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P A K I S T A N ' S P R E M I E R E D U C A T I O N M A G A Z I N E

[Higher Education In Pakistan](#)

How Far Have We Come?





Pakistani higher education sector has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1947. Today, universities, both public and private, are spread out across the country. We study the growth of universities since the independence of the Indian subcontinent and the miles we still have to go.

When the people of the Indian Subcontinent gained independence from British rulers, the Pakistani education sector inherited only a fraction of the resources the combined India under the British rule boasted of. Pakistan had two fully functioning universities at the time – The University of the Punjab and University of Dacca. Although there were other notable colleges that were placed across the nascent nation, none was a degree awarding institution by itself. There was King Edward Medical College for studying medicine, Mayo School of Industrial Arts for studying arts and Forman Christian College Lahore for studying general disciplines, but none could confer degrees on its own. The newly created India, on the other hand, had eight functioning universities.

Today, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) puts the total number of higher education institutions in the country at 204, with a majority being in the public sector. Presently, there are 81 HEIs in the private sector, making up 39.7 percent of the total higher education sector of Pakistan.

Beginnings

To study the growth of universities over the 73 years of independence, we resorted to official data made available by the government of Pakistan in its *Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17*, the latest official report on education sector in Pakistan. According to official data, Pakistan had two universities in 1947, and the count stayed the same until two more universities were set up by the year 1954-55. By the year 1962, two more universities had been added to the national tally, while another one was added to the list in the year 1966-67. Interestingly, the decade between 1958 and 1967 was a time of dictatorship in Pakistan, which many consider the decade wherein Pakistan saw most progress in various times sectors.

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Although the decade under Gen Ayub is considered an era of great progress, the higher education sector certainly wasn't having any it – only three new universities were established in from 1958 to 1969.

While the opinion is certainly a subject of debate, one thing is certain; the higher education sector certainly wasn't having any of that famed progress, as only three new universities were established in Pakistan from the time General Ayub Khan declared martial law in 1958 to the time he left power in 1969. Pakistan's count of having only seven universities

continued until 1970-71, after which another university was set up by the year 1971-72. The next five years under PPP's Zulfikr Ali Bhutto was a time when the nation was recovering from the loss of its eastern limb. Progress was slow, as depicted by the fact that only four more universities came into existence until 1977. The total number of universities in all of Pakistan had now jumped to 12.

Midlife

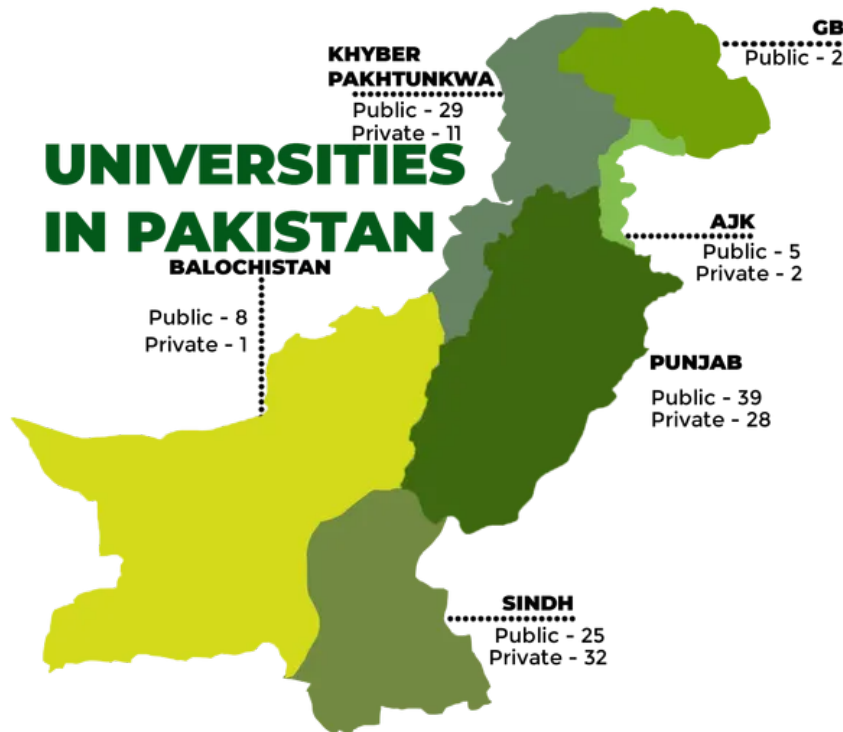
With the martial law in place from year 1977 to 1988, the pace of establishment of universities picked up considerably. While many associate the span of the military regime with censorship, gags and curbs on freedom, the higher education sector took some considerable leaps. By the time General Ziaul Haq got killed in a plane crash in 1988, the number of universities in Pakistan had jumped to 22. That's an average of almost one university each year over the course of 11 years of dictatorship. Sadly the situation did not change much until 1992, despite elected, democratic parties taking turns at running the country's show. Only one more university came into existence between 1988 and 1992. However, six more universities were set up in the next two years, and the total had jumped to 28 by the year 1993-94. From there onwards began a steady rise in number. The count of universities rose to 34 in the year 1994-95, then to 38 by year 1995-96, stood at 41 by the year 1996-97 and then moved to 45 in the year 1997-98. By the time General Pervez Musharraf took reins of the country following the coup of 1999, the number of universities in Pakistan had risen to 46.

