

**ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF PAKISTAN: AN
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS**

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EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF PAKISTAN: AN
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Association of American Universities
CAE	Council for Aid to Education
CASE	Council for Advancement and Support of Education
CBPP	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DAIs	Degree Awarding Institutes
EUA	European University Associations
FAPUASA	Federation of ALL Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association
FATA	Federally Administrative Tribal Areas
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoP	Government of Pakistan
HEC	Higher Education Commission
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IFAC	International Federation of Accountants
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkwa
MTDF	Mid-Term Development Framework
NEP	National Education Policy
NYSE	New York Stock Exchange
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
PCP	Pakistan Center for Philanthropy

PEP Promotion for Education in Pakistan
PhD Doctor of Philosophy

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**PENGLIBATAN ALUMNI DAN INSTITUSI PENDIDIKAN TINGGI AWAM
PAKISTAN: SATU ANALISIS FENOMENOLOGIS INTERPERATIF**

ABSTRAK

Selama beberapa dekad, landskap pengajian tinggi telah berubah secara drastik disebabkan oleh cabaran kewangan global, persaingan sengit, teknologi yang pesat maju, dan perubahan persekitaran yang belum pernah terjadi sebelumnya, misalnya, pandemik terbaru COVID-19. Akibat situasi ini, pemerintah negara di seluruh dunia mengurangkan sokongan kewangan mereka kepada institusi pengajian tinggi awam dan meminta institusi ini mencari sumber dana alternatif. Terutamanya, institusi pengajian tinggi awam di negara-negara membangun seperti Pakistan telah terjejas teruk kerana kerajaan persekutuan yang mengalami masalah ekonomi telah mengurangkan belanjawan institusi pengajian tinggi awam kepada lebih daripada 55 peratus, pada tahun 2020. Untuk mengatasi cabaran kewangan, alumni telah muncul sebagai penyumbang utama dan kemungkinan besar, telah menjadi pemegang berkepentingan yang menyokong institusi di negara maju dalam bentuk monetari dan bukan-monetari. Walau bagaimanapun, institusi di Pakistan masih tidak dapat memanfaatkan potensi sumbangan alumni untuk mengatasi cabaran kewangan semasa. Oleh itu, kekurangan budaya sokongan alumni dalam institusi pengajian tinggi awam Pakistan telah muncul sebagai isu penting, terutama ketika persoalan yang muncul ialah kelestarian kewangan jangka panjang institusi. Untuk memahami masalah ini, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk memahami sikap alumni terhadap penglibatan dalam institusi pengajian tinggi awam Pakistan melalui penyiasatan tentang pengaruh institusi, peribadi, dan persekitaran ke atas sikap alumni terhadap penglibatan. Untuk mencapai objektif ini, penyelidikan ini telah menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi

kerana ia merupakan pendekatan yang paling sesuai untuk menyasat pengalaman hidup alumni dengan institusi mereka. Alumni dikategorikan dalam tiga kumpulan yang berbeza berdasarkan tahap penglibatan mereka: sangat terlibat, jarang terlibat, dan tidak terlibat. Melalui teknik persampelan bertujuan dan teknik bola salji, penyelidikan ini mengumpulkan data empirikal dalam bentuk wawancara separa berstruktur dan perbincangan kumpulan fokus bersama 26 alumni dari lapan institusi pengajian tinggi awam Pakistan yang berbeza. Analisis terhadap data yang dikumpulkan menggunakan Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) dalam perisian Atlas.ti. Penyelidikan ini telah menghasilkan penemuan yang kaya dalam bentuk 12 tema superordinat dan 36 tema subordinat. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa alumni lebih cenderung kepada penglibatan tanpa menggunakan wang, dengan terbukti terdapat beberapa fokus kepada penglibatan menggunakan wang dengan pemberian dana dari majikan. Namun, mereka telah menunjukkan keengganan untuk terlibat dalam penglibatan penggunaan wang secara individu terutamanya kerana masalah kemampuan kewangan peribadi. Penyelidikan ini mendapati bahawa institusi pengajian tinggi awam di Pakistan belum/tidak membina ikatan yang sihat dengan alumni kerana kewujudan kekurangan dalam penilaian potensi sumbangan dan peranan alumni dalam kesejahteraan institusi. Oleh itu, alumni telah menunjukkan tahap ketidakpuasan yang tinggi mengenai usaha institusi untuk melibatkan mereka, misalnya, kekurangan komunikasi dengan alumni, kekurangan kakitangan pejabat hubungan alumni yang mahir, ketiadaan persatuan alumni, dan kekurangan kemudahan alumni. Suatu dapatan menarik ialah alumni yang sangat terlibat telah muncul untuk mendorong budaya penglibatan dengan institusi di Pakistan setelah melihat pendekatan pasif institusi mereka. Penyelidikan ini mendapati bahawa alumni mempunyai sikap positif terhadap penglibatan dengan institusi terutamanya

disebabkan oleh keterikatan emosi dan perasaan terhutang budi terhadap institusi. Namun, mereka mengaitkan kemungkinan penglibatan mereka di masa depan dengan polisi penglibatan alumni, komunikasi berkala, rasa hormat dan nilai yang diberikan kepada mereka, dan undangan penglibatan dari institusi tersebut. Penyelidikan ini juga telah memperluas penerapan kerangka S-O-R dan teori pertukaran sosial ke dalam penglibatan alumni dengan menambahkan konstruk baru yang belum digunakan dalam penyelidikan sebelumnya. Kesimpulannya, penyelidikan ini telah menyetengahkan alumni sebagai pihak berkepentingan yang paling mungkin menyumbang terhadap kelestarian institusi pengajian tinggi awam Pakistan, dan memerlukan tumpuan lebih strategik. Walau bagaimanapun, ia memerlukan institusi untuk membina hubungan yang sihat bersama alumni dalam jangka masa panjang, dengan menggunakan strategi pemasaran organisasi korporat yang dapat memanfaatkan sumbangan alumni dan kelestarian kewangan, yang juga, secara beransur-ansur, mengurangkan pergantungan pada dana kerajaan.

**ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS OF PAKISTAN: AN INTERPRETATIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

ABSTRACT

Over the decades, the landscape of Higher Education (HE) has drastically changed on account of global financial challenges, intense competition, rapidly advancing technology, and unprecedented environmental changes for example, the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, state governments worldwide have consistently decreased their financial support to Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) and required institutions to look for alternate sources of funds. Particularly, PHEIs in developing economies like Pakistan have been severely impacted as the economically struggling federal government has reduced PHEIs' budget by more than 55 percent in 2020. It is found that to overcome financial challenges, alumni have emerged as the major contributor and most likely potential stakeholder to support institutions in developed economies in monetary and nonmonetary forms. However, institutions in Pakistan have remained unable to capitalize alumni potential to overcome current financial challenge. Thus, lack of alumni support culture in the PHEIs of Pakistan has emerged as an important issue, particularly when questions are raised on the PHEIs long-term financial sustainability. To analyze this issue, this research aimed to understand alumni attitudes towards engagement in the PHEIs of Pakistan through investigating institutional, personal, and environmental influences on alumni attitudes towards engagement. To achieve this objective this research has adopted a phenomenological approach as it appeared the most suitable approach to investigate lived experiences of alumni with their institutions. Alumni were

categorised into three different groups based on their level of engagement: highly engaged, seldom engaged, and disengaged. Using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques, this research collected empirical data in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion from 26 alumni of eight different PHEIs of Pakistan. The collected data was analysed through employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) on Atlas.ti software. This research has generated rich findings in the form of 12 superordinate and 36 subordinate themes. Findings have reflected that alumni are more inclined towards nonmonetary engagement with some focus on monetary engagement through providing funds from employers. However, they have shown reluctance to engage in individual monetary engagement primarily on account of personal financial capacity issues. This research has found that PHEIs in Pakistan have not nurtured a healthy bond with alumni as they have undervalued their potential and their role in the wellbeing of institutions. Therefore, alumni have shown high levels of dissatisfaction regarding inadequate institutional engagement efforts, for example, lack of communication with alumni, lack of skilled and expert alumni relations office staff, absence of an alumni association, and a lack of alumni amenities. Interestingly, highly-engaged alumni have appeared to drive engagement culture with institutions in Pakistan after seeing their passive engagement approach. This research has found that alumni held positive attitudes towards engagement with institutions primarily on account of their strong emotional attachment and feelings of indebtedness towards institutions. However, they have associated their possible future engagement with proper institutional engagement policies, regular communication, the respect and value provided to them, and solicitation from the institution. This research has also extended the application of S-O-R framework and social exchange theory to alumni scholarship through adding new constructs which are not adopted in previous

research. In conclusion, this research has highlighted alumni as the most likely and promising stakeholder for the PHEIs of Pakistan to focus on more strategically. However, it requires institutions to build healthy and long-term relationships with alumni through adopting marketing strategies like corporate organizations in order to capitalize on alumni for long-term financial sustainability and gradually reduce their dependence on state funding.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses how financially struggling public higher education institutions (PHEIs), with a particular focus on PHEIs of Pakistan, could leverage the benefits of alumni engagement to overcome the issues of state funding cuts. In the first section, a detailed discussion is carried out about the changing landscape of higher education globally. The second section discusses in detail the global and Pakistan-specific situation in regard to the consequences of government funding cuts and aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic on PHEIs' financial sustainability, which lays the foundation for this research. In the third section, the background of the study begins with a discussion on the rising importance of external funding to support the financial sustainability of PHEIs, particularly from the perspective of Alumni. It also discusses how organizational strategies are becoming important for HEI to build strong bonds with stakeholders, particularly alumni.

Furthermore, the significance of alumni engagement in PHEIs is exemplified through the critical roles they perform in developed economies to support PHEIs' financial sustainability in times of declining government funding. In this regard, a comparison of alumni engagement in the PHEIs of developed economies and Pakistan is also presented, with recent facts and figures to highlight the underdeveloped state of alumni engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan. In the fourth section, the researcher presents current problems and challenges faced by PHEIs of Pakistan on account of declining government funding, followed by the objective and thesis research questions.

In the fourth section, the scope, significance, and the position of the researcher are discussed. In addition, the researcher presents the theoretical and practical contributions of this research with sound reasoning and justification in a logical manner. In the concluding section, the researcher has provided definitions of terms used and the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Changing Landscape of Higher Education (HE)

Over the years, higher education has become complex and increasingly immune to global challenges, including intense competition, coping with the digital revolution and the changing dynamic environment. In particular, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the landscape of HE and has established an environment where survival of the fittest is the new norm. Seeing the drastically changing HE environment, Gibbs and Murphy (2009) have suggested adapting pure business and marketing philosophy to HEI settings. Consequently, HEIs are increasingly adopting business ethos and practices to meet these challenges (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), which seems appropriate and logical, particularly in a time of financial instability caused by a consistent decline in state support and, more recently, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Primarily, HEIs have three fundamental objectives: teaching, research, and public services, yet these objectives are always in conflict with each other (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). This conflict has become more prominent lately, on account of the growing market orientation of HEIs (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The Council of the European Union (2014) asserted that HEIs must adapt the culture of for-profit organizations to survive, while continuing to serve as non-profit organizations as the role of the HEI as a public good is its essential feature (Nedbalova,

Greenacre & Schulz, 2014). Thus, this requires HEIs to consider their core responsibilities while embracing characteristics of for-profit organizations, so that they could address the growing concern of financial sustainability, in addition to seeking private support and preparing for future financial shocks, resulting from situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to strive for a better and financially sustainable future, HEIs have to follow both organizational orientation (i.e., nurture its capacity to compete in the market; Friga, Bettis & Sullivan, 2003) sector orientation (i.e., maintain its strength to offer value for society through creating and imparting knowledge; Healy, 2008).

