

Relationship between Students' Research Attitude and Program Fee in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan

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Research is said to be the significant factor for technological advancement, social development and institutional fame. For quality research positive attitude towards research is a prerequisite which itself is influenced by different factors including the cost of research, institutional research facilities, etc. The presents study is an effort to determine whether or not the institutional fees have any effect upon the students' attitude towards research. Student Attitude towards Research Scale developed by Papanastasiou was adapted to collect data from randomly selected 218 MS/MPhil level students from 10 different universities. Significant negative correlation was observed between institutional fees and students' attitude towards research.

Keywords: Attitude towards research, universities, fees, postgraduate level students, low fee payers, high fee payers, relationship.

Introduction

Research is the process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell, 2012). It helps in solving problems faced by people in every day life. Moreover, the agent behind the scientific innovations and social progress and prosperity is the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Magolda (1999) explained the importance of research as constructive development pedagogy.

University faculties as well as their students are the primary actors in the research production system and eventually, it is their attitude and perception that determine the output of academic research. These attitudes are described as a psychological evaluation such as good-bad, harmful -beneficial, interesting-uninteresting, pleasant-unpleasant, and likable-dislikable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000; Brendl & Higgins, 1996; Petty et al., 1997). Similarly, Wilson et al. (2000) suggested that attitudes are changing but it does not mean when attitudes change, the new attitude overrides. Likewise, Fazio et al. (1986) explained that attitudes are activated automatically only by

stimuli that elicit a quick, conscious evaluative response.

The attitude towards research basically means a detailed study of thinking, feeling and the person's behavior towards research. It also specifies how a person is acting in the research field and what importance is given by him to the different aspects of research. Papanastasiou (2005) infers that it is important to study the attitudes towards research.

The study of research students' attitudes is not a novel idea. In Pakistani perspective there had been many research studies focusing the academic research and students attitudes. Butt & Shams (2013) explored research attitude of students of public and private sector universities in Pakistan and found that there is no significant difference in the students' research attitude. In the same way Iqbal (2010) also examined the research attitudes of students. He found significant differences in attitudes of prospective teachers from different teacher education degree programs. Several factors influence the students' attitude towards research. These factors include the gender of students as Saleem, Saeed, & Waheed (2014) identified that the research preferences of male and female students differ in the problem selection for research and selection of research supervisor.

Similarly, male and female students have different approaches to accomplish their academic research. In the same way Iqbal (2010), Butt & Shams (2013), Saleem, Fareed & Nasrrin (2014) also found that, in one way or the other, gender is a significant factor in the disposition of research attitude among university level students.

Campus research facilities available to students also contribute significantly to the development of their research attitudes. If the laboratories, libraries and the other supporting facilities are available to the students, they possess positive attitude towards research and vice versa. The cost of research is another important factor that may affect the research attitudes of the students. Especially the cost of academic research can significantly influence the students' attitude.

In the recent times considerable rise in academic fee has been observed in most of the countries. The reasons for this cost increase are both cultural as well as structural. The most frequently mentioned causes are: an academic culture focused on improving the quality of the educational experience and reinvesting savings to improve quality rather than reduce tuition (DEF, 2012). The gap between the demand and supply of the higher education is another cause of rising cost (Li, 2013). This ongoing rise in the fees has raised a number of important questions for higher education institutions and the higher education sector as a whole and the field of research in particular (Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe, 2006).

On the other hand Aungles, Buchanan, Karmel, & MacLachlan (2005) found that in the enrollment at higher education institutions, the overall share of low socio economic status students is less than those of high socio economic status which has discouraged a relatively large number of students' entry to this level of education. In the same way financial reasons are the most commonly cited reason for dropping out of higher education. Therefore, lower social class students spend more time working part time during their time as HE students (Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe, 2006). Consequently their research attitudes are affected because of less concentration and shortage of time available to conduct research.

In recent times many governments have allowed the private sector to open and operate institutions of higher education (IIEP, 2007). This decision has further increased the cost of higher education as the focus of private institutions is upon profit earning rather than the provision of

quality education. Unfortunately, current trends and critical issues, like high fee and poor research attitudes, affecting higher education is expected to continue over the next five to ten years (DEF, 2012). But, there are certain reasons advocated by the private institutions for this high fee. It is assumed that the current levels of funding teaching and learning were insufficient to enable universities to achieve society's aspirations for maintaining and enhancing quality. Therefore, to compete successfully in the global markets the rise in fees was essential (Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe, 2006)

Moreover, there is concern that the consistent rise in fee and cost of higher education will reduce participation which would eventually slow down the national economy as students opt for cheaper courses. Finnie (2004) argues that participation in higher education is contingent upon two critical decision rules. The first is what he calls the investment decision rule. Students choose to go to university if 'they perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs'. Hence, the intelligent and brilliant but poor students will be unable to get themselves enrolled in the reputed or standard higher education institutions only because of their inability to pay high cost. Therefore, similar results will appear in the research sector. Poor research attitudes of students will be the cause of low quality research.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