In Bloom

Strictly speaking in terms of growth of higher education sector, the era of Gen Musharraf was one of the most prolific in the country's history. It was in this era that the archaic University Grants Commission was replaced by an all empowered Higher Education Commission of Pakistan in 2002 that set the tone of things to come. Besides an increased focus on overhauling public sector universities, the formation of HEC opened new vistas for private educationists across the country and many new names entered the sector to begin a new era of educational service. By the time HEC was established in 2002, the number of universities stood at 59. That means that the military regime had already made way for the establishment of 13 new universities before HEC was even given the go ahead.

Once HEC became the higher education monitoring authority empowered to uplift the education sector in the country, the number of universities rose significantly. Within just two years, by the 2004-2005, the number of universities, public and private combined, had jumped to 108.

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By the year 2009-2010, Pakistan had 132 fully functioning universities, while the number jumped to 163 in the next five years, by the year 2014-15, that is. Over the course of the last five years, the number of higher education institutes have continued to grow, but at a much slower pace than that witnessed in the mid and late 2000s. As of 2016-2017, Pakistan's number of universities stood at 185, however, the HEC now recognizes 204 degree awarding higher education institutes, a majority still in the public sector. Punjab has the most universities with 67, followed by Sindh that has 57 recognized HEIs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 40, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) with 22, Balochistan that has nine universities, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) with seven, while there are two operational universities in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Are We There Yet?

Unfortunately, we are not. While we might have grown in numbers, we have miles to go before we can rest assured that our higher education sector is a master class in, well, higher education. For example, our highest ranking university in this year's QS World University Rankings 2020 was PIEAS at 375th position. It had a score of 36.2 for citations per faculty and an overall score of 29.2. India began its educational journey the same day as Pakistan did. The top Indian university in the same ranking was Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB), ranked 152nd in the world. Its score of citations per faculty was 54.6. China, which became a people's republic two years later than both Pakistan and India in 1949, has outdone both its sub-continental neighbors. The top Chinese university at the moment is Tsinghua University. It also happens to be the 16th best university in the world, with a citation per faculty of 80.4! And that is discussing just one parameter on which these universities are ranked. It also goes to show us that while numbers matter, quality matters much more. Pakistani scholars are churning out tons of research papers each year, but their efficacy remains a major question mark.

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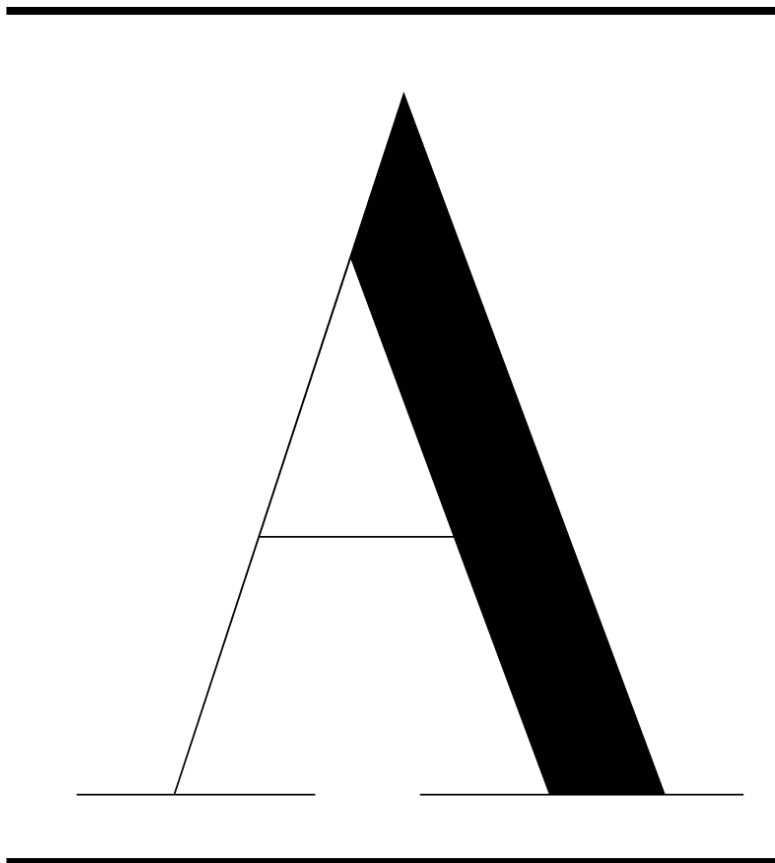


