

FLEECING OR FACILITATING STUDENTS: COMPARISON OF FEE STRUCTURE AND ON-CAMPUS FACILITIES FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR UNIVERSITIES OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

With the ever increasing demand of higher education in the country, several measures have been adopted to fill the gap between demand and supply. Therefore, to meet the challenge number of new universities had been established in both the public and private sector during the last decade. Consequently, there is a competition between public and private sector universities for attracting the students. Claims of providing high quality education at an affordable price are being promulgated by both the sectors. The present study is an attempt to compare the fee charged and on-campus facilities provided to students by public and private sector universities. To conduct the study a sample of 218 social sciences MS/MPhil level students from public and private sector universities were selected. Facility Identification Inventory was used to collect data. Analysis of the data reflected that very high fee is being charged by the private sector universities as compared to public sector. As far as the facilities are concerned the private sector is providing fewer facilities. Moreover, there existed no relationship between total fee and the facilities provided to students in the universities.

Keywords: fee, higher education facilities, Social Sciences, physical facilities

Introduction

Higher education is considered responsible for growth and development of societies. It helps people have access to the new research based knowledge for overcoming their problems. This authentic knowledge drives economic growth as well as development. In the same way higher education level corresponds to the lower level of poverty and unemployment. Similarly, higher level of education corresponds to the higher level of civic participation (Baum & Payea, 2005). But in the present time productive knowledge is being generated by universities. They are playing an important role in generating new ideas, and in collecting and transmitting research based knowledge (IIEP, 2007).

With the passage of time and developments in higher education systems the cost of higher education has risen considerably. In the developing and poor countries the effect of the rising prices is being seriously felt as the postgraduate level students are now complaining about the affordability. In the same way higher education level students in

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developed and advanced states are also annoyed at the rising prices. Although in these states higher education loans are available for the students they are finding it hard to meet the ever rising expenses of higher education. In Pakistan higher education has made tremendous expansion during the last decade. The number of higher education institutions, universities and degree awarding institutions, has risen to almost four time in 2013 as compared to their count in 1999.

Quality higher education to a great extent depends upon the on-campus facilities for the students. An attractive infrastructure, latest and accessible instructional resources, ever helpful human resources, efficient teacher support and adequate and reliable research resources are some of the most desired on-campus facilities for higher education. Hoodbhoy (2009) noted that facilities do matter, but it is also vital for a university to have a futuristic world-view and an open environment. Therefore, campus ambience is important. It enables the students to enjoy teaching learning process on the campus. Hence the “feel” of campus is of much importance. Similarly, the lawns and buildings, the period of operation, size and adequacy of library facilities, appropriate science teaching laboratories, internet access and the average number of computers per students are also some of the important components of the on-campus facilities (Hoodbhoy, 2009).

With the increase in the number of private universities in Pakistan the issue of higher education rising prices has come to light with more intensity than it was in the past. The present study is an effort to determine whether or not the higher education institutions in Pakistan are providing adequate research facilities to the students of social sciences. The comparison is made between fee structure and the facilities provided in public and private universities of Pakistan.

Literature Review

The need for facilities at higher education level is as essential as at any other level of education. The discussion for higher education level facilities is on for years and with the passage of time such facilities have undergone a significant change. UNESCO (1979) categorized higher education level facilities as the classroom facilities, laboratory facilities, office facilities, study facilities, special use facilities, health care, supporting and general use facilities. In the modern times there are certain other facilities which are also needed for the students of higher education. These include computers, internet, printers, and similar type of other technology related facilities (Government of Australia, 2009). All the modern technological facilities help the students both at home and on campus. Virtual learning facilities are the latest demand of higher education level students in developed as well as in developing nations. Such facilities have enabled the students to remain in touch with the classroom even remaining at home or at the place of work. Thus, owing to the modern technology higher education is now available at the door step of the students (Azad, 2011).

For the provision of different facilities, universities need adequate funds. In the public sector universities major portion of these funds is usually provided by the government. The situation has changed in recent years. Public universities no longer rely entirely on the state for their funding (IIEP, 2007). Hence many public universities are awash in

funds (Hoodbhoy, 2009) as they get grants from the government as well as generate their own funds by adopting different measures like self-financed admissions, etc.

On the other hand, private universities have to generate their own funds as they get fewer grants from the governments. Tuition fees collected from the students are a major source of revenue for the private universities and degree awarding institutions. But, comparatively the institutions offering religious education usually charge less fee, sometimes less than even those demanded by public institutions (Varghese, 2004).

On the basis of funds generation the private universities are categorized into three groups i.e. profit earning, non-profit and the self-financing. In the profit earning institutions profitability depends on the savings they can make, especially savings from salaries which is the major part of the expenditure. Thus private universities try to employ few people giving them multiple assignments. Consequently, quality of services and education is badly affected. The self-financing institutions charge full fee to recover costs. They save money by adopting several economic measures like hiring part-time staff, guest lecturers, etc. They religious institutions can get such employees even free of cost (Varghese, 2004).