A consistent increase in the fee at higher education level is being observed since last few years. This ongoing rise in the fees has raised a number of important questions for higher education institutions and the higher education sector as a whole (Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe, 2006). For example, despite the rise in fees the quality of higher education, especially the research being conducted, remains debatable in Pakistani universities. The quality of research, in one way or the other, depends upon the research attitude of the researchers which on the other hand rests on the cost of research and institutional facilities for the research. The present study is an effort to determine the relationship between the students' research attitude and the fee structure at universities. The purpose of the study is to determine whether or not the high fee charging universities are able to create a positive research attitude among higher education level students.

Research Questions

1. Is there significant difference in the research attitude of social science students paying low and high fees?
2. Is there significant relationship in fee structure and research attitude of social science students?

Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and survey technique was used to collect data from the participants. Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey i.e. a questionnaire, to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, survey was conducted as it describes trends in the data rather than offer rigorous explanations. In the same way Fraenkel & Wallen (2009) states that during survey information is collected from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or knowledge) of the population of which that group is a part.

The population of the study comprised of all the MS/MPhil level students enrolled during

academic year 2012-13 in social science/arts and humanities departments of public and private sector universities of Pakistan. Only those students were the participants of the study who have successfully completed at least one year of the program. There are 160, including 91 public and 69 private sector, universities and degree awarding institutions in Pakistan (HEC, 2013). From these 160 universities and degree awarding institutions ten universities, including, 5 from public sector and 5 from private sector, were randomly selected. From each selected university one department of social science/arts and humanities was randomly selected. Finally from all the selected departments 50% of the total students were again randomly selected. Thus a total of 218 students were the sample of the study. The selected students were further divided into two groups on the basis of total fee paid for MS/MPhil program. Midpoint of the fees charged by the selected universities was calculated to determine the low and high fee levels. Therefore, the students paying up to 200,000 Pakistani rupees as total fee of MS/MPhil level program were considered as low fee payers whereas the students paying more than 200000 rupees were the high fee payers. Hence, there were 100 low fee payers and 118 high fee payers.

Table 1

Distribution of high and low fee payers in public and private universities

	Public Universities		Private Universities		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low Fee Payers	89	40.83	11	5.04	100	45.87
High Fee Payers	42	19.27	76	34.86	118	54.13

As far as the distribution of low and high fee payers is concerned, it is found that 40.83% low fee payers are from the public sector universities whereas 34.86% high fee payers belong to private universities. Only 5.04% low fee payers are enrolled in private universities and 19.27% high fee payers are studying in public universities.

For the purpose of data collection Students' Attitude Research Scale developed by Elena C. Papanastasiou (Papanastasiou, 2005) was adapted. The Students' Attitude Research Scale comprised of 32 items divided into five different aspects of attitude towards research i.e. research usefulness, research anxiety, positive attitude, relevance to life and research difficulty. The scale was tried out

before final administration in two universities, one public and one private . Both of these universities were not included in final process of data collection. The coefficient of reliability was calculated as 0.88, which is considered as high reliability for data collection instruments in social sciences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The scale was finally administered to the selected sample for data collection.

To find out the differences in the research attitudes of low and high fee payers independent sample t-test was used. Moreover, correlation between fees and students research attitude was also calculated to determine whether these two variables are mutually correlated or not.

Findings/Results

The data collected was analyzed using both the descriptive as well as inferential statistics.

Table 2

Comparison of research attitude on low and high fee levels

	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	Significance
Low Fee	100	4.38	.990	.40	3.046	216	.003
High Fee	118	3.98	.925				

There exist significant difference ($p=.003<.05$) between the research attitudes of students paying low fees and high fees. Low fee payers possess more promising research attitude ($\bar{x}=4.38$) than those paying high fees ($\bar{x}=3.98$).

The graphic comparison of low and high fee payers' research attitude also reflects the prevailing difference in research attitudes.