year 1994-95, then to 38 by year 1995-96, stood at 41 by the year 1996-97 and then moved to 45 in the year 1997-98.

While HEC has spent almost two decades sponsoring Pakistanis to pursue PhDs in foreign lands, the on-ground situation is such that almost 800 returning scholars cannot find decent jobs anywhere in Pakistan. There appears to be something seriously wrong with either the way HEC funds scholars or the out-of-demand disciplines these scholars choose to pursue their doctorates. Plagiarism seems to be a cruse Pakistanis love to invoke. Even some top officials in HEC have been found guilty of the crime, bringing much disgrace and criticism the commission's way. It also gives clue to the fact that if HEC has failed to spot such nuisances among its ranks, it could well have missed out big time on spotting the same in hundreds of scholars it helped gain PhDs. The standard of education and exploitation of students at private higher education universities are other issues that call for strict interventions by the powers that be. So while we may revel in only the fact that Pakistan has more than two hundred universities operating across the country, we really need to sit down and analyze how far higher education in the country has really come in the past 72 years since independence. To truly make our mark on the world, Pakistan needs excellence, not existence, in the world of higher education.

ABOUT





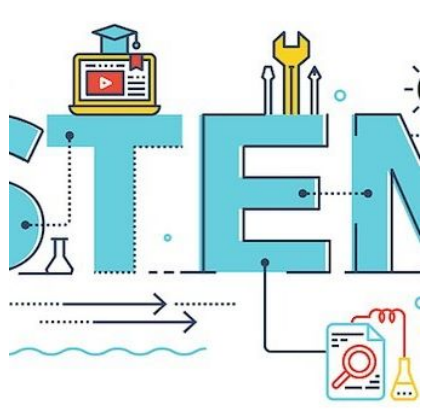
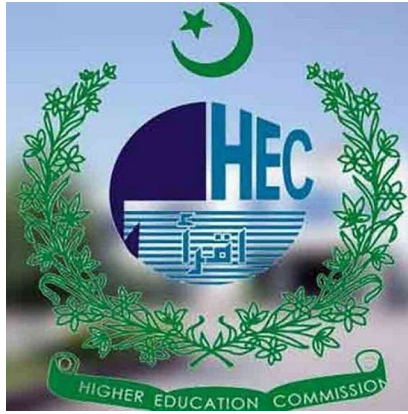
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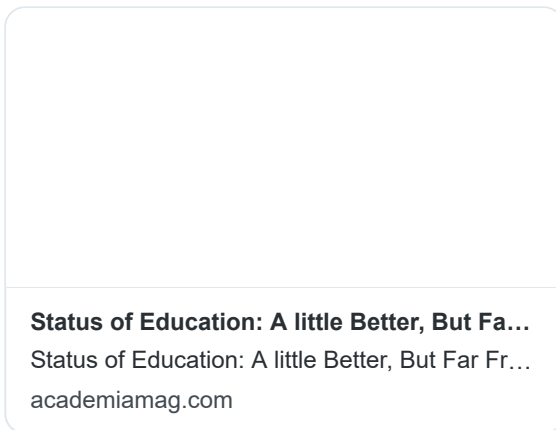
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Ammar Sheikh

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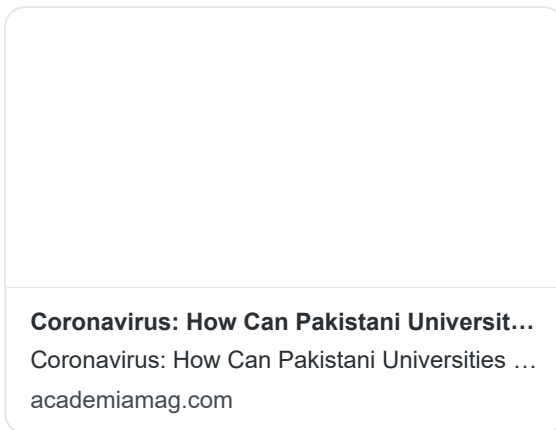
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