In many ways the higher education system across the world is now-a-days facing macro-economic pressures that changed the business landscape during the last decade. The students as well as parents are expecting more but have less to spend, have greater options, and desire to choose from an overcapacity of “teaching” institutions and opportunities of various kinds (DEF, 2012). As a result, the fee for higher education has considerably increased during the last two decades or so. Therefore, higher education is becoming more and more expensive. Li (2013) states that gap between the demand and supply of the higher education is another cause of rising cost.

The ongoing rise in the fee has created a number of important queries for the higher education institutions and the higher education sector on the whole (Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe, 2006). These questions include, will higher education be easily accessible to students of low socio economic status? How will equity of participation be maintained? Do the universities’ fees correspond to the quality of education? Finnie (2004) says that involvement in higher education is depending upon two critical decision rules. The first is what he calls the investment decision rules. According to Finnie (2004) students choose to go to university if “they perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs”.

Students are now much aware of their rights and are not willing to accept poor service. They demand facilities for quality education in return of their fees. But, it is worthy to note that there exists difference in the on-campus facilities in different universities. This difference is obvious among the universities in public sector, private sector and in public and private sector.

In short, it may be stated that the quality higher education is much dependent on the on-campus facilities for students. For the provision of better on-campus facilities, universities have started charging money. Consequently higher education, especially private higher education, is becoming more expensive day by day.

Scope of the Study

The increasing proportion of private universities in the higher education sector has introduced a healthy competition in Pakistan. But, the fee charged by private sector universities has always been a point of concern for most of the students. Despite the quality of education, the level of fees is an important aspect the students consider while selecting institutions for admission. In this situation the on-campus facilities for the students, teachers and the supporting staff have also acquired secondary position as the students find it difficult to pay high fee. On the other hand the public sector universities promise to provide best educational facilities at a highly reduced cost. The main purpose of the study is to determine the level of fees charged and facilities provided to students in the public and private universities of Pakistan. The study was delimited to the facilities needed to complete research theses/projects at MS/MPhil level for the students of social sciences. Following facilities available in public and private universities are compared;

1. Physical infrastructure of the universities
2. The instructional resources
3. Human resources
4. Teacher support for students
5. Research resources in the universities

Research Questions

Following research questions were answered on the basis of data gathered from the participants of the research at hand

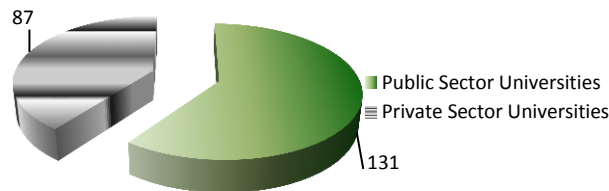
1. Is there any difference in the fee structure of the public and private sector universities?
2. Is there any difference in on-campus facilities for students at the public and private sector universities?
3. Does there exist any relationship in fee structure and on-campus facilities for students of the public and private sector universities?

Research Methodology

The study focused on determining relationship between fees charged from students by public and private sector universities and the on-campus facilities provided to the pupils. This is a study of an existing phenomena and according to Best (1970)“conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of views, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing” is descriptive research. The present study also aims at examining the ongoing phenomena without manipulating any variable. Hence, this is a survey based descriptive study (Creswell, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison,2007).

The population of the study included all the social sciences and humanities students of MS/MPhil level enrolled in public and private sector universities of Pakistan. There are total 160 universities and degree awarding institutions in Pakistan (91 public and 69 private sector) (HEC, 2013). For the purpose of sample selection multistage sampling technique was used. At the first stage ten universities (five from public sector and five from private sector) selected were randomly. Secondly, from the selected universities one department of social science, arts and humanities offering MS/MPhil programs since 2010 was again randomly selected. From the selected departments of social sciences, arts and humanities, all students from the final semesters were selected as the sample. The total sample size thus finalized for the study consisted of 218 MS/MPhil level students (131 students from public and 87 students from private sector universities). The distribution of the sample of the study is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of the selected sample



For the purpose of data collection, a questionnaire viz. “social sciences facility identification inventory” was used. It was developed by the researchers and comprises 72 items. The items were further divided into five factors namely “Physical Infrastructure, Instructional Resources, Human Resources, Teacher Support, and Research Resources”. Before final administration, the developed questionnaire was piloted on a limited sample from one public and one private university. These two universities were not considered during the process of final sample selection. The reliability coefficient i.e. Cronbach Alpha, for the scale was calculated as 0.834. Therefore, the scale was considered reliable for using it in the final administration for data collection. The researchers personally visited the selected universities and requested the students to fill the questionnaire for giving their responses.

