way to economic prosperity and a safer and more progressive path for overcoming the challenges of the rapidly changing technological and political world. A better higher education system in Pakistan is, among other things, a powerful tool to alleviate poverty and improve understanding, enhance mutual respect, and encourages tolerance and the peaceful resolution of cultural, social, ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. In Pakistan higher education our academic programs and our revenue streams have changed with social mobility. Comparative analysis can allow us to tackle the social issues in higher education and to identify best practices, reinforcing our systems' strength and higher education should be equally distributed through society and should be used to cease the differences of class, gender, or race for the progress and prosperity of people of Pakistan.

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