The following sections 1.2 and 1.3 will discuss in detail how state funding cuts have drastically changed the landscape of PHEIs both globally and in Pakistan in particular.

1.2 Government Funding Cuts to PHEIs: A Global Perspective

Historically, public colleges and universities have depended on federal and local tax revenues, whereas private colleges and universities have relied heavily on charitable donation and large endowment funds to support their operations (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association [SHEEO], 2018). However, the great recession has resulted in a gloomy future for PHEIs in the form of historic government funding cuts all around the world. The senior policy analyst at SHEEO has stated “with every recession, funding for higher education has had steeper declines and shallower recoveries, so we are coming up to this next one at a worse spot than ever before” (SHEEO, 2020).

Consequently, the financially constrained environment for PHEIs in the US has resulted in several issues such as a raise in tuition fees, compromise on the quality of

education, closure of campuses and programmes, and faculty layoffs (CBPP, 2019). Further, historically it has been shown that when institutions encounter cuts in state funding, they increasingly rely on revenue earned in the form of tuition and fees. However, experts are uncertain whether this pattern will be repeated during the present COVID-19 pandemic led depressed economy (SHEEO, 2020), thus anticipating a gloomy future for PHEIs in coming years and raising serious concerns over their financial sustainability.

Similarly, PHEIs in the United Kingdom (UK) and European countries are also at risk from the austerity measures of their federal governments. For the last two decades, the UK government have introduced strict financial reforms in higher education, with a central focus on shifting 96 percent of government financing from grants to loans (Institute of Fiscal Studies [IFS], 2019). Likewise, according to the European University Association ([EUA], 2020) report, universities throughout Europe are facing financial challenges on account of state funding cuts, which stemmed from the recession of 2008. Although the economies of European countries are showing some favourable signs in recent times, there is still a growing emphasis on exploring the financial sustainability of universities through alternative sources of funding (EUA, 2020). As a result, rising education costs, compromise on the quality of education and the closure of programmes have severely impacted the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Times Higher Education world rankings of institutions in these countries (Adams, 2017; Times Higher Education, 2017), making them less competitive in comparison to other institutions in the world.

The austerity measures of federal governments towards PHEIs have not only affected the PHEIs of western countries but have also severely damaged the struggling PHEIs of several South Asian and South-East Asian countries such as Malaysia, India,

and Pakistan. In this regard, in his budget speech, the former prime minister of Malaysia announced the liberalization of PHEIs and developed the idea of a corporate university due to the rising cost of funding to PHEIs in the country (Nasruddin, Bustami & Inayatullah, 2012). The austerity wave has made the journey of providing quality education difficult for Malaysian universities (Tan, Goh & Chan, 2015), with a sharp decline of 19 percent in the federal government budget for higher education (Kamal, 2017). Similarly, the position of PHEIs in India has become worse since the local and federal governments reduced the higher education budget and shattered the dreams of the largest youth population in the country who aspire to join to PHEIs for the opportunity to have a bright future (Times of India [TOI], 2019).

Moreover, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has meant a major blow for financially struggling PHEIs worldwide. The pandemic has severely undermined global economies and threatens to considerably affect almost every sector including higher education. The current pandemic has raised the alarm for the financial future of PHEIs, since it would introduce dual financial constraint i.e., a likely increase in the cost and a significant decline in revenue. In this regard, New America (2021) and SHEEO (2020) have warned PHEIs that the pandemic has resulted in the economic downturn and raised the cost of state both of which are likely to impact state funding to higher education. Similarly, IFS (2020) has raised alarms for PHEIs in the UK as the pandemic-led crisis is presenting a considerable financial threat to PHEIs in the form of a loss of a wide range of income sources and investments, which may lead PHEIs to witness severe financial crisis, including insolvency. The pandemic led crisis has raised the importance of seeking external funding for PHEIs worldwide in order to attain long-term financial sustainability and progressively lessen their dependence on the state.

1.3 Government Funding Cuts to PHEIs: Pakistan Perspective

The heads and vice-chancellors of PHEIs in Pakistan have declared that PHEIs in the country are suffering from a financial emergency on account of consistent cuts in government funding. The government has failed to maintain balance between the financing for PHEIs and the number enrolments for the last three consecutive years (HEC, 2019). For example, the cumulative (recurrent and development budget) shortfall has reached Rs. 71 billion in the 2019-20 fiscal year, which stands at more than 55 percent of budget cuts (Khattak, 2020), following budget cuts of 29 percent and 14 percent in 2018-19 and 2017-18 respectively (Dawn, 2018, 2019). Heads and vice chancellors have shown grave concern over the financial future and survival of PHEIs in the country (Dawn, 2020), which consequently threatens the future of higher education.

Although the government has increased the PHEIs budget in the year 2017-2018, the allocation of the budget remained considerably less than many economically struggling South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Iran, as reflected in figure 1.1 (Chaudhry, 2018; World Bank, 2017). Nevertheless, the government expenditure on education has remained at only 2.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the 2018-19 fiscal year (Dawn, 2019), which is lower than the 2.7 percent of GDP in 2017-18 (World Bank, 2017), making it well below than international standards. Furthermore, the recent pandemic has worsened the financial situation of PHEIs in the country through increasing costs and loss of revenue (Dawn, 2020), consequently making PHEIs in the country financially vulnerable and raising the importance of securing external support.