Certain ethical considerations for the collection and presentation of data were observed during the study. These are listed as under:

- i) The names and locale of the public and private sector universities are deliberately kept anonymous.
- ii) The participants of the research were MPhil/MS level students enrolled in departments of social sciences from the selected universities. The names of the departments as well as of the students are also deliberately not mentioned in the study to avoid any kind of stress or damage to the reputation of individual students, departments and universities.

- iii) It was ensured to the participants of the study that the collected data will be used only for the research purposes and will never be reported or presented at any platform for any other purpose.
- iv) Due permission from the departments concerned was obtained from the heads of the departments of the participants

Findings/Results

To analyze the data, SPSS was used. For determining the difference between the fee structure and the corresponding facilities in public and private universities, independent sample t-test was used. As the data is normally distributed and fulfills all the conditions for the application of parametric tests therefore, along with t-test the correlation can also be calculated (Creswell, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Moreover, for analyzing the relationship between the fee and corresponding facilities in both the public as well as private universities, Pearson r (correlation) was calculated. The graphical representations are given on the basis of percentages and the Mean Scores. The analysis of data yielded following results.

Table 1
Comparison of fees received by public and private universities

	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	Df	p	Effect Size
Public	131	2.61	1.20	-1.97	-12.46	216	0.000	0.652
Private	87	4.58	1.12					

Analysis in the above table reveals that significant difference existed in the fee charged by the public and private sector universities ($p=.000<.05$). Moreover, private universities are receiving relatively higher fees as compared to the public universities. The effect size of 0.651 describes the statistical significance of the mean difference.

Table 2
Comparison of provided facilities to students in public and private universities

	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	p
Public	131	3.56	0.67	0.12	1.841	0.671
Private	87	3.48	0.66			

The comparison of facilities provided to the students in the public and private universities shows that there is no difference in the facilities ($p=.671>.05$).

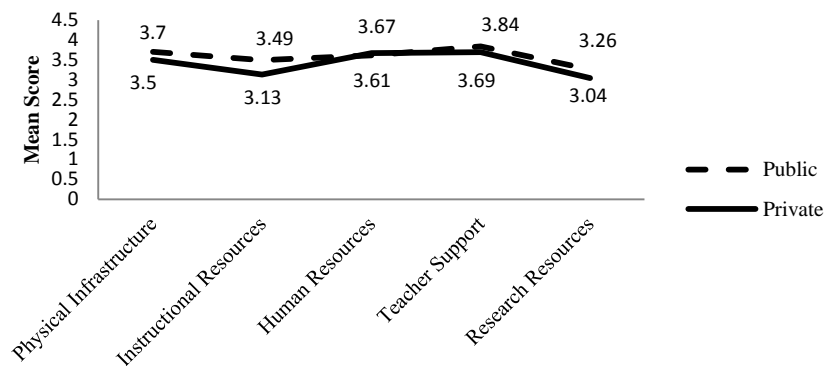
Table 3
Comparison of facilities provided in public and private universities

Facilities	Mean		SD		t	p
	Public	Private	Public	Private		
Physical Infrastructure	3.71	3.51	0.47	0.61	2.39	0.018
Instructional Resources	3.48	3.14	1.12	1.07	2.35	0.020
Human Resources	3.60	3.68	0.62	0.75	-0.68	0.464
Teacher Support	3.85	3.68	0.76	0.79	1.36	0.171
Research Resources	3.25	3.03	0.94	0.92	1.67	0.084

No difference was observed in most of the facilities provided to students in public and private universities. The difference in the facilities was significant only for the physical infrastructure ($p=.018<.05$) and instructional resources ($p=.018<.05$). In these two areas public sector universities rendered better facilities.

Similarly, the mean score based comparison of facilities also shows that all the type of facilities, except human resources, in public universities are in better condition. Only the human resource facilities in the private universities are marginally better ($\bar{x}=3.29$) than that of available in the public sector. The mean score base comparison of facilities in the public and private universities is presented in the figure below;

Figure 2. Mean score-based comparison of facilities in public and private sector universities



On the other hand comparison of facilities with the fee charged in public and private universities reflects that far better facilities at low cost are being provided at public sector universities. The below figure depicts the true picture;

Figure 3. Comparison of fees and facilities at public and private sector universities