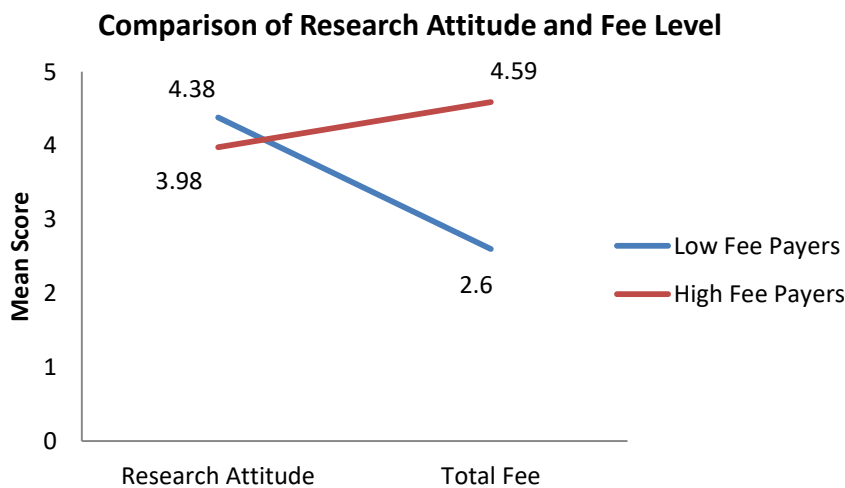


Table 3

Comparison of research attitude factors on low and high fee levels

Research Attitude Factors	Fee Levels	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	Significance
Research usefulness	Low	100	4.55	1.22	.47	2.91	216	.004
	High	118	4.08	1.13				
Research anxiety	Low	100	4.13	0.85	.32	2.42	216	.016
	High	118	3.81	1.05				
Positive attitudes	Low	100	4.53	1.28	.18	1.075	216	.279
	High	118	4.35	1.13				
Relevance to life	Low	100	4.23	1.15	.15	.809	216	.423
	High	118	4.08	1.26				
Research difficulty	Low	100	4.49	1.55	.80	4.350	216	.000
	High	118	3.60	1.44				

As far as sub-factors of research attitude scale are concerned, significant difference exists between low and high fee payers' attitude towards research usefulness for profession ($p=.004<.05$), research anxiety ($p=.016<.05$) and research difficulty ($p=.000<.05$). For all the sub-factors of research attitude the low fee payers showed high mean scores as compare to the high fee payers.

Table 4

Relationship between students' research attitude and total fee paid

	N	Mean	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total fee	218	3.39	-0.23	.000*
Research attitude		4.17		

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There exists negative and significant ($r= -0.23, p=.000<.01$) correlation between the students' research attitude and fee charged by universities at MPhil/MS level.

Table 5

Relationship between research attitude and total fee paid on low and high fee levels

	Fee level	N	Mean	Pearson r	Sig.(2-tailed)
Total fee	Low	100	2.06	-.260	.009*
Research attitude	payers		4.38		
Total fee	High	118	4.53	.007	.936
Research attitude	payers		3.99		

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

On low and high fee levels comparison of relationship between students' research attitude and fee charged by universities reflects that for low fee payers there exists significant negative relationship ($r= -0.26, p=.009<.01$). But for the high fee payers the relationship is insignificant ($r= 0.007, p=.936<.01$).

Table 6

Relationship between low fee payers' research attitude and total fee paid (Factor wise)

Sub-factors of Research Attitude	N	r	Sig(2-Tailed)
Research usefulness	100	-.339**	.001
Research anxiety	100	-.313**	.002
Positive attitudes	100	.030	.768
Relevance to life	100	-.198*	.048
Research difficulty	100	-.270**	.007

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There exists significant and negative relationship between fee paid to the university and low fee payers' attitude towards research usefulness ($r= -0.339, p=.001<.01$), research anxiety ($r= -0.313, p=.002<.01$), relevance to life ($r= -0.198, p=.048<.05$) and research difficulty ($r= -0.270, p=.007<.01$).

Conclusions

Significant difference was observed between low and high fee payers' attitude towards research. The low fee payers' attitude towards research is relatively stronger as compared to the attitude of students paying high fees. Similar difference in the research attitudes is also visible for three out of five sub-factors of research attitude scale i.e. research usefulness, research anxiety and research difficulty. Similarly, a negative significant relationship between students' research attitude

and research cost (institutional fees) is observed. It means that higher the research cost lower was the research attitude and vice versa. For the low fee payers' research usefulness, research anxiety and research difficulty are negatively and significantly correlated with the fee paid to the university.

Discussion

The study reveals that there exists difference in the research attitude of university students which is in line with the results of the study conducted by Iqbal (2010). But this result contradicts the results of the research carried out by Butt & Shams (2013). As far as the differences of research attitudes between low and high fee payers is concerned, the main reason behind this result might be the absence of research environment in private sector universities which are hosting most of the high fee payers. Similarly, as research is considered to be an exhaustive field based activity (Creswell, 2012), the well-off people may become reluctant in spending their efforts and time in the field.

The optional status of thesis at MS/MPhil level for the students of social science, arts and humanities in the private universities is another cause of the high fee payers' negative attitude towards research. The students are actually not oriented with the practical aspects of research, consequently they find it hard to develop positive or favorable research attitude. On the other hand negative attitude towards the usefulness of research might be an indication of the fact that students are still not aware of the professional responsibilities. As far as the negative correlation between fee and research anxiety and difficulty is concerned it again reflects that as the level of fee rises the students become more reluctant in research because of their better financial status and relaxed habits in everyday life.

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