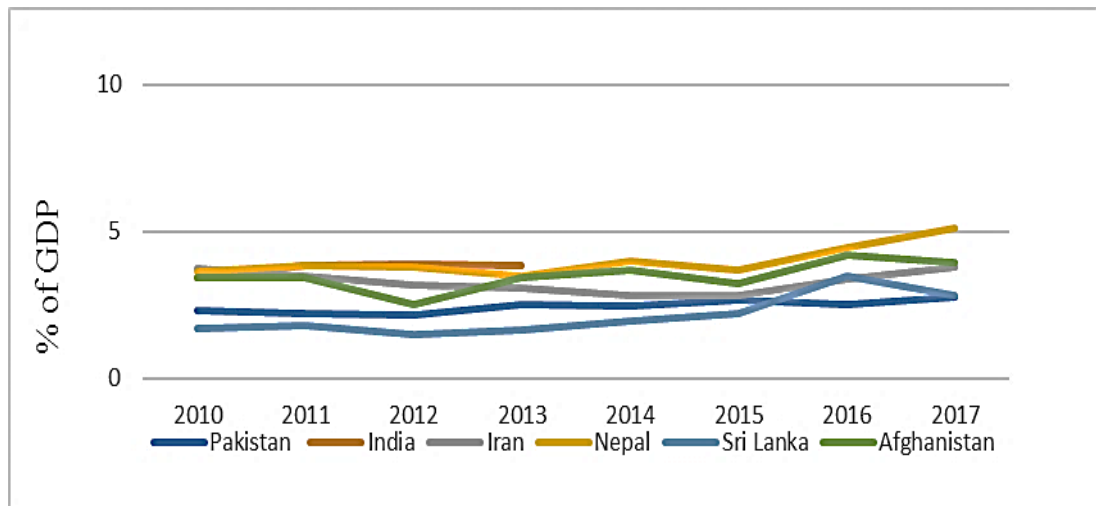


Figure 1.1. Government Expenditure on Education as % of GDP

Source: World Bank, 2017

Consequently, the lack of government funding has resulted in several issues for PHEIs, including deteriorating standards of education and a reduction in critical projects such as sending scholars overseas for further study, faculty training and institutional developmental projects (HEC, 2019; Bari, 2019). Additionally, the lack of allocation of funds has halted many developmental projects of PHEIs, resulting in institutions failing to obtain approval and remaining devoid of modern infrastructure. Furthermore, QS ranking of PHEIs has suffered badly over the years and only three PHEIs remained successful enough in 2017 to reach the top 800 lists of HEIs, compared to six two years prior (Chaudhry, 2018).

Having experienced severe cuts in funding and the potential of a financially constrained future following the COVID-19 pandemic, the heads of PHEIs are under intense pressure to save the future of higher education and attain long-term financial sustainability of their organizations. Understanding the current phenomenon, PHEIs need to lessen their reliance on government funds and look for alternative sources of funding. Strategizing in this direction will not only enable PHEIs to become

sustainable but also secure the future of the youth in the country. In this regard, the chairman of HEC has suggested the vice-chancellors and heads of PHEIs set a target that at least 20 percent of revenue should be gathered from alternative sources to mitigate the issue of decline in government funding and in order to become financially sustainable (HEC, 2019).

From the discussion, it appears that a consistent decline in government funding has not only made the journey of providing quality education difficult for PHEIs all around the world but has challenged their financial sustainability. When this problem is examined at a broader level, it signals severe challenges ahead for all countries generally, but particularly for developing economies like Pakistan. The ultimate consequence of endangering the future of the country's aspiring and promising youth is disastrous for Pakistan because it is the home of one of the largest youth population in the world. Considering the financial sustainability of PHEIs as an impeding issue, the next section will discuss the concept of the financial sustainability of PHEIs.

1.4 Financial Sustainability of PHEIs: A Critical Issue

Financial sustainability has become a key challenge for PHEIs on account of strict financial measures taken by federal governments worldwide and more recently as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus creating a scenario where only PHEIs who have healthy financial systems and a sustained stream of income would survive and attain financial sustainability to achieve future academic and research goals (Sazonov, Kharlamova, Chekhovskaya & Polyanskaya, 2015). According to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the concept of financial sustainability is based on three pillars, i.e., economic, social, and environmental (in Brusseau, 2019). However, the current state government funding cuts to PHEIs globally have augmented the

importance of the economic or financial aspect of financial sustainability for institutions.

Considering the mandate of this research and previous discussion, the researcher has only focused on the financial sustainability of PHEIs in Pakistan in this study. European University Associations ([EUA], 2008), Estermann and Nokkala (2009), and Estermann and Bennetot (2011) asserted that financial sustainability is “the ability to allocate and manage financial resources freely, to establish partnerships and raise income from the private sector” (in Lucianelli & Citro, 2017, p. 38). This definition served the purpose of this research as it covers the three major dimensions of financial sustainability i.e, financial independence from state, establishing partnerships with alumni, and cultivating alumni potential.

1.5 Background of Study

It is apparent from the previous discussion that PHEIs all around the world and particularly in developing economies like Pakistan are suffering badly on account of a decline in government funding. As a result, PHEIs worldwide are striving to access external sources of funding to attain long-term financial sustainability, which has become more important after the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, from time to time, several government officials of different countries, mainly from developing economies, are also suggesting their PHEIs look for alternate sources of revenues. For example, in Malaysia, the deputy chief minister of Penang state has suggested PHEIs become self-sustainable by utilizing other funding resources, particularly since the federal government is already facing financial challenges (Mok, 2018). Considering the severity of the issue, the next section of this research discusses the fundraising environment in PHEIs globally and particularly in Pakistan, followed by the

significance of alumni, alumni engagement towards PHEIs, attitudes of alumni towards engagement, and influences on attitudes of alumni towards engagement.