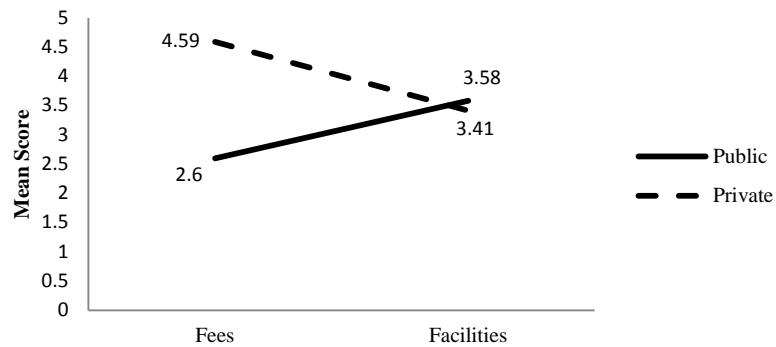


Table 4
Relationship between feeand facilities provided to students

	N	Mean	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fee	218	3.38	-.041	.543
Facilities		3.52		

It was observed that no relationship exists between the fees charged by the universities and the corresponding facilities for students in the universities ($p=.543>.05$). Hence, the facilities available to the students on their respective campuses, public or private, has nothing to do with the amount of fees charged.

Table 5
Relationship between fee and facilities in public and private universities

	University	N	Mean	Pearson r	Sig.(2-tailed)
Fee	Public	131	2.61	-.159	.066
Facilities			3.57		
Fee	Private	87	4.58	.402	.000
Facilities			3.41		

Finally it was found that the facilities enjoyed by the students in the public sector universities do not depend upon the amount of fee paid by them ($p=.553>.05$). But, these facilities has significant relationship ($p=.000<.05$) with the amount of fee paid by the students of private universities.

Discussion

Significant difference in the fee structure of public and private sector universities shows the profit making nature of private sector universities as there fee structure is relatively very high in comparison with the public sector universities. Similar situation was found by Varghese (2004) who categorizes universities as profit taking and no-profit taking.

Another reason for charging a lesser amount of fees in the public sector universities is the government support. The public sector universities receive more funds from government because it is the responsibility of the state to provide quality education to its people. Only because of this reason Hoodbhoy (2009) noted that many public universities are oversupplied in funds.

As far as the comparison of facilities is concerned, it is observed that despite charging very high fees private sector universities are providing few facilities to the students. The facilities provided by the public sector universities are far better than those of private sector. It is again because of the government funding in public sector universities and the profit making desire of private sector universities. Another reason for better facilities in the public sector universities is that most of these universities were established far earlier than the private universities. Therefore, they have developed their infrastructure, research and human resources with the passage of time. The same is the case with the faculty. Public sector universities have more qualified and experienced faculty.

It is, therefore, suggested that measures should be taken to have a control over fees of private sector universities. To reduce their casts such institutions must look for ways to increase professor productivity and total enrollment get a fair match in their income and expenditures. (Li, 2013). As the private sector universities are charging more fees, they should provide certain scholarship the talented needy students. In the same way they can also participate in community development programs (Bond, 2006). Moreover, Higher Education Commission Pakistan should take measures to specify the level of fees and their corresponding facilities so that the students from low socioeconomic groups can also get higher education. Furthermore, universities should make arrangements for education on subsidized fees for poor and needy students.

Conclusions

Similar to other parts of the world private sector universities in Pakistan are also charging more fees as compared with the public sector. But, contrary to a number of world top class private universities, the Pakistani private universities are rendering fewer facilities. Public sector universities in Pakistan have better infrastructure and instructional resources. Only the human resources of private universities are in relatively better condition.

Another important result of the study is that the facilities being enjoyed by the postgraduate level students in public universities do not relate to the amount of fees paid. It means that the public universities are facilitating the students irrespective of the amount of fee. But, the situation is completely different in the private universities where the facilities are significantly correlated with the amount of fees paid by the students. Therefore, the universities charging high fee are providing better facilities and vice versa.

To sum up on-campus facilities in public sector universities are not associated with the fees, but in the private sector universities better facilities are being provided to those students who are paying more fees. But despite getting huge fees, level of facilities provided in private sector universities is very low as compared to the public sector

universities. Therefore, it is concluded students are getting fleeced instead of being facilitated in private universities.

Limitations of Research Study and Recommendations

The study at hand was an effort to determine whether there is any relationship of the fees received by the universities from the students and respective facilities provided to them. The study is limited in its scope as it focuses only on the social sciences area. The situation might differ for other fields of studies e.g. natural sciences. At the same time the results of the study cannot be generalized for the students of graduation or master level as there is a possibility that for the lower level of education the facilities are adequate but these do not match with the needs and requirements of higher education level like M.Phil. or Ph.D. On the basis of the findings it is recommended that the authorities responsible for the administration of higher education should specify the maximum limit of fee and minimum level of corresponding facilities to keep a match between received fees and the facilities provided.

The same research may also be replicated at different levels of education e.g. Ph.D. level or at the Master level to verify the results of the study. Similarly the research may also be conducted to determine the relationship between fees and facilities provided for the other disciplines of study i.e. natural sciences and information technology.

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