1.5.1 Fundraising in PHEIs: Global Perspective

Historically, numerous institutions showcase their buildings after the names of their benefactors or donors (Bernal & Mille, 2014). However, fundraising in PHEIs has gained momentum in recent years due to these institutions experiencing negative effects on account of government funding cuts across the globe. As a result, this has put pressure on institutions to raise funds to become sustainable and accomplish their mission relevant to academic, research, and public services (Bernal & Mille, 2014; Iskhakova et al., 2020; Kwiek, 2014; McAlexander & Koenig, 2012; McAlexander, Koenig & DuFault, 2016; Skari, 2014;). Therefore, institutions are striving hard to secure alternate sources of revenue to lessen their dependency on government funding, and to attain financial sustainability.

In this context, research shows that a diverse set of stakeholders including alumni, faculty, the general public, government agencies, industry, and research institutions have provided funds and benefited PHEIs to attain financial sustainability and achieve their aims (McAlexander & Koenig, 2012; McAlexander et al., 2016; McDearmon, 2013; Skari, 2014; Snijders et al.2019). However, among all stakeholders, alumni have appeared as ambassadors of these institutions in their daily routine, consciously or unconsciously representing their institutions through connecting to their professional, religious, social, network organizations and surrounding general community (Chen & Chung-Ming, 2013; Gallo, 2012 & 2018; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). These stakeholders and alumni have contributed

progressively towards PHEIs to attain financial sustainability in times of declining government funding.

The report published by Voluntary Support Survey (VSE) conducted by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) confirms the increasing donations of multiple stakeholders (including alumni, non-alumni individuals, corporations, foundations, and other organizations) to HEIs. CAE (2021) reports that philanthropic contributions to HEIs in the US have stood at \$49.50 billion, which is slightly lower than previous year contributions \$49.60 billion on account of the COVID-19 pandemic (refer to figure 1.2). However, the CAE (2021) report still highlights alumni as the most significant contributor to HEIs in the US with an amount of \$11.06 billion (22.3 percent) in 2020, signifying the importance establishing long-term relationship with alumni to secure their support for long-term financial sustainability.

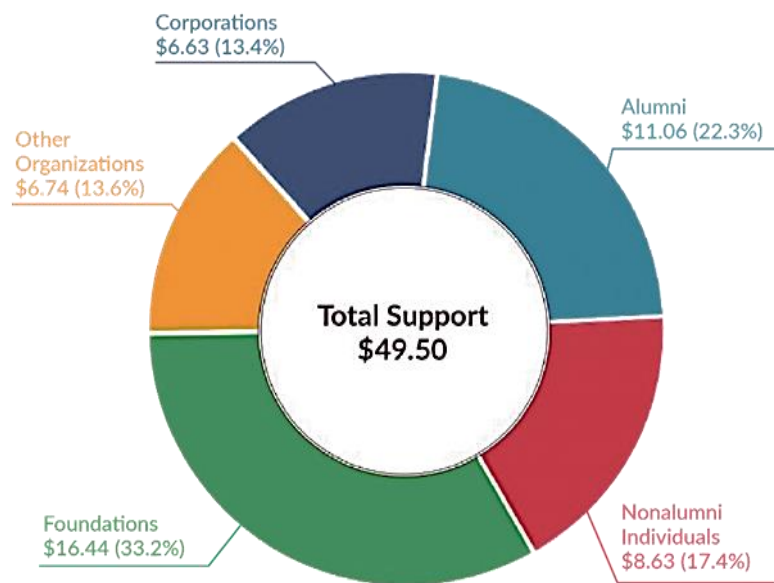


Figure 1.2. Voluntary Support of Higher Education by Source, 2021

Source: CAE, 2021

However, as discussed earlier, the rapidly changing environment of HEIs has required them to place more emphasis on marketing orientation (Durkin, Howcroft & Fairless, 2016) particularly to seek external support from different stakeholders including alumni to increase their support for PHEIs' long-term financial sustainability. Consequently, PHEIs are increasingly focusing on marketing principles, skills and strategies primarily related to communication, relationship building, donor management and branding (Durkin et al., 2016; Fay & Zavattaro; 2016; Nedbalová et al., 2014; Wu & Naidoo, 2016). Therefore, it is suggested that "friend-raising" before fundraising is fundamental (Myran et al., 2003; Tromble, 1998; Wagner, 2007 Weinstein, 2009) to cultivate supportive relations for PHEIs, which require organizational level characteristics (i.e., marketing principles) to play their role.

1.5.2 Fundraising in PHEIs: Pakistan Perspective

Fundraising to support PHEIs to attain financial sustainability has long been commonplace in the institutions of western developed economies, as noted above. However, such phenomena and culture are not nurtured in developing economies such as Pakistan. For example, considering the financially constrained environment for PHEIs in the country, the chairman of HEC Pakistan has requested philanthropists, particularly alumni, to come forward and support institutions in the country (The Nation, 2018). Such appeals by high government officials not only highlight the scale of the financial emergency of higher education in the country, but also shows the underdeveloped concept of individual philanthropy, particularly from alumni, towards institutions in the country.

However, initiatives such as university advancement office and celebrating national education fundraising week by HEC have helped in generating funds for PHEIs in Pakistan (HEC, 2013, 2019). Unfortunately, these initiatives have failed to bring the large-scale change that is required. Moreover, there has been a failure to nurture the fundraising environment for PHEIs in the country that would have eventually become the societal or cultural norm, as exists in the US and other developed countries. Consequently, the trend of giving to PHEIs has remained very low, particularly among alumni, who have emerged as the most significant contributor to PHEIs in western economies. Moreover, the review of the literature has highlighted the scarcity of research on alumni engagement from the perspective of Pakistan and developing economies, which affirms that alumni engagement towards PHEIs is still in its infancy in Pakistan. This gap serves as one of the primary motivations for the researcher to conduct more research on alumni engagement with PHEIs from the perspective of Pakistan.

1.5.3 Significance of Alumni for PHEIs

The growing financial pressure on account of declining government support has required PHEIs to focus more on their relationship with alumni as a top priority to secure funds for their financial sustainability (Berryhill, 2013; Gallo, 2018; McAlexander & Koenig, 2012). Therefore, over the decades, alumni have remained the primary focus of PHEIs as they endeavour to grow their donor base (Drezner, 2013, 2019). For example, heads of PHEIs in the United States have progressively leveraged their relationship with alumni over the years to support their institutions to succeed and become sustainable (Brittan, 2014) on account of their social welfare state (Garvey

& Drezner, 2019). Hence, it can be asserted that PHEIs in Pakistan should focus primarily on alumni to nurture relationships with them to secure their engagement.

Since alumni contribute progressively to PHEIs, researchers have referred to them as the leading contributors to these institutions in the form monetary and nonmonetary engagement. This includes alumni donations, investment, lobbying, mentoring, volunteering, and networking (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007a; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Iskhakova et al., 2016; Iskhakova et al., 2020; Nettet & Helgesen, 2009; Pedro & Andraz; 2019; Schlesinger et al., 2017; Snijders et al., 2019; Sung & Yang, 2009). For example, CAE (2020) reports alumni contributions in 2019 remained at 22.6 percent of overall donations to universities in the US. Therefore, it has become imperative for PHEIs to nurture and maintain good long-term relationships with alumni, as other businesses do, to encourage their loyalty (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2001) which may lead to PHEIs' long-term financial sustainability. Consequently, alumni engagement has become a key concept for PHEIs in recent times to focus in order to strengthen their standing during times of declining government support.

However, attracting alumni support in the form of their engagement requires PHEIs to build healthy and long-term relationships. As Fontaine (2014) argues, HEIs must strive to develop long-term relationships with alumni as opposed to transactional relationships. This demands PHEIs to learn organizational marketing ethos and, as in this situation, principles of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing focuses on identifying key drivers that effect strategy development for the attraction, retention, and enhancement of customer loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Tarokh & Sheykhani, 2015). The core essence of relationship marketing is related to what PHEIs are trying to achieve in the case of alumni; strategizing to attract, sustain and build long-term

relationships with alumni that could lead to lifelong alumni engagement. Therefore, scholars have regarded relationship marketing philosophy as highly relevant and important in attracting alumni engagement and loyalty towards HIEs (Abubakar & Mokhtar, 2015; Fontaine, 2014; Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). Thus, understanding of relationship marketing has appeared imperative for PHEIs to hold long-term relationships with alumni which may lead to future alumni support.

1.5.4 Alumni Engagement

Over the years, the nature of PHEIs has changed considerably, with alumni engagement becoming an important concept on account of a consistent decline in state support, financial crisis, and increasing global competition (Dvorak & Toubman, 2013; Iskhakova et al., 2020; Schlesinger et al., 2017). Therefore, the notion of alumni engagement is widely utilized by researchers in various fields but mostly in discussions regarding the main influences or factors that may affect alumni to engage with institutions (Iskhakova et al., 2017). Moreover, several scholars have accepted alumni engagement as the most critical aspect in envisaging alumni contributions (monetary and nonmonetary) towards PHEIs' financial sustainability (Alves & Raposo, 2007, Brown & Mazzrol, 2009; Fleming, 2019; Iskhakova et al., 2016; Iskhakova et al., 2020). Thus, alumni engagement can play a game-changing role for PHEIs in Pakistan by providing them with an opportunity to cultivate alumni and progressively lessen their dependence on government funding.

Research highlights that alumni engagement usually takes the form of both monetary roles and nonmonetary roles. Monetary roles include financial engagement of alumni (Gallo, 2018; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), re-purchase behaviour of alumni (Bowden, 2011), and alumni association membership (McDearmon, 2013). Whereas

nonmonetary roles include volunteerism (charitable preferences), political advocacy (social change preferences), and multimode participation (charity and social change) (Gallo, 2018; Weerts et al., 2014; Weerts & Cabrera, 2017, 2018). However, researchers have argued that the recent promising trend of alumni engaging in monetary and nonmonetary roles is based on their attitudes towards engagement to PHEIs (Arboleda & Alonso, 2017; McAlexander et al., 2016). Therefore, to attract alumni engagement (monetary and nonmonetary) to PHEIs in Pakistan, understanding attitudes of alumni towards engagement is a fundamental element.

Several scholars have asserted that alumni attitudes are formed based on their participation in activities and overall experience with the institution. Consequently, these attitudes have a substantial effect on alumni engagement towards institutions (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Gaier, 2005; Gallo & Hubschman, 2003; Hoyt, 2004; Iskhakova et al., 2016; Mosser, 1993). Therefore, a better understanding of alumni attitudes is likely to expand more avenues for further research on alumni satisfaction, engagement, loyalty, trust towards universities, and giving (Abbasov & Drezner, 2018; Drezner, 2008, McDearmon, 2010;). The growing engagement of alumni with PHEIs in developed economies, scarcity of local alumni literature in Pakistan, and the current state of financial crisis in the PHEIs of Pakistan establish a favourable case to conduct more research on alumni engagement in the PHEIs of Pakistan.

1.5.5 Influences on Attitudes of Alumni towards Engagement

Since attitudes of alumni towards engagement drives their actual behaviour in the form of engagement or avoidance, Farrow and Yuan (2011) have stressed that institutions need to understand the influences on attitudes of alumni towards engagement. In this regard, researchers have highlighted that influences on alumni

attitudes are institutional, personal, and environmental (Gunsalus, 2005; McDearmon, 2013; Siller, 2016; Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Thus, understanding these influences in detail may not only strengthen alumni engagement towards institutions but also help to cultivate future alumni contributions (Siller, 2016). Therefore, the next section will shed some light on these influences individually.

1.5.5(a) Institutional Influences

A review of the literature highlights that institutional influences are important when considering attitudes of alumni towards engagement. Several institutional influences that may affect attitudes of alumni towards engagement are discussed in the literature. These include the reputation of the institution (Fuller et al., 2006; Syed-Alwi and Kitchen, 2014), culture, traditions and rituals of the institution (Bernal & Mille, 2014; Gallo, 2012; Schlesinger et al., 2015), institutional communication with alumni and activities that cultivate relationships (Chi et al., 2012; Daly, 2013; Northfell et al., 2016), scholarships or grants awarded to students from the institution (Cunningham & CochiFicano, 2002; Freeland et al., 2015), and operations of the advancement office of the institution (McAlexander et al., 2014).

1.5.5(b) Personal Influences

Research highlights that personal influences are also likely to affect attitudes of alumni towards engagement. Personal influences are studied from the perspective of sociodemographic and psychographic influences (Tsao & Coll, 2005; Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Sociodemographic influences deal with age, gender, family status, the capacity to give, and charitable giving. Understanding these influences may lead to a greater level of alumni retention and helps institutions to predict future

engagement of alumni (Sargeant & Jay, 2014), whereas psychographic influences include satisfaction with institutional experience and involvement as students (Casidy & Wymer, 2016; McAlexander & Koenig, 2010; Stephenson & Yerger, 2015; Weerts, 2010) and satisfaction with institutional experience and involvement as alumni after graduation (Chen, 2018; McAlexander et al., 2016).

1.5.5(c) Environmental Influences

Over the years, researchers have also been inclined to study the possible influence of environment on the attitudes of alumni towards engagement, and some interesting findings have been found in this regard. Researchers have stated that environmental influences, including economic conditions of the country and particularly the performance of the stock market in the country, are likely to affect attitudes of alumni towards engagement (Brown et al., 2014). In addition, the income tax benefit provided by the government is also likely to influence attitudes of alumni towards engagement (CAE, 2016; Rohayati et al., 2016).

A critical analysis of the literature highlights influences that may affect attitudes of alumni towards engagement in PHEIs. However, since most of the research is conducted on alumni quantitatively in western developed economies, it is expected that carrying out further qualitative research on alumni engagement from a developing economy perspective may unearth some new insights and offer unique findings to scholarship. The purpose of this research is to present ‘thick descriptions’ of alumni experiences (Geertz, 1973) and ‘local knowledge’ (Geertz, 1983) which can facilitate academic researchers in theory building and also help alumni relations and advancement office practitioners in devising effective alumni engagement strategies.

1.6 Problem Statement

The Government of Pakistan (GoP) has a well-planned and sustained determination in basic, vocational, technical, and higher education to achieve its Vision 2025 goal of creating a progressive and prosperous society that holds a democratic social order (HEC, 2017). Progressing on this, HEC has also aimed to enhance the quality of higher education and to provide equal opportunities to the growing population all over the country, particularly underprivileged ones. In this perspective, HEC has played a game-changing role in the higher education sector of Pakistan. For example, from 2002-2014/15, the country witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of public and private HEIs from 59 to 175 (HEC, 2017).

However, the government has failed to achieve set goals of Vision 2025 and have halted the progress of HEC towards lifting the standards of HEIs in the country, particularly PHEIs, as they depend solely on government funding. PHEIs in the country are facing financial crisis on account of budgetary cuts by the government over the last few years. For example, the cumulative (recurrent and development budget) shortfall reached Rs. 71 billion in the fiscal year 2019-20, which stands more than 55 percent of budgetary cuts (Khattak, 2020), following the budget cuts of 29 percent and 14 percent in 2018-19 and 2017-18 respectively (Dawn, 2019, 2018). Considering the current financial effects on PHEIs, chairman HEC has stated that “African countries are spending more on education than Pakistan” (Dawn, 2019). His comments, along with budgetary statistics, not only emphasized the grave financial situation of PHEIs, but also showcased the false promises of the government to give priority to higher education.

Consequently, the consistent decline in government funding to PHEIs has resulted in numerous challenges for these organizations. Among the most crucial challenge is the deterioration of quality of as multiple academic and developmental programmes of PHEIs are suspended (HEC, 2019; Khattak, 2020), which as a result has badly affected the 'Times Higher Education' world rankings of Pakistani PHEIs. The country has no PHEI listed in the top 500 institutions of the world. Moreover, the collapse of faculty development programmes, decline in international patents, lack of quality research, and an increase in the workload of qualified PhD holders are also alarming signals for the government, HEC and PHEIs and signal a bleak future of higher education in Pakistan (Atta-Ur-Rehman, 2017; HEC, 2019). Thus, the actions of the government have not only endangered the future position of higher education in the country but also raised questions on PHEIs' long-term financial sustainability in Pakistan.

The review of the literature highlights that when PHEIs in developed economies encounter similar financial constraints, they look for alternative sources of revenue to attain financial sustainability and progressively lessen their dependence on government. Since alumni have remained the most significant contributor to institutions in the US as previously mentioned, PHEIs are increasingly turning to them to enlarge their donor base (Drezner, 2013, 2019). Thus, the notion of alumni engagement has become a strategic theme and an essential element for the survival of PHEIs on account of a consistent decline in government funding (Schlesinger et al. 2017).

However, in Pakistan PHEIs have not experienced or leveraged alumni engagement as an alternative source of revenue to counter the consistent decline in government support. For example, the vice-chancellor of one of the leading PHEIs in

Pakistan regretfully stated that the alumni of his institution have not supported like global alumni practices in PHEIs (Tribune, 2014). Furthermore, the current chairman of HEC has stressed that universities should utilize external sources to sustain themselves financially. These include mobilizing alumni, seeking support from philanthropists, providing more executive training, and encouraging consultancies. He stated: "The universities must play their role in fundraising and look for new avenues to generate funds" (HEC, 2019), thus, reflecting the absence of alumni engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan compared to PHEIs of developed economies.

When the absence of alumni engagement in PHEIs is coupled with financial stress, it reveals an alarming situation. Thus, this calls for urgent measures, since Pakistan is home to one of the largest youth population (around 64 percent fall below 30 years of age). The country will enjoy this status for the coming three decades (UNDP, 2018). Although this youth increase brings a window of opportunities for the country, it simultaneously raises the severe challenge of providing adequate services that require a substantial investment in youth. Furthermore, the concern of UNDP "will Pakistan's youth be the country's biggest asset – or biggest liability - in the years to come?" (UNDP, 2018) holds sound ground in the current situation as financial sustainability of PHEIs is already on the stake.

Therefore, to investigate the alumni engagement phenomenon in the PHEIs of Pakistan and to address PHEIs' financial sustainability concern, this research aimed to understand and describe the attitudes of alumni towards engagement in the PHEIs of Pakistan. The limited amount of scholarship on alumni engagement from developing economies perspective also presented current research as valuable contribution to alumni scholarship. This research studied alumni engagement through examining in detail the attitudes of alumni towards engagement concerning institutional, personal,

and environmental influences. Since most of the previous scholars have focused on quantitative approach to study alumni engagement, therefore this research adopted the phenomenological approach, which allowed the researcher to understand and describe the lived experiences of alumni at first hand. Besides, phenomenological approach also facilitated in providing some new constructs to alumni scholarship through investigating influences on alumni engagement using S-O-R framework, which is has limited application in higher education settings.

1.7 Research Objective

The objective of this research was to understand and describe attitudes of alumni towards engagement in the public higher education institutions (PHEIs) of Pakistan. The phenomenological approach was chosen for this research to unearth the lived experiences of alumni and to report narrative accounts of alumni about the central phenomenon “alumni engagement”.

Since PHEIs in Pakistan are in a state of a financial crisis and are seeking external sources of funding, this research aimed to understand attitudes of alumni towards engagement as a means to explore them as an alternate source of support to attain financial sustainability for PHEIs of Pakistan. It is evident that alumni engage through monetary and nonmonetary means with PHEIs to sustain them in times of declining government support. Moreover, since the concept of alumni engagement is still underdeveloped in evolving economies, particularly in Pakistan, this research can serve as a breakthrough for PHEIs in Pakistan to cultivate alumni engagement as a means to attain financial sustainability.

1.8 Research Questions

1.8.1 Primary Research Question

RQ: What attitudes do alumni hold towards engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan?

1.8.2 Sub-research Questions

RQ 1: What is the perception of alumni about engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan?

RQ 2: What are the institutional influences that play a role in developing attitudes of alumni towards engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan?

RQ 3: What are the personal influences that are involved in developing attitudes of alumni towards engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan?

RQ 4: What are the environmental influences that encourage or discourage alumni from forming attitudes towards engagement in PHEIs of Pakistan?

RQ 5: What are the views of alumni about the financial sustainability of PHEIs in Pakistan?

1.9 Scope of the Study

This research focused on the alumni of PHEIs in Pakistan. Key informants were those alumni who successfully graduated from the selected institutions of this study and were able to provide enough information about the phenomenon under investigation. To effectively reach the key informants for this research, the researcher selected alumni from eight PHEIs that established UAOs with the coordination of HEC and USAID in Pakistan. The researcher assumed that those eight institutions might have taken some efforts to engage alumni after the establishment of UAOs. The selected institutions were offering academic programmes such as management

sciences, computer sciences, engineering, agriculture, social sciences, and information technology.

1.10 Position of Researcher

My motivation and interest in this subject facilitated me not only to highlight the issue in this field but also to choose the appropriate approach to undertake this research. My previous role as manager alumni relations and UAO with one of the leading PHEIs of Pakistan provided me with this unique idea and generated my interest in this subject. Moreover, I was aware that I bring alongside a specific perspective to this research, as stated by Troyna (1995) “all research from its conception through to the production of data, its interpretation and dissemination reflects partisanship which derives from the social identity and values of the researcher” (p. 403). Therefore, I approached this research primarily as an insider (as alumnus of a PHEI in Pakistan) and secondarily as an outsider (as a manager of alumni relations & UAO).

My experience being an undergraduate student and then alumni of one of the leading PHEIs of Pakistan built my perceptions about my institution. Alongside my perceptions, the experience defined my relationship with my institution, whereas my experience of working in the department of alumni relations and UAO enlightened me to the state of alumni relationship efforts and the financial affairs of PHEIs in Pakistan. As a manager of alumni relations and UAO, my job required me to perform a variety of tasks, including maintaining connections with alumni, soliciting prospective donors for fundraising, arranging alumni reunions, and participating in annual fundraising campaigns organized by HEC. Thus, I carry rich knowledge about the way alumni engagement and fundraising was carried out in the PHEIs of Pakistan. However, I strictly followed bracketing and maintained a reflective diary to set aside my